

Kayan dialects in light of Proto-Karen

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52th ICSTLL, University of Sydney, 2019

For years linguists have reconstructed Karen from several (easily accessed) languages, leading to a tree-like heritage.

This paper approaches the analysis from a different perspective – comparing multiple dialects from a cluster. This is the first of such broad-reaching research in the Karen branch comparing multiple doculects rather than one or two easily accessed varieties.

Karen languages

The Karen languages are a distinct branch of [Your favourite name] and a clearly defined cluster of languages with no members of uncertain status.

Speakers of Karen languages are primarily located along the eastern border of Burma from southern Shan State southward to the southernmost tip of Burma. Over the last 2-3 centuries there has been migration into Thailand along the western border with Burma and then further into northern Thailand.

Proto-Karen (PK) Reconstructions

- Haudricourt (1946, 1953, 1975) [2 lgs/2 clusters, 506 etyma]
- Jones (1961) [4 lgs/3 clusters, 197 etyma]
- Burling (1969) [based on Jones, 735 etyma]
- Mazaudon (1985) [3 lgs/3 clusters, based on Haudricourt]
- Peiros (1989) [based on Jones, ~600 etyma]
- Solnit (1989, 1999, 2013)
- Theraphan (2014, 2019) [7 lgs/6 clusters, data collected in Thailand, 341 etyma]
- Manson (2003-2019) [15-20 lgs/12 clusters, ~900 etyma]

There is a broad consensus with the modern authors (Solnit, Theraphan & myself), except

- Manner of stops [voiceless &/or implosives/preglottalized]
- Clusters, especially velar clusters
- Luce's Tone Pattern V
[Benedict reconstructs PK *-s, but no evidence of [-s] in Karen dialects. Theraphan reconstructs PK *-t, but no PK voiced initials have been found in Luce's V]
- 9-10 vowel inventory, Theraphan has, in addition, final *-j/-w (14 vowels)

From our current state of knowledge, we can see reasonably distinct clusters of Karen languages, but how they relate at higher levels depends on which feature of the languages a researcher is focusing on.

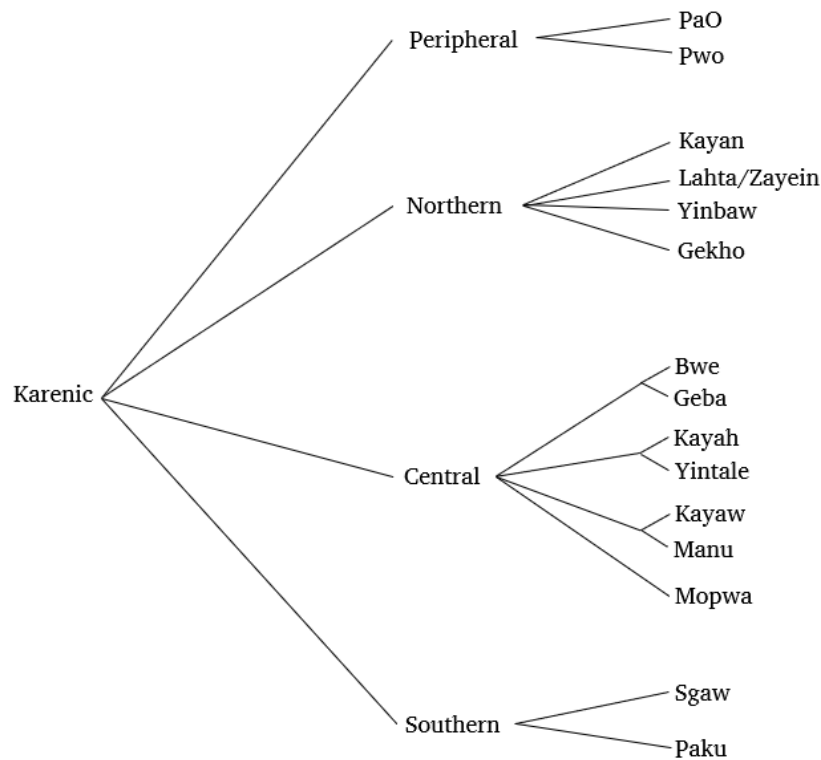


Figure 1: Revised Karen classification

Motivation of reconstructing Proto-Kayan (PKyn)

