

Leke script: The “chicken scratch” script of Pwo Karen*

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Abstract

The Leke script is a writing system designed for Eastern Pwo Karen. It is primarily used by the followers of the Leke religion. Owing to its distinctive shapes, it is also called the “chicken scratch” script. Created in the mid-19th century, the script reflects the Eastern Pwo Karen phonological system of the time. This article elucidates the system of the Leke script by demonstrating its correspondence with the Eastern Pwo Karen phonological system of the 19th century. The analysis reveals that the Leke script is capable of accurately representing the phonological system of both 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen and contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen.

1. Introduction

The ethnic Karen have various writing systems. Drawing from the phrase “a fertile zone for the invention of new scripts” by Kelly (2018b: 189) to describe West Africa, Kato (2025) calls the Karen society “a fertile society for the invention of new scripts”. Even when limiting the discussion to Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen, who constitute the Karen people in the narrowest sense (Kato [2021b]), the writing systems representing their languages include at least the following scripts:

* In analyzing the system of the Leke script, information received from Van de Kasteelen, Frank (p.c., July 2025) proved invaluable. He also sent me a Unicode proposal for the Leke script (Van de Kasteelen 2025). I would like to express my deepest gratitude to him. For typing Leke characters in this article, I used the Plone Ware Shar Mla Font.

- (a) The Christian Sgaw Karen script is the best known. It was created by the American Baptist missionary Rev. Jonathan Wade in the 1830s (Kato [2025]).
- (b) The Buddhist Pwo Karen script was created by Karen Buddhist monks for Eastern Pwo Karen between the late 18th and early 19th centuries (Kato [2021a]).
- (c) The Christian Pwo Karen script was created for Eastern Pwo Karen by American Baptist missionaries in the 1840s (Kato [2021a, 2022a]). However, it is now primarily used for Western Pwo Karen.
- (d) The Buddhist Sgaw Karen script, called “Letalanyah”, was created by Karen Buddhist monks sometime after 1960 (Kato [2023]).
- (e) The Leke script is used by Leke followers to write Eastern Pwo Karen (Stern [1968]; see also Fickle and Hosken [2013], Kelly [2018a], and Van de Kasteelen [2025]).
- (f) Romei is a Romanized Sgaw Karen script mainly used by Roman Catholic Karens in Thailand (Seguinotte [2007]; Kato [2025]).
- (g) Lae Kwekaw is a newly created “ancient” writing system for Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen (Kato [2022b]; Kato [2024]).
- (h) There is also an “ancient” script for Sgaw Karen (Kato [2022b: 14]). However, the details of the script remain unclear.¹

Of these, (a), (c), and (f) were created by Christian missionaries, whereas the remaining were created by the Karen themselves. Scripts (a), (b), and (c) are used by many speakers across a wide region. Scripts (d)–(h) are used less frequently. Additionally, there have been attempts in Thailand to write several Karen dialects using the Thai script. For example, Cooke et al. (1976) described an attempt to write a Pwo Karen dialect in northern Thailand using the Thai script.

One reason for the large number of scripts used in Karen society is language variations. The narrowly defined Karen language comprises two major groups: Sgaw Karen and Pwo Karen. Each group has numerous subgroups with different phonological systems. Another reason is the practice of diverse religions, including

¹ Regarding script (h), I plan to discuss it in detail in a separate paper.

Buddhism, Christianity, Leke, Talakon, and animism. The choice of script for writing religious teachings is important for religious leaders. Additionally, being surrounded by Mon, Burmese, and Thai societies, which have long histories of written language, has likely provided numerous stimuli for writing.

This study discusses the Leke script, that is, script (e), which is one of the Eastern Pwo Karen² scripts and is used by the followers of the Leke religion (Figure 1). It is based on the phonology of the Hpa-an dialect of Eastern Pwo Karen. The founders of the Leke religion were most likely Karen people whose native language was a variety of Eastern Pwo Karen spoken around present-day Hpa-an, the capital of Kayin State, Myanmar. The script was created by them in the mid-19th century, around the same time when the Leke religion was founded. Based on its distinctive form, this script is called Leit Hsan Wait (/láichânwé/ in contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen; */láí?chânwé?/ in 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen; <ꨀꨃꨁꨇꨆꨇ in the Leke script³). The Eastern Pwo Karen words /láí/, /chân/, and /wé/ mean ‘script’, ‘chicken’, and ‘to scratch’, respectively. Thus, as a whole, /láichânwé/ can be translated as the ‘chicken scratch script’.⁴ Notably, of the scripts listed above, scripts (b), (c), (e), and (g), are used to write Eastern Pwo Karen.

Leke (also spelled Lekei, Lehkai, or Laikai) is a Karen religion that worships the Metteyya (Maitreya) (Burma Socialist Programme Party [1967: 264–271]; Saw Kya Shin et al. [2006]).⁵ In Eastern Pwo Karen, Leke is pronounced /lɛkè/, meaning ‘pith’ or ‘essence’ (Saw Kya Shin et al. [2006: 10]). Leke is also called /wɛcā/ (Ware Shar).

2 Some of the music videos uploaded to the YouTube channel listed in Section 2 contain Sgaw Karen lyrics written in the Leke script. Therefore, the Leke script can currently be used to write Sgaw Karen. However, I have not yet begun researching how Sgaw Karen is written using the Leke script.

3 When using a Leke spelling in English text, it is indicated by <> for readability.

4 In Burmese, the Leke script is called ကရင်ကြက်ယက်စာ, meaning ‘Karen chicken scratch script’.

5 The Burma Socialist Programme Party (1967: 265) states: “အရိမေတ္တေယျဘုရားလောင်းအား ကိုးကွယ်သည်။ အရိယာဘုရားဟုလည်း ခေါ်သည်။ [(They) believe in Metteyya, who is also called Ariya.].” Similarly, Saw Kya Shin et al. (2006: 25) state: “Unlike the Buddhist who revered the 3 gems namely – the Lord Buddha, the law and the priesthood, the Laikai Arimati followers revered only the 5th Buddha whom they were expecting and waiting for”.



Figure 1: Altar of the Leke religion (photograph by the author in Hpa-an, 1994)

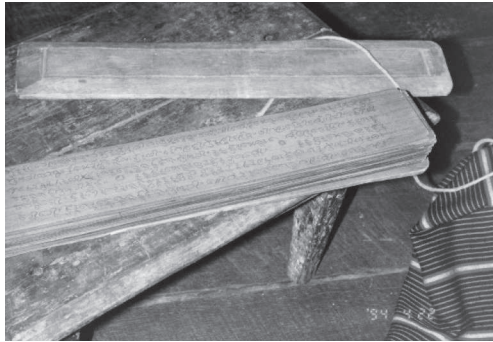


Figure 2: Palm-leaf manuscript of a sacred text (photograph by the author in Hpa-an, 1994)

In Eastern Pwo Karen, /wē/ means ‘elder sibling’ and /eā/ means ‘old’. Therefore, /wēeā/ can be translated as ‘old elder sibling’. The sacred texts of the Leke religion are written using the Leke script (Figure 2). There are numerous sacred texts, with Saw Kya Shin et al. (2006) listing the titles of 49 scriptures.

The exact origins of the Leke script remain unclear, with varying accounts from researchers. This is likely because of the legendary elements associated with the origins of the script. Three accounts of the origins are introduced as follows.

First, the Burma Socialist Programme Party (1967: 409–410), written in Burmese, states that U Maw Yaing (ဦးမောယိုင်) created the Leke script at the Upper Yetagun Temple (အထက်ရေတံခွန်ကျောင်း) in 1846. It also mentions that Pi Mike Kali (ဖိမိုက်ကလီ) of Hnitkya village (နှစ်ခြားကျေးရွာ) wrote the first sacred text in 1861.

Second, Womack (2005: 155) explains that in the year 1207 of the Myanmar

calendar (1844–45 CE), Pu Nai Thayat and Pu Maung Tawdut received a revelation from the Nat-prince Arimettaya, Thagya Min, Brahma, Min, and many nats at the Upper Yetagun Temple on Mount Zwegabin, and were granted a script. Pu Maw Yaing (the same person as U Maw Yaing) and Pu Ti Shwe Yauk systematized this script. Furthermore, in 1222 (AD 1860–61), Pi Mike Kali and Pu Ti Thaung Tawt of Hnltkya village received a holy book that formed the basis of Leke religious practice through revelations from the same divine messengers.

Third, Kelly (2018a), based on Saw Kya Shin et al. (2006), states that in 1844 or 1845, Mahn Thaung Hlya undertook a seven-day fast on Mount Zwegabin with six companions. He was the only one who completed the seven-day fast and received the vision of a figure in white robes on the final day, who granted him the script. After descending the mountain, he studied under Mahn Maw Yaing (= U Maw Yaing), who assisted Baptist missionaries by translating the Bible into Pwo Karen. Mahn Maw Yaing then systematized this script.

The name that appears most commonly in these studies is U Maw Yaing (= Pu Maw Yaing, Mahn Maw Yaing). He was likely heavily involved in creating the Leke script. Pi Mike Kali (= Hpee Mite Kali) and her husband, Pu Ti Thaung Tawt (= Hputee Thaung Htaut or Mahn Thaung Htaut), whom Womack (2005) mentioned as recipients of the holy book, may have also contributed significantly to the development of the Leke script. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that the Leke script was created in the mid-19th century.

This article primarily aims to explain the Leke script system by showing how it corresponds to the phonology of the Hpa-an dialect. Although Stern (1968) previously analyzed the Leke script in relation to pronunciation, his analysis was, unfortunately, inaccurate and incomplete. Hence, this study analyzes the Leke script accurately and comprehensively.

The remainder of this article is organized as follows. Section 2 describes the methods used in the study. Section 3 discusses the phonological system of contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen. Section 4 presents the phonological system of Eastern Pwo Karen from the 19th century. The Leke script largely reflects the pronunciation of 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen; however, it is also influenced by

understanding the Leke script system.



Figure 3: Pu Htaw Shong (n.d., p. 26)

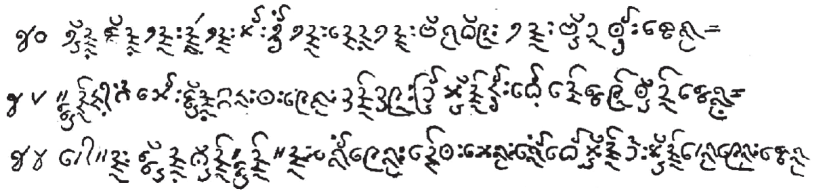


Figure 4: Pu Htaw Shong (n.d., p. 36)

For long, I was unable to find any information about reading this textbook. However, this changed when I learned about LEIT TAW TUG, a YouTube channel (<https://www.youtube.com/@leittawtug5487>; registered on February 27, 2018; last accessed October 21, 2025). This YouTube channel has uploaded a large number of videos explaining how to read the basic letters and vowel symbols of the Leke script in Eastern Pwo Karen and videos of Eastern Pwo Karen songs with Leke script subtitles. By watching these videos, I gained a general understanding of the relationship between the Leke script and the pronunciation of contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen. I had been unable to read Pu Htaw Shong (n.d.) previously, but this enabled me to do so. Reading Pu Htaw Shong (n.d.) helped me understand the details of the Leke script. These procedures were carried out in late 2024 and early 2025.

The tables of correspondence between spellings and sounds in Section 6 were created based on the findings obtained through these methods. Note that all spelling examples in this article are from Pu Htaw Shong (n.d.) or the lyrics of videos on the LEIT TAW TUG YouTube channel.

3. Phonology of contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen

The Leke script was created by speakers of Eastern Pwo Karen in the mid-19th century in the suburbs of Hpa-an, the present capital of Myanmar's Kayin State. Thus, the script largely reflects the phonological system of Eastern Pwo Karen spoken in Hpa-an during the 19th century. However, it is also influenced by contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen. Thus, understanding the script requires an understanding of both contemporary and 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen phonological systems. The phonological system of the contemporary Hpa-an dialect is presented first, followed by that of the 19th century. The contemporary phonological system is presented first because it allows for a more detailed and precise understanding of sounds.

Pwo Karen can be classified into at least four dialectal groups: Western Pwo Karen, Eastern Pwo Karen, Northern Pwo Karen, and Htoklibang Pwo Karen (Kato [2009a]; Phillips [2017]). These groups exhibit low degrees of mutual understanding. The Hpa-an dialect is representative of Eastern Pwo Karen because it has a large population of speakers and is understood in many regions. It includes languages spoken in the surrounding towns, such as Hlaingbwe and Kawkareik. In this article, the contemporary Hpa-an dialect is referred to as “CEPK” (Contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen).

The syllable structure of CEPK can be represented as C1(C2)V1(V2)(C3)/(T). “C” stands for a consonant, “V” for a vowel, and “T” for a tone. C1, C2, and C3 are the initial, medial, and final consonants, respectively. One or two vowels may occur and are represented by V1 and V2. Bracketed elements may or may not be present. The part C1(C2)- is called an onset, and the part -V1(V2)(C3) is called a rhyme. In the following discussion, hyphens are used to indicate C1 as “C-” (C is any initial consonant), C2 as “-C-” (C is any medial consonant), and the rhyme as “-R” (R is any rhyme), where necessary. Note that all phonetic symbols in the tables of Sections 3 and 4 are phonemic, but “/” is omitted.

As shown in Table 1, there are four tones: low-level, mid-level, high-level, and falling tones. In the table, they are shown with /a/ and tone marks. The mid-level tone is pronounced with a breathy voice. Moreover, there are atonic syllables that are

represented without the addition of tone marks. The only rhyme that can appear in atonic syllables is /-ə/. They are pronounced short and weak, and their pitches are inconsistent.

Table 1: Tones in CEPK

à	[a11]	low-level tone
ā	[a33~334]	mid-level tone
á	[a55]	high-level tone
â	[a51]	falling tone
ə		atonic

The simple onsets consisting only of C1 are listed in Table 2. There are 25 phonemes that can serve as simple onsets.

Table 2: Simple onsets in CEPK

p	θ	t	c	k	ʔ
ph		th	ch	kh	
b		d			
			ɕ	x	h
				ɣ	ɣ
m		n	ɲ	ŋ	
w			j		
		l			
		r			

The phonetic values of simple onsets are as follows: /p-/ [p], /θ-/ [t̪~t̪θ~θ], /t-/ [t], /c-/ [tɕ], /k-/ [k], /ʔ-/ [ʔ], /ph-/ [pʰ], /th-/ [tʰ], /ch-/ [tɕʰ], /kh-/ [kʰ], /b-/ [β~ʔb], /d-/ [d~ʔd~d], /ɕ-/ [ɕ~sʰ], /x-/ [x], /h-/ [h], /ɣ-/ [ɣ], /ɣ-/ [ɣ~ɦ], /m-/ [m], /n-/ [n], /ɲ-/ [ɲ], /ŋ-/ [ŋ], /w-/ [w], /j-/ [j~j], /l-/ [l], and /r-/ [r~ɹ]. When one reads a written text, /c-/ and /ch-/ are often pronounced as [s] and [sʰ], respectively, regardless of the writing system. In this case, /ch-/ [sʰ] becomes indistinguishable from /ɕ-/ when the latter is pronounced [sʰ]. Finally, /r-/ is often pronounced [l]. In such cases, /r-/ loses its distinction from /l-/.

The phonemes that can appear as C2 are /-w-/ [w], /-l-/ [l], /-r-/ [r~ɹ], and /-j-/ [j~j]. The possible combinations of C1 and C2 are presented in Table 3. Medial /-r-/ , like the initial /r-/, is often pronounced [l]. In such cases, /-r-/ loses its distinction from /-l-/.

Table 3: Possible combinations of C1 and C2 in CEPK

		C1																		
		p	θ	t	c	k	ʔ	ph	th	ch	kh	b	d	x	h	m	n	ɲ	j	l
C2	w	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	l	+				+		+			+	+				+				
	r	+				+					+									
	j	+						+				+				+				+

As previously mentioned, the structure of a rhyme can be represented as -V1(V2)(C3). Among its components, the position of C3 can only be occupied by the phoneme /N/, which cannot appear as C1 or C2. The final consonant /N/ is realized as [N] or the nasalization of the preceding vowel. Rhymes can be divided into two types: open rhymes without C3 and nasalized rhymes with /N/.

There are 13 open rhymes (Table 4).

Table 4: Open rhymes in CEPK

Monophthongs			Diphthongs	
i	ĩ	u	ai	au
ĩ		u		
e	ə	o		
ɛ	a	ɔ		

These rhymes are realized as follows: /-i/[ǝi(jʰ)], /-ĩ/[ɪ], /-e/[ɛ], /-ɛ/[ɛ], /-i/[i], /-ə/[ə], /-a/[ä], /-u/[u~ɔu], /-u/[u], /-o/[o], /-ɔ/[ɔ], /-ai/[äi], and /-au/[äu]. The rhyme /-i/ may be accompanied by a pharyngealized palatal approximant at the end, as indicated by [(jʰ)]. In the younger generation, the distinction between the rhymes /-ĩ/ and /-e/ is becoming unclear for many speakers. Similarly, the distinction between the rhymes /-u/ and /-o/ is also becoming unclear. Among all the rhymes, /-e/, /-o/, /-ai/, and /-au/, generally co-occur only with low- and high-level tones. This is because they originated from rhymes with a final glottal stop in the 19th century, and the tones that used to co-occur with a final glottal stop in the 19th century, that is, the low- and high-checked tones, merged into contemporary low- and high-level tones, respectively.

Note that I used to transcribe the vowel phoneme /ĩ/ as /ɪ/. I have used /ĩ/ instead of /ɪ/ since 2019 (Kato [2019a]; Kato [2019b]), because the symbol /ɪ/ is difficult to distinguish from /i/ when written with a tone mark. Compare, for example, /ĩ/ and /i/.

Moreover, /i/ and /i/ are difficult to distinguish in some IPA fonts in italics.

There are eight nasalized rhymes (Table 5). I put /-iN/ in parentheses because it appears only in loanwords from Burmese and from other languages that have entered via Burmese.

Table 5: Nasalized rhymes in CEPK

Monophthongs	Diphthongs		
(iN)			
əN	ON	eiN	əuN oUN
aN		aiN	

These rhymes are realized as follows: /-iN/ [iN~ĩ], /-əN/ [əN~ẽ], /-aN/ [ãN~ǣ~ẽ], /-oN/ [oN~õ], /-eiN/ [eiN~ei], /-əuN/ [əuN~əu], /-aiN/ [äiN~äi], and /-oUN/ [oUN~ou]. In the rhymes /-eiN/, /-əuN/, and /-oUN/, the final /-N/ is often dropped in rapid speech. Furthermore, the distinction between /-əuN/ and /-oUN/ is becoming increasingly unclear, particularly among the younger generation.

4. Phonology of Eastern Pwo Karen in the 19th century

Kato (2021a) reconstructed the phonological system of the Hpa-an dialect of Eastern Pwo Karen from the late 18th to the mid-19th centuries. This reconstruction is based on a comparison of Pwo Karen dialects and an analysis of the Christian Pwo Karen script. This study refers to the Hpa-an dialect of Eastern Pwo Karen during this period as “19c EPK” (19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen). The Leke script reflects the phonological system of the 19c EPK. This section presents the 19c EPK phonological system. Note that as discussed in Kato (2022a), the 19th-century phonological system presented in Kato (2021a) requires a revision to include the consonant cluster */cj-/.

Similar to CEPK, the syllable structure of 19c EPK can be represented as C1(C2)V1(V2)(C3)/(T). However, 19c EPK differs significantly from CEPK in that a glottal stop can appear at C3.

There are six tones in 19c EPK: low-level, mid-level, high-level, falling, low-checked, and high-checked (Table 6). However, the exact pitches of these are unknown.

Table 6: Tones in 19c EPK

à	low-level tone
ā	mid-level tone
á	high-level tone
â	falling tone
àʔ	low-checked tone
áʔ	high-checked tone
ə	atonic

The major difference between tones in CEPK and 19c EPK is that the latter has tones ending with a glottal stop, namely the low-checked and high-checked tones. It is unclear whether the glottal stop in these tones should be considered an intrinsic tonal feature or a syllable-final consonant unrelated to tone. Therefore, I avoid drawing definitive conclusions in this study and regard the glottal stop as both an intrinsic tonal feature and a syllable-final consonant. Furthermore, it is very difficult to establish phonological correspondences between the low-checked and low-level tones and between the high-checked and high-level tones. Regarding notation, /à/ and /àʔ/ are represented by the same tone mark; however, they may or may not belong to the same toneme. Similarly, this is true for /á/ and /áʔ/. Hence, no definitive conclusions are drawn regarding this issue.

The simple onsets consisting only of C1 are listed in Table 7. The inventory of phonemes is the same as that of CEPK. However, it is unknown whether there are any differences between 19c EPK and CEPK in terms of phonetic realization.

Table 7: Simple onsets in 19c EPK

p	θ	t	c	k	ʔ
ph		th	ch	kh	
b		d			
			ɕ	x	h
			ɣ	ʁ	
m		n	ɲ	ŋ	
w			j		
		l			
		r			

Table 8 presents the possible combinations of C1 and C2. The only difference from Table 3 is that Table 8 includes the /cj-/ cluster. In other words, 19c EPK contained the consonant cluster /cj-/, which does not exist in CEPK.

Table 8: Possible combinations of C1 and C2 in 19c EPK

		C1															
		p	θ	t	c	k	ʔ	ph	th	ch	kh	b	d	x	h	m	n
C2	w	+	+	+	+	+	+		+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
	l	+				+		+			+	+				+	
	r	+				+					+						
	j	+			+			+				+				+	

The structure of a rhyme in 19c EPK can be represented as -V1(V2)(C3), similar to CEPK. As noted above, the major difference from CEPK is the glottal stop that can appear as C3 in 19c EPK.