- The reconstructions of Proto-Karen are just “Common Karen” – shared lexical retentions with phonological variation
- Strengthening the historical foundation of Proto-Karen (previous PK reconstructions have only selected at most one or two dialects)
- Provide phonological and lexical criteria for the internal (& external) classification of the Kayan languages and dialects
- A historical-comparative study of Kayan may help guide the process of language documentation and revitalisation, which is currently taking place in the Kayan community
- My initial Karen reconstruction shared the same methodology of other researchers
 - Different researchers collected different words for the same meanings
 - There are too many exceptions within dialects of different languages
 - For example, in the Kayan cluster
 - PK *a → PKyn *a → [ɔ] in Tegekho, Latu (similar to Kayaw)
 - PK *a_N → PKyn *a_N → [ɛ] in Lobakho (similar to Bwe/Geba/Kayah) → [ɔ] in Lai (similar to Sgaw)
 - If a single dialect is recorded, it may be a non-prototypical representative of the language
 - So I reassessed my reconstruction using a cluster analysis and informed knowledge

Background

Shintani's (2012) data is the most encompassing of all the Karen languages and dialects collected by a single researcher (Shintani's doculects names have very little connection to previous research). Based on his data (98 words), I created a NeighborNet diagram for the relationships within the Karen languages.

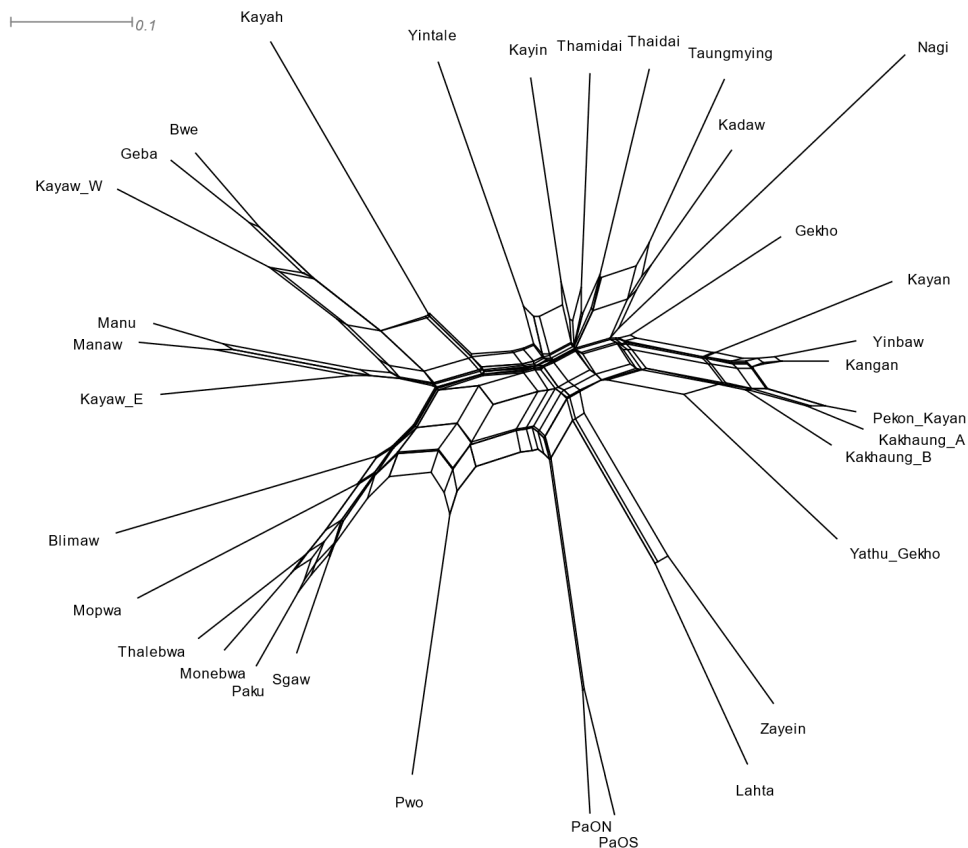


Figure 2: Quantitative analysis of Shintani (2012) [98 lexical items]

Kayan Cluster

I am now focusing on the Kayan Cluster (the right-hand side of Figure 2)

- 5 languages are recorded in the Ethnologue Kayan [pdu], Yinbaw [kvu], Gekho [ghk], Lahta [kvt], Zayein [kxk]
 - Shared cultural identity (4 ethnic groups)
 - Around 350 villages, 100,000 speakers
 - Diverse phonologies
 - Variation in tone pitch range
 - Variation in syllable rhymes
 - Variation in articulation/intonation (staccato, flowing stream)
 - Variation in pronunciation of clusters (coarticulation, sequential, epithentic vowel)
 - Inter/intra speaker variation
- E.g. knee PKyn *k^hanlɛ̃n
- | | | |
|----------------------------|----------------|-------------------------------------|
| <i>k^hanlen</i> | <i>kale(n)</i> | <i>kele(n)</i> [vowel assimilation] |
| <i>k^hale(n)</i> | <i>kale(n)</i> | <i>k^ʰle(n)</i> |

- I collected over 80 doculects from the “Kayan Cluster”
 - 11 Kayan dialects with tones marked
 - 21 Kayan dialects no tones marked, or short wordlists
 - 5 Gekho dialects
 - 9 Lahta/Zayein dialects
 - 4 Yinbaw dialects
 - 7 uncertain affiliation [Shintani]
 - 12 historical
 - 15 ignored (small lists, inconsistent/obscure transcription)
- Reconstructed etyma stands at over 500 morphemes