As shown in Table 9, there are 10 open rhymes. A key difference from CEPK is that 19c EPK distinguished between /-u/ and /-u/.

Table 9: Open rhymes in 19c EPK

i	i	u u
e	ə	o
ε	a	o

As shown in Table 10, there are seven nasalized rhymes. CEPK has /-iN/, which only appears in loanwords from Burmese. However, I assume that 19c EPK did not have this rhyme.

Table 10: Nasalized rhymes in 19c EPK

Monophthongs	Diphthongs
əN oN	eiN əuN ouN
aN	aiN

Rhymes ending with a glottal stop were present in 19c EPK. I refer to these as stopped rhymes. As shown in Table 11, there are eight stopped rhymes.

Table 11: Stopped rhymes in 19c EPK

Monophthongs	Diphthongs
iʔ	
eʔ oʔ	
aʔ əʔ	aiʔ auʔ auʔ

5. Correspondences of sounds between 19c EPK and CEPK

This section demonstrates how the sounds of 19c EPK correspond to those of CEPK. In this study, the forms of the 19c EPK (including the names of tones) are marked with asterisks.

The corresponding tones are listed in Table 12. In CEPK, */à/ and */àʔ/ in 19c EPK have merged to become /à/. Similarly, */á/ and */áʔ/ in 19c EPK have merged to become /á/ in CEPK.

Table 12: Tones

19c EPK	CEPK
*à, *àʔ	à [a11]
*ā	ā [a33 ~ 334]
*á, *áʔ	á [a55]
*â	â [a51]
*ə (atonic)	ə (atonic)

The correspondences of the simple onsets are presented in Tables 13–15. Including all simple onsets in a single table would make it too long; hence, they are divided into three categories: “stops and affricates”, “fricatives”, and “nasals, semivowels, and liquids”. As these tables show, there is no difference between the C1, that is, simple onsets, of the 19c EPK and the CEPK.

Table 13: Stops and affricates

19c EPK	*p-	*θ-	*t-	*c-	*k-	*ʔ-	*ph-	*th-	*ch-	*kh-	*b-	*d-
CEPK	p-	θ-	t-	c-	k-	ʔ-	ph-	th-	ch-	kh-	b-	d-

Table 14: Fricatives

19c EPK	*ɕ-	*x-	*h-	*ɣ-	*ʁ-
CEPK	ɕ-	x-	h-	ɣ-	ʁ-

Table 15: Nasals, semivowels, and liquids

19c EPK	*m-	*n-	*ɲ-	*ŋ-	*w-	*j-	*l-	*r-
CEPK	m-	n-	ɲ-	ŋ-	w-	j-	l-	r-

The consonant phonemes appearing in position C2 exhibit a correspondence as shown in Table 16. This means that the consonant phonemes that can appear medially are /w/, /l/, /r/, and /j/ in both 19c EPK and CEPK, and the correspondences are

regular.

Table 16: Medials

19c EPK	*-w-	*-l-	*-r-	*-j-
CEPK	-w-	-l-	-r-	-j-

As stated in Section 4, the possible combinations of C1 and C2 differ only in one respect between 19c EPK and CEPK. 19c EPK had the consonant cluster */cj-/, consisting of the initial consonant */c-/ and the medial consonant */-j-/. However, CEPK does not have /cj-/. The */cj-/ of 19c EPK has become /c-/ in CEPK. Meanwhile, the */c-/ of 19c EPK has been inherited by /c-/ in CEPK. In other words, the */cj-/ and */c-/ of 19c EPK have merged to become /c-/ in CEPK (Table 17).

Table 17: */c-/ and */cj-/

19c EPK	*c-	*cj-
CEPK	c-	

Kato (2021a) considered the spellings ၵ in the Buddhist Pwo Karen script and ၵ in the Christian Pwo Karen script to appear only in loanwords from Mon or Burmese. However, these spellings can also appear in vocabulary native to Pwo Karen. For example, Eastern Pwo Karen ၵၵၵ /càn/ ‘hut’ and Western Pwo Karen ၵၵ /cán/ ‘hut’. Moreover, although Eastern Pwo Karen /c-/ typically corresponds to Western Pwo Karen /s-/, in this case it corresponds to /c-/ instead. Therefore, to explain this fact, Kato (2022a) proposed that 19c EPK possessed a consonant cluster */cj-/. This consonant cluster is thought to have also existed in Proto-Pwo-Karen around the 17th century (see Kato [2019b] for the period in which Proto-Pwo-Karen was spoken). Proto-Pwo-Karen */cj-/ became /c-/ in both contemporary Eastern and Western Pwo Karen.

The open rhymes in 19c EPK correspond to the CEPK rhymes, as shown in Table 18. In the 19th century, there was a distinction between /-u/ and /-u/, but these two rhymes have merged into /-u/ in CEPK. The close-mid vowels /-e/ and /-o/ in 19c EPK have both been narrowed in CEPK, becoming /-i/ and /-u/, respectively.

Table 18: Open rhymes

19c EPK	*-i	*-e	*-ε	*-ĩ	*-ə	*-a	*-u	*-u	*-o	*-ɔ
CEPK	-i	-ĩ	-ε	-ĩ	-ə	-a	-u	-u	-o	-ɔ

There is an exception to the correspondence listed in Table 18. The 19c EPK rhyme */-e/, preceded by the initial */w-/ or medial */-w-/, has become /-e/ in CEPK, not /i/. For example, /-e/ of the word /ʔəwê/ ‘3SG’ comes from */-e/, but this word is not pronounced /ʔəwî/. Similarly, /-e/ of the word /xwè/ ‘to buy’ comes from */-e/, but this word is not pronounced /xwî/.

The nasalized rhymes in 19c EPK correspond to those in CEPK in a one-to-one relationship (Table 19). As mentioned in Section 4, it is likely that /-ĩN/ did not exist in 19c EPK.

Table 19: Nasalized rhymes

19c EPK	*-əN	*-aN	*-oN	*-eĩN	*-əuĩN	*-aiĩN	*-ouĩN
CEPK	-əN	-aN	-oN	-eĩN	-əuĩN	-aiĩN	-ouĩN

As shown in Table 20, the stopped rhymes in 19c EPK have all changed to plain rhymes in CEPK. Moreover, the stopped rhymes */-aurʔ/ and */-auʔ/ in 19c EPK have merged to become /-au/ in CEPK.

Table 20: Stopped rhymes

19c EPK	*-eʔ	*-iʔ	*-aʔ	*-oʔ	*-ɔʔ	*-aiʔ	*-aurʔ	*-auʔ
CEPK	-e	-i	-a	-o	-ɔ	-ai	-au	

6. The Leke script and the phonology of 19c EPK and CEPK

This section presents how the Leke script corresponds to the phonological system of Eastern Pwo Karen. The Leke script was created in the mid-19th century. Therefore, it fundamentally reflects the phonological system of 19c EPK. Consequently, to understand its system, it is necessary to examine the correspondence between its various symbols and the phonological system of 19c EPK. However, some Leke script spellings have been modified to reflect CEPK. Therefore, it is also necessary to examine the correspondence between the Leke script and contemporary sounds. Thus, when indicating pronunciation in the following discussion, the 19c EPK sound is shown first, followed by the CEPK sound in parentheses. For example, */-ù/ (/ -ùr/) indicates that the 19c EPK sound was */-ù/ and the CEPK sound is /-ùr/.

In the Leke script, syllables are expressed by placing a letter representing the initial consonant in the center and adding various symbols around it. When the letter

appears without any symbol attached, it is pronounced with the rhyme */-àʔ/ (/ -à/). In other words, the Leke script uses an abugida system. In an abugida system, letters representing initial consonants are important because they form the basis for attaching other symbols. In this article, these letters are referred to as “basic letters”.

6.1. Initial consonants

The initial consonants are represented by basic letters. Table 21 lists the 25 basic letters of the Leke script, along with their pronunciations. This 5×5 array is the same as that used to teach the Leke script.

Table 21: Basic letters

(1) 	(2) 	(3) 	(4) 	(5) 
*/k-/ (/k-/)	*/kh-/ (/kh-/)	*/ŋ-/ (/ŋ-/)	*/c-/ (/c-/)	*/ch-/ (/ch-/)
(6) 	(7) 	(8) 	(9) 	(10) 
*/j-/ (/j-/)	*/t-/ (/t-/)	*/th-/ (/th-/)	*/n-/ (/n-/)	*/ɕ-/ (/ɕ-/)
(11) 	(12) 	(13) 	(14) 	(15) 
*/p-/ (/p-/)	*/ph-/ (/ph-/)	*/m-/ (/m-/)	*/j-/ (/j-/)	*/r-/ (/r-/)
(16) 	(17) 	(18) 	(19) 	(20) 
*/l-/ (/l-/)	*/w-/ (/w-/)	*/θ-/ (/θ-/)	*/ɣ-/ (/ɣ-/)	*/h-/ (/h-/)
(21) 	(22) 	(23) 	(24) 	(25) 
*/x-/ (/x-/)	*/ɣ-/ (/ɣ-/)	*/ʔ-/ (/ʔ-/)	*/b-/ (/b-/)	*/d-/ (/d-/)

To understand how the basic letters are used, the following notes should be kept in mind;

- When no symbol is attached to a basic letter (including when medial symbols from Table 23 in Section 6.2 are attached), it is pronounced with the rhyme */-àʔ/ (/ -à/). For example, the pronunciation of (1) <ɔ> is */kàʔ/ (/kà/). See the cell located in the third row from the top of the left column in Table 31 in 6.3.3.
- The shapes of (1) through (9) in Table 21, namely <ɔ>, <ɪ>, <ɔ>, <ɔ>, <ɔ>, <ɔ>, <ɔ>, <ɔ>, and <ɔ>, are thought to be modeled after the shapes of the numerals 1 through 9 in the Mon-Burmese script. For example, the Burmese script numerals 1

through 9 are ဘ, ဃ, င, ဇ, ဈ, ည, ဋ, ဌ, ဍ, and ဎ. Furthermore, the eight letters from (11) to (18), namely <ဒ>, <ဥ>, <ဇ>, <ဉ>, <ဋ>, <ဌ>, <ဍ>, and <ဎ>, are formed by vertically stacking the shapes from (1) to (8).

- The shape of (10) <ဝ> is thought to be modeled after the Burmese basic letter ဝှ, which represents the Burmese /ε-/ sound.
- The shape of (24) <ဝ> is thought to be modeled after the Mon basic letter ဝ, which represents the Mon /b-/ [6] sound.

Examples of Eastern Pwo Karen words written with each basic letter follow: <ဝ> *ká/ (/ká/) ‘be difficult’, <၇> *khā/ (/khā/) ‘to break (as a long object)’, <၉၉၉၉> *hèṇṇò/ (/hèṇṇò/) ‘to quarrel’, <၉၉> *cú/ (/cú/) ‘hand’, <၉၇> *châ/ (/châ/) ‘to ache’, <၉၉> *jân/ (/jân/) ‘wisdom’, <၉၉၉၉၇> *ʔətà/ (/ʔətà/) ‘responsibility’, <၉၇၇> *thó/ (/thó/) ‘bird’, <၉၇> *nā/ (/nā/) ‘ear’, <၉၇> *éá/ (/éá/) ‘star’, <၉၉> *pàin/ (/pàin/) ‘be full’, <၇၇> *phā/ (/phā/) ‘father’, <၉၇> *mà/ (/mà/) ‘to do’, <၉၇> *já/ (/já/) ‘fish’, <၉၇၉၇> *nàràthá/ (/nàràthá/) ‘pineapple’, <၉၇> *là/ (/là/) ‘moon’, <၉၇> *wà/ (/wà/) ‘husband’, <၇> *θàʔ/ (/θàʔ/) ‘heart’, <၇၇> *yà/ (/yà/) ‘NUMERAL CLASSIFIER FOR A HUMAN’, <၇၉၉> *hə/ (/hə/) ‘we’, <၉၉> *xí/ (/xí/) ‘be beautiful’, <၉၇> *bá/ (/bá/) ‘SENTENCE-FINAL PARTICLE DENOTING QUESTION’, <၇> *ʔá/ (/ʔá/) ‘be numerous’, <ဝ> *bá/ (/bá/) ‘be right’, and <၉၇> *dó/ (/dó/) ‘be big’.

Table 22 displays the numerals of the Leke script, which differ significantly from those in the Mon-Burmese script mentioned above.

Table 22: Numerals

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	0
✓	၄	၆	၈	၉	၁	၂	၃	၅	၇

6.2. Medial consonants

Medial consonants are represented by the medial symbols shown in Table 23. In this article, “+” indicates the position of a basic letter. A basic letter accompanied by a medial symbol functions as an independent basic letter. However, this does not apply to Table 23; that is, no basic letter can bear more than one medial symbol.

Table 23: Medial symbols

			
*/-w-/	*/-l-/	*/-r-/	*/-j-/
(/-w-)	(/-l-)	(/-r-)	(/-j-)

Examples of medial symbols are: <ꠊꠊ> */jwà/ (/jwà/) ‘to flow’, <ꠊꠊ> */kló/ (/kló/) ‘traditional Karen bronze drum’, <ꠊꠊ> */kràn/ (/kràn/) ‘randomly’, and <ꠊꠊ> */mjâ/ (/mjâ/) ‘so much’.

Notably, medial symbols not only indicate medial consonants but can also express a sequence of syllables that can be represented as C1aC2V1(V2)(C3). In this case, the basic letter indicates the initial consonant of the first syllable, whereas the medial symbol indicates the initial consonant of the following syllable. For example, <ꠊꠊ> */təwân/ (/təwân/) ‘village’ and <ꠊꠊ> */chərâ/ (/chərâ/) ‘teacher’.

Furthermore, regarding medial symbols, it must be noted that the notation used for the cluster */cj-/ in 19c EPK is expressed by attaching a symbol indicating */-j-/ to the basic letter indicating */k-/ (Table 24). This spelling is thought to be modeled after the Mon script spelling ꠊꠊ, which represents the Mon consonant cluster /cy-/ (Sakamoto 1994).

Table 24: Representation of */cj-/


*/cj-/ (/c-/)

Examples are: <ꠊꠊ> */cjàn/ (/càn/) ‘field hut’, <ꠊꠊ> */cjài/ (/cài/) ‘Buddha’, and <ꠊꠊ> */ʔəcjòN/ (/ʔəcòN/) ‘reason’.

6.3. Rhymes and tones

In the Leke script, symbols denoting rhymes may simultaneously indicate tones; consequently, symbols denoting rhymes and tones should not be treated separately.

In this study, the symbols used to write various rhymes are categorized into two groups. The first group consists of the vowel symbols listed in the upper row of Table 25. Considering their function and shape similarities, they are believed to correspond to the symbols of the Mon-Burmese script shown in the lower row. The symbol at the

far right is marked with a “?” because it is believed that there are no corresponding symbols in the Mon-Burmese script.

Table 25: Vowel symbols

ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ
ၚ	ၚ	ၚ (ၚ)	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	?

The second group of symbols used to write various rhymes consists of basic letters with the symbols <ၚ> or <ၚ> attached. These symbols are listed in the upper row of Table 26. To the best of my knowledge, at least 15 of the 25 basic letters are used to represent rhymes. The symbols <ၚ> and <ၚ> correspond to the vowel-suppressing sign ၚ (virāma) in the Mon-Burmese script and, in the Leke script, indicate that the basic letters function as symbols representing rhymes. The symbol <ၚ> is used for <ၚ> and <ၚ> to improve the readability. The lower row in the table shows the sound values of the basic letters as used to represent initials.

Table 26: Basic letters with “virāma”

ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ	ၚ
*/k-/	*/ŋ-/	*/c-/	*/ɲ-/	*/t-/	*/n-/	*/p-/	*/m-/	*/j-/	*/w-/	*/y-/	*/h-/	*/x-/	*/ɣ-/	*/ʔ-/

The symbols in Tables 25 and 26 are combined to represent the rhymes. I speculate that the creator(s) of the Leke script patterned the group in Table 25 after the Mon-Burmese script; however, they felt that these symbols and their combinations alone could not adequately represent the sound images of Eastern Pwo Karen and therefore added the group in Table 26. Pu Htaw Shong (n.d.) also contains the symbol <ၚ>, formed by adding <ၚ> to the basic letter representing /kh-/ , in addition to the symbols listed in Table 26; however, its usage is unclear.

The symbols <ၚ>, <ၚ>, <ၚ>, and <ၚ> in Table 27 are tone symbols. <ၚ> represents the *low-level or *low-checked tone, <ၚ> represents the *mid-level tone, <ၚ> represents the *high-level or high-checked tone, and <ၚ> represents the *falling tone. However, when the rhyme is represented solely by vowel symbols, <ၚ> is not used, and the *low-level tone is shown by no mark. Furthermore, when the rhyme is represented using a symbol with a “virāma” (Table 26), <ၚ> is not used, and the

*falling tone is shown by no mark. These are the general principles; however, in the case of the stopped rhymes discussed in Section 6.3.3, the application of these principles is inconsistent.

Table 27: Tone symbols

⚭	⚭̣	⚭̣̣	⚭̣̣̣
*/à/, */ạ̌/	*/ā/	*/á/, */ạ̣̌/	*/ạ̣̣̌/

6.3.1. Open rhymes and tones

Open rhymes are represented by the symbols in Table 28. The vertical columns show the types of rhymes without tones, and the horizontal rows show the tones. Tables 29, 30, and 31 follow the same format. As the notation for the rhyme type */-ə/ without tone would be identical to that of the atonic syllable */-ə/, it is notated as */-ə//.

The following should be kept in mind when writing open rhymes and tones:

- Instead of the symbol <+> used in the notation of */-o/, a hyphen-like <+> may be used. For example, <⚭̣̣̣> */mō/ (/mō/) ‘mother’ may be written as <⚭̣̣̣>. Similarly, <⚭̣̣̣̣> */mô/ (/mô/) ‘unripe’ may be written as <⚭̣̣̣̣>. Furthermore, although it is likely a simplified notation, <⚭̣̣̣̣> is sometimes written as <⚭̣̣̣̣> by omitting <+>. Consequently, the spelling of */mō/ (/mō/) ‘mother’ can take three forms: <⚭̣̣̣̣>, <⚭̣̣̣̣>, and <⚭̣̣̣̣>.
- The rhyme /-ə/ in an atonic syllable is spelled the same as /-ə̣/ and written as <⚭̣̣̣̣>. Another less frequent spelling for an atonic syllable /-ə/ is <⚭̣̣̣̣̣>. This is likely to be the case for specific words only. An example is <⚭̣̣̣̣̣̣̣> */khədọ̀/ (/khədò/) ‘to spell’. Furthermore, an atonic syllable /-ə/ is sometimes written using the simplified spelling for */-ọ̄/, i.e., <⚭̣̣̣̣>. For example, the first-person singular pronoun */jə/ (/jə/) should be written <⚭̣̣̣̣̣̣̣>, but it is sometimes written <⚭̣̣̣̣>. However, this may be an exception or an incorrect spelling.
- The tone symbol <⚭̣̣̣̣> for the *low-level or *low-checked tone exceptionally represents the mid-level tone in the notation of */-ọ̄/ (/-ọ̄/). Furthermore, only for the

Table 28: Open rhymes and tones

	*Low-level	*Mid-level	*High-level	*Falling	*Atonic
*-/i/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ì/ (/ -ì/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ĩ/ (/ -ĩ/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}, \overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-í/ (/ -í/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-î/ (/ -î/)	
*-/e/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-è/ (/ -è/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ẽ/ (/ -ĩ/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-é/ (/ -í/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ê/ (/ -î/)	
*-/ɛ/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ê/ (/ -è/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ẽ/ (/ -ẽ/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-é/ (/ -é/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ê/ (/ -ê/)	
*-/i/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ì/ (/ -ì/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ĩ/ (/ -ĩ/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-í/ (/ -í/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$? */-î/ (/ -î/)	
*-/ə/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ə/ (/ -ə/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ə/ (/ -ə/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ə/ (/ -ə/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ə/ (/ -ə/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ə/ (/ -ə/)
*-/a/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-à/ (/ -à/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ā/ (/ -ā/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-á/ (/ -á/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-â/ (/ -â/)	
*-/u/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ù/ (/ -ù/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ū/ (/ -ū/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ú/ (/ -ú/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-û/ (/ -û/)	
*-/u/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ù/ (/ -ù/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ū/ (/ -ū/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}, \overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ú/ (/ -ú/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-û/ (/ -û/)	
*-/o/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}, \overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ò/ (/ -ò/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}, \overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ō/ (/ -ō/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ó/ (/ -ó/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}, \overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ô/ (/ -ô/)	
*-/ɔ/	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ô/ (/ -ô/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ō/ (/ -ō/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ó/ (/ -ó/)	$\overset{\circ}{\text{f}}$ */-ô/ (/ -ô/)	

notation of */-ô/ (/ -ô/), the vowel symbol <f> is used to denote the falling tone.

- */-í/ (/ -í/) is spelled as either <f> or <f>, */-ú/ (/ -ú/) is spelled as either <f> or <f>, */-ẽ/ (/ -ẽ/) is spelled as either <f> or <f>, */-é/ (/ -é/) is spelled as either <f> or <f>, and */-ĩ/ (/ -ĩ/) is spelled as either <f> or <f>. However, the principles that govern their use remain unclear.

- <f> is presented as the spelling representing */-î/ (/ -î/), but a “?” is attached, because no actual examples have been found. The rhyme */-î/ (/ -î/) occurs only in a few sentence-final particles including */mî/ (/mî) ‘I am telling you’.

- The symbols in Table 26 (including a tone symbol, if present) may be written repeatedly to represent reduplication. For example, the spelling of */klàklà/ (/klàklà/)

‘always’ can be written as <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> or <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ>. This spelling convention can be applied not only to open rhymes but also to all rhymes.