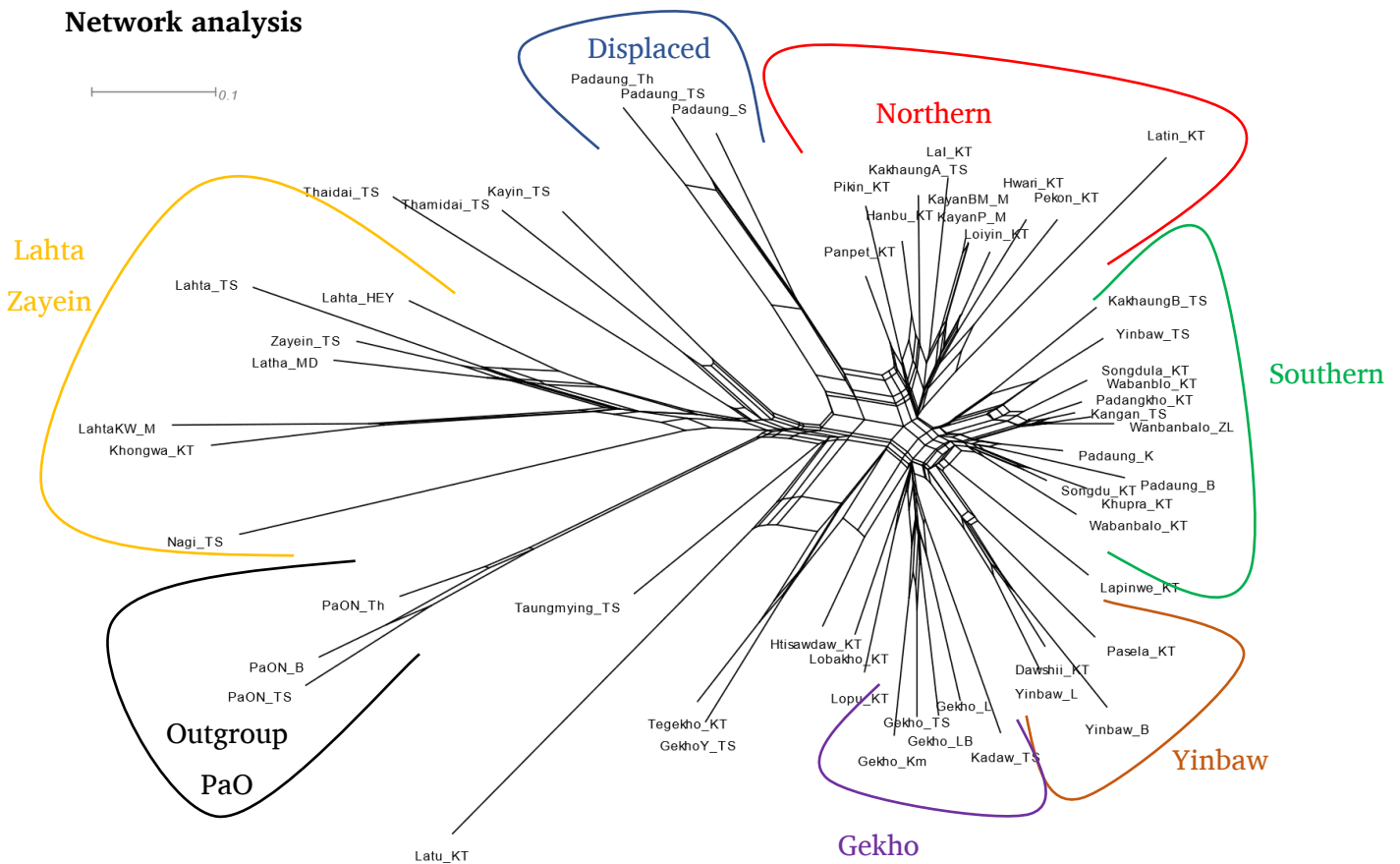
Findings

Proto-Kayan phonemes

Similar to Proto-Karen

*p ^h	*t ^h	*c ^h	*k ^h		*i	*ĩ	*u	*u
*p	*t	*c	*k	ʔ	*e	*ə		*o
*b	*d	[*ɟ]	*g		*ɛ	*a		*ɔ
*m̥	*n̥		*ŋ̥			*ai		*au
*m	*n		*ŋ					
	*s			*h				
*w	*l	*r	*j					
*ʌ	*l̥	*r̥	*j̥					

Network analysis



With respect to Proto-Karen

Initials

Proto-Karen	Proto-Kayan	Comments
*b-	*p-	similarly *d, *j, *g
*p-	*b-	similarly *t, *c, *k
*p ^h -	*p ^h -	similarly *t ^h , *c ^h , *k ^h [retention]
*s-	*s-	retention (phonetic variation [s/ʈθ/θ])
*ŋ-	*n-	merged with voiced, similarly *m̥-, *ŋ̥-
*l̥-	*l-	merged with voiced l-
*ɲ̥/*ɲ	*j-	merged with PK *j (and in some dialects fricativised)
*r̥-	*r-	merged with voiced r-. One phonetician marked consistently [r̥], suggesting that Proto-Kayan has retained the voicing distinction

Clusters

Proto-Karen	Proto-Kayan	Comments
*p ^{hl}	*p ^{hl}	*pl Lahta/Zayein dialects (#54 seed, #409 spherical, #346 hit, beat)
*pr	*pr	*pl Lahta/Zayein dialects (#391 few, #195 human, #370 buy, #526 peacock, #166 intestines, #274 vomit)
*k ^{hl}	*k ^{hl}	*k Lahta/Zayein dialects (poorly attested) (#500 loose, #62 sugarcane, #68 banana (Tai loan), #133 land snail, #218 road)
*kr	*kr	*kw Lahta/Zayein dialects (poorly attested) (#288 shout, #477 earthworm, #310 scratch)

Rhymes

Proto-Karen	Proto-Kayan	Comments
*a	*a	Retention
*ɛ	*ɛ/*ai	Retention/split
*ɔ	*ɔ/*au	Retention/split
*-m *-n *-ŋ	*-N	merged nasal finals

Phonological processes

Cog #	Meaning	Proto-Karen	Proto-Kayan	Comments
115	egg	*ti ^B	*ci ^B	
26	water	t ^h i ^A	*t ^h i ^A	some dialects retain the stop initial
718	cucumber	*di ^A	*ci ^A	

cf:

385	ten	*c ^h i ^A	*c ^h i ^A	
192	urine	*c ^h i ^B	*c ^h i ^B	

Lexical change

Cog #	Meaning	Proto-Karen	Proto-Kayan	Comments
566	grandchild	*li ^A	*gu ^A	(putative PK *gu ^A)
255/256	gong	*moŋ ^A	*paŋ ^A	(putative PK *baŋ ^A)
479 478	I I	*ŋa ^A	*ŋa ^A *k ^h i ^A	Latha (retention) Gekho, Kayan, Yinbaw (innovation) cf. Yintale [kwɛ], PaO [k ^h wi]

Internally

Proto-Kayan	Reflex	Dialects	Comments
*a/*aʔ *a	[ɔ] [ɔ]	Tegekho Latu	PK *aʔ/*aɴ → *ɔ Kayaw cluster
*ɛɴ	[ɛɪɴ] [ʊ(ɴ)] əɪ/ɪ/əʊ [jəɴ/jɪɴ]	Latu, Pikin, Latin, Loiyin Gekho Southern Kayan Northern Kayan	retention vowel centralisation & raising vowel centralisation & raising nasal deletion vowel splitting
*iɴ *jaɴ		Northern Kayan	