- As discussed in Section 5, */-u/ and */-u/ in 19c EPK have merged into /-u/ in CEPK. Consequently, the spellings for */-u/ and */-u/ are frequently confused. For example, */ʔú/ (/ʔú/) ‘to rot’ should be spelled <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> but is sometimes written <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ>.
- As stated in Section 3, the distinction between /-i/ and /-e/ in CEPK has become unclear. Consequently, the spellings for */-e/ and */-e/ may sometimes be confused. Similarly, the distinction between /-o/ and /-o/ in CEPK has become unclear. Consequently, the spellings for */-o/ and */-o/ may sometimes be confused.

The following are examples of how to write open rhymes and tones:

- */-i/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */thìθá/ (/thìθá/) ‘cucumber’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */nī/ (/nī/) ‘to laugh’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */θi/ (/θi/) ‘plural marker’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */lí/ (/lí/) ‘squirrel’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */phī/ (/phī/) ‘grandmother’
- */-e/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */yè/ (/yè/) ‘be good’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */nē/ (/nē/) ‘to get’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mé/ (/mí/) ‘fire’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */pê/ (/pî/) ‘be small’
- */-ɛ/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */khè/ (/khè/) ‘be lit’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */lê/ (/lê/) ‘be wide’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */wê/ (/wê/) ‘to open’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */ʔé/ (/ʔé/) ‘to love’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mé/ (/mé/) ‘to sprout’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */yê/ (/yê/) ‘to come’
- */-i/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */chì/ (/chì/) ‘ethnic group’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */líkáʔ/ (/líká/) ‘world’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */khī/ (/khī/) ‘to fall (as a tree)’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */phí/ (/phí/) ‘be short, be low’
- */-o/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */klà/ (/klà/) ‘frequently’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */chā/ (/chā/) ‘thing’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */lá/ (/lá/) ‘to, at, from’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */lâ/ (/lâ/) ‘RELATIVE MARKER’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */chəjòkhâ/ (/chəjòkhâ/) ‘hot season’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */khədòʔ/ (/khədò/) ‘to spell’
- */-a/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mà/ (/mà/) ‘to do’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */nā/ (/nā/) ‘ear’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */ká/ (/ká/) ‘be difficult’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */châ/ (/châ/) ‘to ache’
- */-u/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */dù/ (/dù/) ‘NUMERAL CLASSIFIER FOR AN ANIMAL’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mū/ (/mū/) ‘day, date’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mú/ (/mú/) ‘woman’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */mūlā/ (/mūlā/) ‘to hope’
- */-u/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */dù/ (/dù/) ‘pear’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */nū/ (/nū/) ‘breast’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */cú/ (/cú/) ‘hand’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */phù/ (/phù/) ‘grandfather’
- */-o/: <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */jò/ (/jò/) ‘Mon’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */jō/ (/jō/) ‘to look’, <ᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛᵛ> */dó/ (/dó/) ‘be big’,

<ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> */chô/ (/chô/) ‘be early’
 */-ɔ/: <ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> */lò/ (/lò/) ‘to tell’, <ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> */pɔ/ (/pɔ/) ‘to read’, <ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> */ʔó/ (/ʔó/) ‘to exist’, <ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> */thô/ (/thô/) ‘be long, be high’

6.3.2. Nasalized rhymes and tones

Nasalized rhymes are represented by the symbols shown in Table 29.

Table 29: Nasalized rhymes and tones

	*Low-level	*Mid-level	*High-level	*Falling
*/-əN/	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əN/ (/ -əN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əN/ (/ -əN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əN/ (/ -əN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əN/ (/ -əN/)
*/-aŋ/	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ, +ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-aŋ/ (/ -aŋ/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ, +ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-āN/ (/ -āN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ, +ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-áN/ (/ -áN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ, +ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-âN/ (/ -âN/)
*/-oN/	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-òN/ (/ -òN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-ōN/ (/ -ōN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-óN/ (/ -óN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-ôN/ (/ -ôN/)
*/-eĩN/	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-èiN/ (/ -èiN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-ēiN/ (/ -ēiN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-éiN/ (/ -éiN/)	ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-êiN/ (/ -êiN/)
*/-əuN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əuN/ (/ -əuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əuN/ (/ -əuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əuN/ (/ -əuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-əuN/ (/ -əuN/)
*/-aiN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-àiN/ (/ -àiN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-āiN/ (/ -āiN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-áiN/ (/ -áiN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-âiN/ (/ -âiN/)
*/-ouN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-òuN/ (/ -òuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-ōuN/ (/ -ōuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-óuN/ (/ -óuN/)	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ */-ôuN/ (/ -ôuN/)

The rhyme /-ĩN/, which appears only in CEPK, is spelled as shown in Table 30. I speculate that this spelling was devised well into the 20th century.

Table 30: The nasalized rhyme /-ĩN/

	Low-level	Mid-level	High-level	Falling
/-ĩN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ /-ĩN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ /-ĩN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ /-ĩN/	+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ /-ĩN/

The following should be kept in mind when writing nasalized rhymes and tones:

- There are two ways to write the nasalized rhyme /-aŋ/: one using <ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ> and another using <+ᵒᵒᵒᵒᵒ>. However, the difference in their roles remains unclear. Both can sometimes

be used to spell the same words. For example, the spelling of */thán/ (/thán/) ‘to ascend’ can use either <ṭṭṭṭ> or <ṇṇṇṇ>.

● As mentioned in Section 3, the distinction between /-əuN/ and /-ouN/ has become unclear in CEPK. Consequently, the spellings for */-əuN/ and */-ouN/ may sometimes be confused.

The following are examples of how to write nasalized rhymes and tones:

- */-əN/: <ṭṭṭṭ> */məN/ (/məN/) ‘be drunk’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */θəNchi/ (/θəNchi/) ‘thirty’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */θəNṭṭṭṭ/ (/θəNṭṭṭṭ/) ‘guava’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */xəN/ (/xəN/) ‘be heavy’
- */-aN/: <ṭṭṭṭ> (= <ṭṭṭṭ>) */làn/ (/làn/) ‘to descend’, <ṭṭṭṭ> */khāN/ (/khāN/) ‘country’, <ṭṭṭṭ> */yāN/ (/yāN/) ‘for the sake of’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */ṭṭṭṭ/ (/ṭṭṭṭ/) ‘to eat’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */yāNkhó/ (/yāNkhó/) ‘ground’, <ṭṭṭṭ> */chāN/ (/chāN/) ‘chicken’, <ṭṭṭṭ> */θāN/ (/θāN/) ‘be new’
- */-oN/: <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */yòN/ (/yòN/) ‘to end’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */thōN/ (/thōN/) ‘copper’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */phón/ (/phón/) ‘to catch’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */thôn/ (/thôn/) ‘gold’
- */-eiN/: <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */mèiN/ (/mèiN/) ‘name’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */phēiN/ (/phēiN/) ‘opium’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */yéiN/ (/yéiN/) ‘house’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */mēiN/ (/mēiN/) ‘be cooked’
- */-əuN/: <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */təuN/ (/təuN/) ‘to mock’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */khəuN/ (/khəuN/) ‘to insult’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */θəuN/ (/θəuN/) ‘to build’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */phəuN/ (/phəuN/) ‘fishing trap’
- */-aiN/: <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */thəiN/ (/thəiN/) ‘to return’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */yāiN/ (/yāiN/) ‘strength’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */chāiN/ (/chāiN/) ‘be sour’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */thāiN/ (/thāiN/) ‘bracelet’
- */-ouN/: <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */kòuN/ (/kòuN/) ‘to assemble’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */lòuN/ (/lòuN/) ‘stone’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */bòuN/ (/bòuN/) ‘festival’, <ṭṭṭṭṭṭ> */lòuN/ (/lòuN/) ‘goblet’
- /-iN/ (only in CEPK): <ṭṭṭṭ> /kīN/ ‘patrol’ (< Burmese /kín/), <ṭṭṭṭ> /thīN/ ‘to assume’ (< Burmese /thìn/)

6.3.3. Stopped rhymes and tones

The stopped rhymes are represented by the symbols listed in Table 31. As stated in Section 4, only the *low- and *high-checked tones can co-occur with stopped rhymes.

Table 31: Stopped rhymes and tones

	*Low-checked	*High-checked
*/-eʔ/	ᑭᑦ */-èʔ/ (/ -è/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-éʔ/ (/ -é/)
*/-iʔ/	ᑭᑦ */-ìʔ/ (/ -ì/)	ᑭᑦ ?*/-íʔ/
*/-aʔ/	ᑭᑦ */-àʔ/ (/ -à/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-áʔ/ (/ -á/)
*/-oʔ/	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ, ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-òʔ/ (/ -ò/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ */-óʔ/ (/ -ó/)
*/-ɔʔ/	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-ɔʔ/ (/ -ɔ/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ ?*/-ɔʔ/
*/-aiʔ/	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-àiʔ/ (/ -ài/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-áiʔ/ (/ -ái/)
*/-auʔ/	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-àuʔ/ (/ -àu/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-áuʔ/ (/ -áu/)
*/-auʔ/	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-àuʔ/ (/ -àu/)	ᑭᑦᑦᑦ */-áuʔ/ (/ -áu/)

The following should be kept in mind when writing stopped rhymes and tones:

- The existence of the rhymes */-íʔ/ and */-ɔʔ/ in 19c EPK has not yet been confirmed. Therefore, “?” has been shown. No spellings representing these rhymes have been found in the Leke script.
- There are two spellings for /-òʔ/ (/ -ò/): <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ> and <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ>. However, the principles that govern their use remain unclear. Regarding <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ>, it is unusual in that */-òʔ/ has a low pitch but is marked with a symbol indicating the mid-level tone.
- As discussed in Section 5, */-auʔ/ and */-auʔ/ in 19c EPK have merged into /-au/ in CEPK. Consequently, the spellings of */-auʔ/ and */-auʔ/ are frequently confused. For example, */cjàuʔ/ (/càu/) ‘to drag’ should be spelled <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ> but is sometimes spelled <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ>. Similarly, */máuʔ/ (/máu/) ‘comfortable’ should be spelled <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ>, but is sometimes spelled <ᑭᑦᑦᑦ>.

- The CEPK word /dē/ ‘and; with’ comes from 19c EPK’s */dē/. The CEPK rhyme /-e/ usually comes from 19c EPK’s /-eʔ/, making this an exception. This word is currently written as <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ>, with the symbol for the *mid-level tone added to the spelling representing */-èʔ/ (/ -è/).
- The rhyme */-e/ in 19c EPK became /-i/ in CEPK (Table 18). However, */-e/ became CEPK /-e/ after */w-/ and */-w-/. Therefore, in the environment following */(-)w-/, phonological correspondences can be represented as */-è/ (/ -è/), */-ē/ (/ -ē/), */-é/ (/ -é/), and */-ê/ (/ -ê/). These are written as <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ>, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ>, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ>, and <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ>, respectively, using the spelling that represents */-eʔ/. For example, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */ʔəwê/ (/ʔəwê/) ‘s/he’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */lóʔkwè/ (/lókwè/) ‘to play’, and <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */xwè/ (/xwè/) ‘to buy’.
- CEPK may exhibit the rhyme /-ō/, which originates from */-òʔ/ of 19c EPK. This is expressed as <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ>. An example is <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */kòʔ/ (/kō/) ‘every’.

The following are examples of how to write stopped rhymes and tones:

- */-eʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ> */kèʔ/ (/kè/) ‘to write’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */méʔ/ (/mé/) ‘face; eye’
- */-iʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ> */ciʔ/ (/ci/) ‘vigorously’
- */-aʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦ> */θàʔ/ (/θà/) ‘heart’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */mèinláʔ/ (/mèinlá/) ‘forest’
- */-oʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */θòʔ/ (/θò/) ‘just as, like’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */kòʔ/ (/kò/) ‘to call’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */jóʔ/ (/jó/) ‘be deep’
- */-ɔʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */dòʔ/ (/dò/) ‘more, later’
- */-aiʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */dàiʔ/ (/dài/) ‘still’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */cháiʔ/ (/chái/) ‘rice field’
- */-auʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */bàʔ/ (/bàʔ/) ‘to stick (to something)’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */tháuʔ/ (/tháu/) ‘to be completed’
- */-auʔ/: <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */bàʔ/ (/bàʔ/) ‘be close’, <ᑲᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦᑦ> */tháuʔ/ (/tháu/) ‘to ride’

7. The Leke script as a writing system

Here, I discuss the characteristics of the Leke script from several perspectives.

7.1. Accuracy of the Leke script

As per Section 6, the following two points can be noted: The first is that the Leke

script has an abugida system. The second is that, although it contains some redundancy, it can represent the pronunciation of 19c EPK completely accurately, except that the notation for the atonic rhyme */-ə/ (/ə/) is identical to that for */-ə̃/ (/ə̃/).

The second point is of particular importance. Although the Leke script is notable for its distinctive shape, it is also an excellent writing system in terms of accuracy. Its ability to accurately represent the pronunciation of 19c EPK implies that it can accurately represent CEPK as well. Redundancy, namely, the existence of multiple symbols for a single pronunciation, cannot necessarily be regarded as a defect in a writing system, because such symbols may serve to distinguish homophones.

7.2. Relationship with the Mon-Burmese script

Many basic letters in the Leke script imitate the shape of numerals in the Mon-Burmese script, indicating that it was influenced by the Mon-Burmese script. Among the various writing systems belonging to the Mon-Burmese script tradition, the Mon and Burmese scripts possibly influenced the Leke script. However, it is difficult to ascertain which of the two had a stronger influence on the Leke script.

As mentioned in Section 6.1, the basic letters (10) and (24) in Table 21 are thought to imitate the Burmese and Mon scripts, respectively. Thus, even in terms of just the basic letters, the Leke script was influenced by both the Mon and Burmese scripts. Regarding the representation of rhymes, the Leke script was certainly influenced by the Mon-Burmese script, since various vowels are represented by combining vowel signs (Table 25) and symbols employing the “virāma” (Table 26). However, because the Mon and Burmese scripts share many features in their rhyme representations, it is difficult to identify which aspects of the Leke script’s rhyme representation are influenced by which script. Therefore, although the Leke script as a whole was influenced by the Mon-Burmese script, it is unclear whether the Mon or Burmese scripts had a greater influence.

7.3. Relationship with other Eastern Pwo Karen scripts

As mentioned at the beginning of this article, several scripts are used to represent Eastern Pwo Karen in addition to the Leke script, such as the Buddhist Pwo Karen

script, the Christian Pwo Karen script, and Lae Kwekaw. Buddhist and Christian Pwo Karen scripts already existed when the Leke script was created. However, no elements of the Leke script were likely influenced by these two writing systems. Possibly, the high degree of accuracy in the Leke script was influenced by the highly systematic Christian Pwo Karen script (Kato [2021a]; Kato [2022a]), because Saw Kya Shin et al. (2006: 12) state that U Maw Yaing assisted Baptist missionaries in translating the Bible. Nevertheless, at least in terms of the shapes of the symbols or the way they are combined, there are no similarities between the Leke and the Christian Pwo Karen scripts.

7.4. Representation of Indic vocabulary

Many languages in Southeast Asia have borrowed a significant number of words of Indic origin. Eastern Pwo Karen too contains many loanwords from Pali, most likely through the Mon influence. In the Leke script, these words are written as they are pronounced. For example, the Pali word *loka* ‘world’ is written as <ꨀꨂꨀꨂꨀ> */likà?/ (/likà/) ‘world’.

7.5. Evolution of the Leke script

Currently, almost nothing is known about how the Leke script has changed since its creation. As mentioned in Section 6.3.3, after */w-/ and */-w-/, the rhyme */-e/ of 19c EPK did not change to */-i/ in CEPK but remained */-e/; in this case, */-e/ is written using the spelling that represents */-e?/. For example, the word <ꨀꨂꨀꨂꨀ> */?əwê/ (/?əwê/) ‘s/he’ would, according to the usual way of writing */-ê/, be expected to be written as <ꨀꨂꨀꨂꨀ>. However, in reality, it is not written this way. Thus, although the Leke script generally reflects the 19th-century pronunciation of Eastern Pwo Karen, some parts have been modified in accordance with sound changes. To discuss the history of Leke script development, one needs to examine the original palm-leaf manuscripts produced in the 19th century. However, it is not known whether such manuscripts still exist. If old manuscripts were available, the representation of rhymes (as mentioned above) and tones would be of particular interest. Regarding tone marking, the Buddhist Pwo Karen script, another writing system for Eastern Pwo

Karen, began marking tones on all syllables after the 1960s. The Leke script also marks tones on every syllable; however, it is unknown whether this was the case from the beginning. If this is the case, one could argue that the creator(s) of the Leke script had an extraordinary awareness of pronunciation.

7.6. The Leke script as an Indic script

In Kato (2024), I regarded the “ancient” Karen script *Lae Kwekaw* as one of the newest versions of Indic scripts. The Leke script is unusual because many of its basic letters imitate the numerals of the Mon-Burmese script. However, given its abugida system and the strong influence of the Mon-Burmese script, it too can be regarded, like *Lae Kwekaw*, as a version of Indic scripts.

8. Sample sentences and text in the Leke script

This section presents Eastern Pwo Karen sample sentences (8.1) and lyrics of a song (8.3) written in the Leke script.

8.1. Sample sentences

From the large number of example sentences listed in Pu Htaw Shong (n.d.), 10 were selected and are shown here. <=> is the period. Note that the comma in Leke script is <->.

- (1) နီနီနီနီနီနီနီ/လှိုင်းနီ= ဂွနီနီဂီလီး/၃၀၀၀၀၀=
ခဲခဲခဲခဲခဲခဲခဲ=
- (2) ဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝို/နီနီနီနီနီနီ/ဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝို/ဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝိုဝို=
- (3) နီနီနီနီနီနီ/နီနီနီနီနီနီ/နီနီနီနီနီနီ/နီနီနီနီနီနီ/နီနီနီနီနီနီ=
- (4) နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ=
- (5) နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ=
- (6) နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ/နီနီနီ=

- (7) ဝေါဝါးသွင်းဖူးလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊
 နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊
 (8) နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊
 နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊
 (9) နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊
 (10) နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊ နီလဲ၊

8.2. Transcription and translation

Here, the example sentences listed in Section 8.1 are transcribed with CEPK pronunciation and provided with English translations. The second line of each example shows the form of each word in 19c EPK. Note that the phonetic symbols for these sentences represent phonemes, but “/ /” is omitted.

- (1) chāchən lān θān, yānkhó ɛú lān.
 *chāchən *lān *θān *yānkhó *ɛú *lān
 rain to.descend recently ground be.cool down
 ‘The rainy season has begun, and the ground has cooled.’
- θáwun lān θā wá khī nān bòn.
 *θáwun *lān *θā *wá *khī *nān *bòn
 to.plant down now! bamboo to.fall some NCI
 ‘Now, raise the fallen bamboo.’
- mō mōn thán lô.
 *mō *mōn *thán *lô
 IRR be.alive up AST
 ‘It will come back to life.’

Note 1: In the second sentence, /θáwun/ is written as <ရွှေ>, which represents /θówun/, but it should properly be written as <ရွှေ>. This “error” likely results from the increasingly blurred distinction between the rhymes /-əwun/ and /-oʊn/ in CEPK.

- (2)
- | | | | | | | |
|---------|-------|---------|---------|------|-------|-----|
| nə | mō | lì | chō | nó, | | |
| *nə | *mō | *lè | *chō | *nó | | |
| 2SG | IRR | to.go | thing | when | | |
| chō | mō | khléin | bá | nò | khó. | |
| *chō | *mō | *khléin | *bá | *nò | *khó? | |
| thing | IRR | be.cold | APP.JUD | 2SG | FUT | |
| thò | thán | nə | châin | nó | bá | lé. |
| *thò? | *thán | *nə | *châin | *nó | *bá | *lè |
| to.wear | up | 2SG | shirt | that | why | Q |
- ‘If you go out, you might feel cold. Why don’t you put on some clothes?’

Note 2: The word /bá/ in the first sentence is an applicative marker denoting judgment. It expresses the meaning ‘be V for (someone); be V to (someone)’ and introduces the experiencer as the object (Kato 2009b). Although Kato (2009b) does not refer to /bá/ as an applicative marker, this usage may be called a “judgmentive applicative” (suggested by Christopher Tancredi [p.c.]).

- (3)
- | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|--------------|-----------|----------|-----|--|
| phlòun | lō | ʔəyāinʔəbà | chón | nó | | |
| *phlòun | *lō | *ʔəyāinʔəbà? | *chón | *nó | | |
| person | REL | strength | be.strong | that | | |
| ʔəwê | jò | chō | nī | ʔáʔálé | lō. | |
| *ʔəwê | *jò? | *chō | *nē | *ʔáʔálé? | *lō | |
| 3SG | to.lift | thing | to.get | much | AST | |
- ‘A powerful man can lift many things.’

- (4)
- | | | | | | | |
|---------|---------|-----|-------|-----------|-----------|---------------|
| cáin | ʔèphlé | nó, | lì | chō | thòn | jàin. |
| *cáin | *ʔèphlé | *nó | *lè | *chō | *thòn | *jàin |
| to.walk | fast | if | to.go | thing | to.arrive | be.far |
| cáin | ʔèʔwì | nó, | mō | thòn | wê | bàukhó lō. |
| *cáin | *ʔèʔwì | *nó | *mō | *thòn | *wê | *bàuʔkhó? *lō |
| to.walk | slowly | if | IRR | to.arrive | EMP | be.close AST |
- ‘If you walk fast, you’ll get far. If you walk slow, you’ll only reach nearby.’

Note 3: The form /ʔè/ in /ʔèphlé/ and /ʔèʔwì/ is a prefix that forms adverbs. /phlé/ and /ʔwì/ are stative verbs that mean ‘be fast’ and ‘be slow’, respectively. It is thought to have been pronounced /ʔé/ in 19c EPK. In the Leke script, this is sometimes written in a spelling that directly reflects that pronunciation, and sometimes in a spelling that can be read as /ʔé/, which likely reflects an intermediate stage leading to the contemporary /ʔè/. The same applies to the

subordinate clause marker /ʔə/, which means ‘if’.