Tones

Proto-Kayan

A	B	B'	D
5	1	3	ʔ3
5	1	3	ʔ3
1̣	3̣	ʔ5̣	

A	B	B'	D
5	1	3	ʔ3
5	1	3	ʔ3
1̣	3̣	ʔ5̣	

Sth&Nth Kayan

A	B	B'	D
5	4	5	2
5	4	5	2
1̣	3̣	5̣	

Proto-Lahta

A	B	B'	D
5	1	5	ʔ4
5	1	5	ʔ4
1̣	3̣	3̣/5̣	

Proto-Yinbaw

A	B	B'	D
5	1	5	5
5	1	5	5
1	3	3	

Proto-Gekho

Note, Kato (2018) reconstructs Proto-Karen tones as *A high-level, *B low-level, and *B' mid-level.

Tones

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12
	*Asp	*Vl	*Vd	*Asp	*Vl	*Vd	*Asp	*Vl	*Asp	*Vl	*Vd
Kayan, P (M)	5	5	ᵀ1	53	53	ᵀ3	1	1	1	1	ᵀ5
Padaung (B)	4	4	ᵀ1	1	1	ᵀ3	3	4	2/4	2	ᵀ3
Padaung (K)	42	42	ᵀ2/ᵀ1	?1	?1	ᵀ3	?5	?3	?3	(?)3	ᵀ?42
Padaung (TS)	55~53	55~53	33~31	33~31	33~31	34	55~53	55~53	?55	?55	34
Padaung (Th)	53	53	33	11	11	11	33/53	11/53	?45	?45	?21
Wanbanbalo (ZL)	5	5	1	?1	?1	3	?3	?3	?5~?3	?5~?3	3
Wabanbalo (KT)	5	5	ᵀ1	1	1	ᵀ3	?42	?42	?42	?42	ᵀ3
Pekon (KT)	5	5	ᵀ2	?42	?42	ᵀ3	1	1	1	1	ᵀ2
Padangkho (KT)	5	5	ᵀ1	1	1	ᵀ3	?42	?42	?42	?42	ᵀ3
Padaung (S)	5	5	1	31	31	(1)	3(1)	31	5	5/1	?31
Yinbaw (B)	5	5	ᵀ1	1	1	ᵀ3	5	5	5	5	ᵀ5
Yinbaw (TS)	55~53	55~53	ᵀ1~ᵀ21	11~21	11~21	ᵀ53	55	55	?53	?53	ᵀ55~ᵀ53
Kadaw (TS)	33~31	33~31	ᵀ31	55~?53	55~?53	ᵀ24	?55	?55	?45	?45	ᵀ?24
Kakhaung, A (TS)	53	53	ᵀ31	55~(?)53	55~(?)53	31	31	31	?31	?31	?53
Kakhaung, B (TS)	53	53	31(h)	(?)31	(?)31	31(h)	(?)31	(?)31	?33	?31	33(h)
Gekho (TS)	55~53	55~53	11	11	11	33~31	55~53	55~53	?53	?53	?33
Gekho, Y (TS)	55~53	55~53	31	31	31	33~34	55~53	55~53	55~53	55~53	34
Lahta (TS)	53	53	53	45	45	33~23	53	53	33	33	53
Zayein (TS)	55	55	ᵀ33	42	42	ᵀ42	55	55	42	42	33
Nagi (TS)	31(h)	31(h)	53(h)	(?)31	(?)31	?53	31(h)	31(h)	?45	?45	(?31)
Taungmying (TS)	21	21	53~42	53~42	53~42	(?)55	55	55	?55	?55	?33
Thaidai (TS)	42~31	42~31	45	45	45	33	33	33	(?)44	(?)44	33
Thamidai (TS)	55	55	31	31	31	55	31	31	?53	?53	?31
Kayin (TS)	44	44	42	(?)42	(?)42	ᵀ31	44	44	44	44	33
Kangan (TS)	55	55	ᵀ31	(?)31	(?)31	ᵀ24	(?)31	(?)31	?45	?45	ᵀ?24

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Karen Data: <https://1drv.ms/x/s!AsCW2L0sLxumgocqtLuOZNxZL04LGw>

Karen Doculects: <https://1drv.ms/x/s!AsCW2L0sLxumgod3PEg0Xlpdeg3FTw>