- (5) chā lā khī nō ʔō wē dōuntāwān phēn ʔé,
 *chā *lā *khē *nō *ʔō *wē *dōuntāwān *phēn *ʔé?
 thing LOC tiger TOP to.be EMP urban.area inside NEG
- ʔō wē mwē mēinlā θōnklā lō.
 *ʔō *wē *mwē *mēinlā? *θōnklā *lō
 to.be EMP COP forest jungle AST
- ‘Tigers do not live in urban areas. They live in forested regions.’

- (6) chā ʔə khōuN kəmlāN lā ʔə lāN bá nō,
 *chā *ʔə *khōuN *kəmlāN *lā *ʔə *lāN *bá *nō
 IMPS if to.dig well REL 3SG place right TOP
- thī mō ʔō wē chūkhó lō.
 *thī *mō *ʔō *wē *chūkhó? *lō
 water IRR to.be EMP be.shallow AST
- ‘If you dig a well in the right place, water will be found in shallow ground.’

Note 4: In this sentence, the word /chā/ (also pronounced /chə/) ‘thing’ functions as the subject of an impersonal construction (Kato [2020]).

- (7) phóthá mú yì khwā yì ʔə jáw ʔə pàin
 *phóthá *mú *yè *khwā *yè *ʔə *jáw? *ʔə *pàin
 child female be.good male be.good 3SG age if be.full
- nwē néin nō ʔə ménūthī bá phó lō.
 *nwē *néin *nō *ʔə *ménūthī *bá *phó? *lō
 seven year TOP 3SG deciduous.tooth must to.fall.out AST
- ‘Children, whether boys or girls, are supposed to lose their baby teeth at age 7.’

- (8) phlōuN ʔānpōN ʔān θāN nō mā bá phēn
 *phlōuN *ʔānpōN *ʔān *θāN *nō *mā *bá *phēn
 person to.cook to.eat side.dish TOP IRR must to.put.in
- lāN wē dē jābāN, mā nāNXí bá khó.
 *lāN *wē *dē *jābāN *mā *nāNXí *bá *khó?
 down EMP with turmeric IRR be.fishy BA FUT
- ‘Anyone making curry must add turmeric. Otherwise, it will smell fishy.’

spellings in the Leke script follow the video captions. [A], [B], and [C] are each sung twice.

In some words, the spellings differ between the first and second occurrences. When this happens, the second spelling is shown in parentheses [] immediately after the first. The difference is due to the existence of multiple pronunciation variants in these forms.

[A]×2

- (1) နီရူဂိုဝဲဝဲနူးနွံနွံနွံ[နွံ]ဝဲဝဲနီရူဝဲ
- (2) ဂျီဂွဒ်နီရူဂီနီရူဂီနီရူဂီ/နီရူဂီဝဲ
- (3) ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံ
- (4) ဂျီဂွဒ်နီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ
- (5) ဇနုဂဲနီရူဝဲဂွဒ်နွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ
- (6) နွံနွံနီရူ/နွံနွံနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (7) ငးနီရူနီရူ/နွံနွံနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ
- (8) ဝဲနွံနွံဝဲနွံ

[B]×2

- (9) ဂဲဝဲဇနုနွံ
- (10) ဂျီဂွဒ်နီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ
- (11) ဝဲနွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (12) ငးနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (13) နွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (14) နီရူ/ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ

[C]×2

- (15) နွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (16) ဂဲဝဲဇနုနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ
- (17) နွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (18) နွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (19) နွံနွံနီရူနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)
- (20) နွံနွံနီရူ(ဇနုဂဲနီရူနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံနွံ)

[A]×2

- (1) lái thài ʔó jə mə(mə) bá lə làn.
 *láiʔ *thàiʔ *ʔó, *jə *mə(mə) *bá *lə *làn
 script origin to.be 1SG IRR must to.tell down

‘I must tell the truth about the origin of the Leke script.’

- (2) phû θàurəjá thán mjānθi lə khwēkəbàn.
 *phû *θàuʔrəjáʔ *thán *mjānθi *lə *khwēkəbàn
 grandfather Thaung.Hlya to.ascend to.practice LOC Mt.Zwegabin

‘Pu Thaung Hlya climbed Mt. Zwegabin to practice asceticism.’

Note 1: In the song, the second part of the name Thaung Hlya is pronounced /rəjá/. The corresponding spelling in the Leke script is <ꨀꨣ>. Presumably, the spelling <ꨀꨣ> is pedantic. If read according to the regular rules, it would be pronounced /rərá/. As /r/ occurs frequently in the cultural vocabulary borrowed from Mon and Pali, using a letter to represent it conveys a sense of sophistication.

- (3) nī thain láí, ʔə θáunθà máu. həʔèin phílān.
 *nē *thain *láiʔ *ʔə *θáunθàʔ *máuw? *həʔèin *phélān
 to.get back script 3SG heart comfortable spirit to.give

‘Upon receiving the script, he rejoiced. The spirits had bestowed it upon him.’

Note 2: The first syllable of /θáunθà/ is written as <ꨀꨣ>, which represents /θóun/, but it should properly be written as <ꨀꨣ>. This “error” stems from the increasingly blurred distinction between the rhymes /-əun/ and /-oun/ in CEPK.

Note 3: /máu/ is written as <ꨀꨣ>. This spelling corresponds to */máuʔ/ in 19c EPK. However, as the 19c EPK form of /máu/ was */máuwʔ/, it should properly be written as <ꨀꨣ>.

- (4) phû θàurəjá lə dòunjān yê thain làn.
 *phû *θàuʔrəjáʔ *lə *dòunjān *yê *thain *làn
 G.F. Thaung.Hlya LOC Don-yin to.come to.return down

‘Pu Thaung Hlya returned to Don-yin (a place name at the foot of Mt. Zwegabin).’

Note 4: The normal word order of this sentence is /phû θàurəjá yê thain làn lə dòunjān/. As it is a part of the lyrics of a song, a special word order was likely used for the rhetorical effect.

- (5) nī thàin láí, bá thōun éán mèinlá wàn.
 *nē *thàin *láí? *bá *thōun *éán *mèinlá? *wān
 to.get back script must receive be.poor forest compound
 ‘He obtained the script, but his practice in the forest was rigorous.’
- (6) ʔə θilá khôn lānān θí, ʔə wīpān lā phān.
 *ʔə *θilá? *khôn *lānān *θí *ʔə *wīpān *lā *phān
 3SG precept be.firm although also 3SG wisdom NEG be.bright
 ‘He strictly adhered to the precepts, but his knowledge was limited.’
- (7) dá làn tē phlòun láí mûlā,
 *dá *làn *tē *phlòun *láí? *mûlā
 to.see down thoroughly Pwo.Karen script basics
- khədò pō mjā lə wān wòn(yòn)lə wān.
 *khədò? *pō *mjā *lə *wān *yòn *lə *wān
 to.spell to.read so.much one time after one time
 ‘He carefully observed the basics of the Pwo Karen script, repeatedly spelling and attempting to read it.’
- (8) pō bá ʔé.
 *pō *bá *ʔé?
 to.read be.right NEG
- phû θàorəjá lə yà ʔə θáunθà éán.
 *phû *θàurəjá? *lə *yà *ʔə *θáunθà? *éán
 G.F. Thuang.Hlya one NCh 3SG heart poor
 ‘He couldn’t read. Pu Thuang Hlya was disappointed.’

[B]×2

- (9) thònnó phû mójàin ʔó lā thîwā.
 *thònnó *phû *mójàin *ʔó *lā *thîwā
 then G.F. Maw.Yaing to.be LOC opposite.bank
- báchâin láí ʔəwê pō bá.
 *báchâin *láí? *ʔəwê *pō *bá
 about script 3SG to.read be.right
 ‘At that time, a man named Pu Maw Yaing lived on the opposite bank (of the Thanlwin River). He was a man well-versed in reading scripts.’

- (10) phû θàurəjá γ̃ənpərən cò,
 *phû *θàuʔrəjáʔ *γ̃ənpərən *cò
 G.F. Thaung.Hlya to.hear.of at.a.distance

mə dàu p̄ dē(dè) lái mûlā.
 *mə *dàuʔ *p̄ *dē *láiʔ *mûlā
 IRR let to.read with script basics

‘Pu Thaung Hlya heard about this and decided to have him read the basics of the script.’

Note 5: The /γ̃ən/ in /γ̃ənpərən/ is spelled <𑜉𑜦𑜧>, and similarly, /rən/ is spelled <𑜉𑜦𑜧>. These spellings represent /γ̃ə/ and /rə/, respectively. Presumably, they must properly be spelled as <𑜉𑜦𑜧> and <𑜉𑜦𑜧>.

Note 6: The spelling of /cò/ (also pronounced /cò/), which means ‘at a distance,’ should properly be <𑜉𑜦𑜧>, but it appears as <𑜉𑜦𑜧>. This spelling actually represents the pronunciation */ciʔ/ (/ci/). However, the reason for this discrepancy remains unclear.

Note 7: /dàu/ is a causative particle. Although its 19c EPK pronunciation was */dàuʔ/, it is written with a spelling that represents */dàuʔ/. This “error” stems from the merger of */-auʔ/ and */-auʔ/ into /-aʊ/ in CEPK. This should be written properly as <𑜉𑜦𑜧>.

- (11) báchâin lái lànblè γ̃on, p̄ bá láokhlā.
 *báchâin *láiʔ *lànblèʔ *γ̃on *p̄ *bá *láuʔkhlā
 about script skillful and to.read be.right all

‘Pu Maw Yaing was highly skilled in literacy and possessed the ability to read any script.’

- (12) dá làn lái, p̄ bá, phû θàurəjá dàuné pjā.
 *dá *làn *láiʔ *p̄ *bá *phû *θàuʔrəjáʔ *dàuʔné *pjā
 to.see down script to.read be.right G.F. Thaung.Hlya to.show PJA

‘He could read it when he saw writing, so Pu Thaung Hlya showed (him the script).’

Note 8: Similar to /dàu/ in Note 7, the 19c EPK pronunciation of the first syllable in /dàuné/ was */dàuʔ/, yet it is written with a spelling that represents */dàuʔ/.

- (13) jə m̄ p̄. khòchônṇá.
 *jə *m̄ *p̄ *khòʔchônṇá
 1SG IRR to.read to.listen

‘I will read. Listen.’

- (14) láí khánthài ké thán phlòun mwē kà khà ñà.
 *láí? *khánthài? *ké *thán *phlòun *mwē *kà? *khà? *ña?
 script beginning to.become up Pwo.Karen COP Ka Kha Nga
 ‘The first letters of the Pwo Karen script are read as Ka, Kha, and Nga.’

[C]×2

- (15) ləjáiləmō phû thàurəjá yō_N ʔə láí làn mā.
 *ləjáiləmə *phû *thàurəjá? *yō_N *ʔə *láí? *làn mā
 soon G.F. Thuang.Hlya to.hear 3SG script to.disappear
 həphlòun chī ʔəyān phōbàu lê. méthī bá lánjwà.
 *həphlòun *chī *ʔəyān *phōbàu? *lê *méʔthī *bá *lánjwà
 Pwo.Karen race for how.much Q tear must to.flow
 ‘Soon, Pu Thuang Hlya heard that the script was a lost one. How devastating it must have been for the Karen people (to lose their script). Tears flowed.’

- (16) éóchàu dē bànnàuchàu.
 *éóchàu? *dē *bànnàuʔchàu?
 to.chant(?) with white.clothing(?)
 ‘He chanted sutras in a white robe. (?)’

Note 9: I consulted two native speakers of Eastern Pwo Karen regarding the meaning of this sentence; however, they were unable to provide an interpretation. I tentatively interpret this as the meaning given above.

- (17) ʔəbòunchən thōn ʔəθàklà,
 *ʔəbòunchən *thōn *ʔəθàʔklà
 during at middle
 phī máikàli phûthī thàothô ʔó nī yà.
 *phī *máiʔkàli *phûthī *thàuʔthô *ʔó *nī *yà
 grandmother Mike.Kali grandfather Thuang.Tawt to.be two NCh
 ‘At that time, there were two people named Pi Mike Kali and Pu Ti Thuang Tawt.’

- (18) ʔəθiwê mwē thəm̄nwà.
 *ʔəθiwê *mwē *thəm̄nwà
 3PL COP married.couple
- phón khôn tē θilà θàucà.
 *phón *khôn *tē *θilà? *θauʔcjà?
 to.catch be.firm thoroughly precept faith
- ‘They were a married couple. And they strictly adhered to their precepts and loyalty.’

- (19) ʔəθiwê mwē thəm̄nwà.
 *ʔəθiwê *mwē *thəm̄nwà
 3PL COP married.couple
- phón khôn tē θilà θàucà. (= 18)
 *phón *khôn *tē *θilà? *θauʔcjà?
 to.catch be.firm thoroughly precept faith
- ‘They were a married couple. And they strictly adhered to their precepts and loyalty.’

- (20) ʔə wīñān(wīñān) phàn mjā, dá láokhlà.
 *ʔə *wīñān(wīñān) *phàn *mjā *dá *láuʔkhlà
 3SG wisdom be.bright so.much to.see all
- ‘Her (Pi Mike Kali) wisdom was exceptional, and she could see through anything.’

- (21) lái mûlà phló thán l̄ ʔə θà.
 *lái? *mûlà *phló *thán *l̄ *ʔə *θà?
 script basics to.appear up LOC 3SG heart
- ‘Texts in the Leke script came to her mind.’

- (22) ʔə mâ l̄ ʔə wà k̄i k̄e(kə)mūnà.
 *ʔə *mâ *l̄ *ʔə *wà *k̄e *k̄emūnà
 3SG wife to.tell 3SG husband to.write night
- ‘The wife (Pi Mike Kali) had her husband (Pu Ti Thaug Tawt) write them down through the night.’

- (23) eán dāwê, lān bá pə tà.
 *eán *dāwê *lān *bá *pə *tà
 be.poor OPT to.descend to.hit 1PL duty
 ‘Let us grow weary. This is our duty.’

- (24) chichá yān, bē lə(lə) lānbái, tōunpāin lān θà.
 *chichá? *yān *bē *lə(lə) *lānbái? *tōunpāin *lān *θà?
 race for so.as NEG be.buried to.swear down MID
 ‘For the sake of their people, they vowed (to strive) so that the Karen people would not decline.’

Note 10: The word /bē/ ‘so as to, so that’ (also pronounced /bê/) was probably pronounced */bê/ in 19c EPK, as indicated by its spelling in the Christian Pwo Karen script. The Leke spelling follows the pronunciation of CEPK and appears to have been revised in accordance with this phonological change.

[D]

- (25) lèlēgē, máikàli máikàli phûthī θàothô.
 *lèlēyē *mái?kàli *mái?kàli *phûthī *θàu?thô
 oh! Mike.Kali Mike.Kali grandfather Thaung.Tawt
 ‘Oh, Pi Mike Kali and Pu Ti Thaung Tawt!’

- (26) máikàli phûthī θàothô dè láilē ?əwê thàu phló.
 *mái?kàli *phûthī *θàu?thô *dē *lái?lē *?əwê *thàuw? *phló
 Mike.Kali grandfather Thaung.Tawt with literature 3PL to.draw to.appear
 ‘Pi Mike Kali and Pu Ti Thaung Tawt brought the sacred texts into the world.’

Note 11: The 19c EPK pronunciation of /thàu/ ‘to draw’ was */thàuw?/. Therefore, the correct spelling is <၀၃>.

Note 12: In canonical word order, the prepositional phrase /dè láilē/ typically follows /thàu phló/. In this instance, a non-canonical word order appears to have been employed for rhetorical effect.

- (27) dè láilē ?əwê thàu phló.
 *dē *lái?lē *?əwê *thàuw? *phló
 with literature 3SG to.draw to.appear
 ‘They brought the sacred texts into the world.’

(28) chichá	γāN	ʔə	θwí	wòwò.
*chichá?	*γāN	*ʔə	*θwí	*γòγò
race	for	3PL	blood	redly

‘For their people, their blood was red.’

Note 13: /wòwò/ ‘redly’ is a reduplication of /wò/ ‘be red’. This word was probably pronounced */γò/ in 19c EPK; however, it is pronounced /γò/ or /wò/ in CEPK. The spelling of the Leke script is based on the latter pronunciation.

(29) chichá	γāN	ʔə	θwí	wòwò.	(= 28)
*chichá?	*γāN	*ʔə	*θwí	*γòγò	
race	for	3PL	blood	redly	

‘For their people, their blood was red.’

(30) lèlékē,	láichânwé	láichânwé	pə	bá	thàu	phló.
*lèlékē	*láíʔchânwé?	*láíʔchânwé?	*pə	*bá	*thàw?	*phló
oh!	Leit.Hsan.Wait	Leit.Hsan.Wait	1PL	must	to.draw	to.appear

‘Oh, we must bring Leit Hsan Wait into the world.’

(31) láichânwé	pə	bá	thàu	phló.
*láíʔchânwé?	*pə	*bá	*thàw?	*phló
Leit.Hsan.Wait	1PL	must	to.draw	to.appear

‘We must bring Leit Hsan Wait into the world.’

(32) phā	cài	θóuN	làn	náin	wè	phō.
*phā	*cjài?	*θóuN	*làn	*náin	*wè	*phō
father	Buddha	to.plant	down	recorded	in.advance	EXCLM

‘Metteyya had planted it for us.’

(33) phā	cài	θóuN	làn	náin	wè	phō.	(= 32)
*phā	*cjài?	*θóuN	*làn	*náin	*wè	*phō	
father	Buddha	to.plant	down	recorded	in.advance	EXCLM	

‘Metteyya had planted it for us.’

(34) mō	pəN	kòkəjàN	nāN	blàn	dò.
*mō	*pəN	*kòʔkràn	*nāN	*blàn	*dòʔ
IRR	to.govern	globe	some	time	after

‘(Metteyya) will again reign over the world.’

Note 14: The word /pàN/ is written as <ᳵ᳚ᳵ᳚᳚>, representing /pà/. This is probably an error for <ᳵ᳚ᳵ᳚᳚᳚>.

Note 15: The pronunciation of /kòkəjàN/ in 19c EPK was probably */kòʔkràN/. The spelling in the Leke script is based on this pronunciation. However, in CEPK, this word is generally pronounced /kòkəjàN/. In this word, the consonant cluster */kr-/ in 19c EPK developed into /kəj-/ in CEPK.

- (35) mā pàN kòkəjàN nāN blāN dō. (= 34)
 *mā *pàN *kòʔkràN *nāN *blāN *dōʔ
 IRR to.govern globe some time after
 ‘(Metteyya) will again reign over the world.’

- (36) lèlé᳚ē, xwè bē nō.
 *lèlé᳚ē *xwè *bē *nō
 oh! as.much.as like that
 ‘That’s enough for now.’

- (37) xwè bē nō pətháu nāN thō.
 *xwè *bē *nō *pətháuʔ *nāN *thō
 as.much.as like that to.stop some while
 ‘I’ll stop here for now.’

- (38) xwè bē nō pətháu nāN thō. (= 37)
 *xwè *bē *nō *pətháuʔ *nāN *thō
 as.much.as like that to.stop some while
 ‘I’ll stop here for now.’

- (39) lō pjá lā láí múlā nō,
 *lō *pjáʔ *lā *láíʔ *múlā *nō
 to.tell PJA OPT script basics TOP
 lō pjá lā láí múlā nō,
 *lō *pjáʔ *lā *láíʔ *múlā *nō
 to.tell PJA OPT script basics TOP
 mwē bá jàʊ. máló eòN lō.
 *mwē *bá *jàʊʔ *máló *eòN *lō
 COP enough PFV to.study together AST
 mwē bá jàʊ. máló eòN lō.
 *mwē *bá *jàʊʔ *máló *eòN *lō
 COP enough PFV to.study together AST

‘So much for talking about the Leke script. Let’s learn together.’

9. Conclusion

The Leke script is a writing system used by followers of the Leke religion to represent Eastern Pwo Karen. It dates back to the mid-19th century. Consequently, it strongly reflects the phonology of 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen. This study examines the relationship between the phonology of Eastern Pwo Karen and the Leke script. The results reveal that the Leke script is capable of accurately representing the phonology of 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen.

Concerning its relationship to other scripts, the Leke script was evidently influenced by the Mon-Burmese script. However, it is impossible to determine whether the influence of the Mon script or the Burmese script was greater. Regarding its relationship with Buddhist and Christian Pwo Karen scripts, both of which already existed when the Leke script was created, no elements of the Leke script were likely influenced by these writing systems. The Leke script is unusual in that many of its basic letters are based on the numerals of the Mon-Burmese script. Nevertheless, its abugida system and strong Mon-Burmese influence mean that it can be considered a version of the Indic script.

Abbreviations

APP.JUD = applicative marker denoting judgment; AST = particle indicating assertion; BA = verb particle /bá/ indicating opportunity, feasibility, inadvertence, or inevitability; CEPK = contemporary Eastern Pwo Karen; COP = copular verb; EMP = emphasis; EPK = Eastern Pwo Karen; EXCLM = exclamative; FUT = future; G.F. = grandfather; IMPS = impersonal subject; INEV = inevitability; IRR = irrealis; LOC = particle indicating location, goal, or source; MID = middle marker; NCf = numeral classifier for a flat thing; NCh = numeral classifier for a human; NCl = numeral classifier for a long thing; NEG = negativity; OPT = optative; PFV = perfective; PJA = verb particle /pjà/ (also pronounced /pjá/) indicating presentation; PL = plural; Q = question; REL = relative marker; SG = singular; TOP = topic; 1 = first person; 2 = second person; 3 = third person; 19c EPK = 19th-century Eastern Pwo Karen.

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