



**THE ACQUISITION, USE, AND ATTITUDE OF THE BURMESE
LANGUAGE ACCORDING TO INDIVIDUALS FROM THE CHIN
HILLS OF MYANMAR**

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction.....	1
1.1 The Country of Myanmar.....	1
1.1.1 Geographic and Political Features.....	1
1.1.2 Languages of Myanmar.....	1
1.1.3 Language Use and Education in Myanmar.....	1
1.2 The People of The Chin Hills.....	1
1.2.1 Location of The Chin Hills.....	1
1.2.2 Languages of The Chin Hills.....	1
1.2.3 Clans and Family Customs.....	1
1.2.4 Discussion of “Zo” Unity.....	1
1.3 The Languages of The Participants of This Study.....	1
1.3.1 Language Profiles.....	1
1.3.2 Evaluation of Language Through EIGDS.....	1
2 Research Conducted.....	2
2.1 Purpose of Research.....	2
2.2 Method and Procedure.....	2
2.2.1 Assessing Fluency in Burmese.....	3
2.2.2 Assessing Language Attitude.....	5
2.2.3 Language Attitudes For Burmese.....	5
2.3 Complications and Adjustments.....	5
2.4 Results and Trends.....	5

ABBREVIATIONS

cfm – Falam Chin

cnh – Hakha Chin/ Laiholh

ctd – Tedim Chin

csy – Siyin (Sizang) Chin

czt – Zotung Chin

KC – Kuki-Chin

L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

MLE – Mother Language Education

mya – Burmese (Language)

SB – Spoken Burmese

1 Introduction

1.1 The Country of Myanmar

1.1.1 Geographic and Political Features

1.1.2 Languages of Myanmar

1.1.3 Language Use and Education in Myanmar

1.2 The People of The Chin Hills

1.2.1 Location of The Chin Hills

1.2.2 Languages of The Chin Hills

1.2.3 Clans and Family Customs

1.2.4 Discussion of “Zo” Unity

1.3 The Languages of The Participants of This Study

1.3.1 Language Profiles

1.3.2 Evaluation of Language Through EIGDS

2 Research Conducted

In August 2014, I traveled to Indianapolis, Indiana to interview seven random and anonymous individuals, whose mother tongues belong to the Kuki-Chin language family, regarding language use and attitude toward the Burmese language, in comparison to their native languages.

My inspiration for carrying out this investigation came from two unpublished manuscripts that I had written for Professor Shannon T. Bischoff, Assistant Professor of Linguistics at Indiana University – Purdue University Fort Wayne. The first of which, entitled *Diglossia in Fort Wayne's Burmese Community*, was a sociolinguistic paper containing an interview of two participants; one a native Burmese speaker, the other a native Kayan (Padaung) speaker; which addressed several sociolinguistic inquiries I had regarding the views of the Burmese people in Fort Wayne, regarding e.g. their views of the Burmese language as compared to English and their position on maintaining the use of the language in their children. The second manuscript was a paper very similar to this one, where I briefly investigated the sociolinguistic situation of the peoples of the Chin Hills of Burma (Myanmar) and interviewed one individual on this matter. This paper is an expansion on that previous research, containing a slightly-different set of interview questions, and a more in-depth methodology of analysis.

2.1 Purpose of Research

Given the socio-political situation of Burma (Myanmar), which was described in the Introduction, I intended to find out the attitudes of several speakers of various languages within the Kuki-Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family, who reside in the United States of America, toward the Burmese language in comparison to their own. I also wanted to find out what their views of the Burmese people (formerly referred to as *Burman*) were, and if any of these views had changed since their arrival in the United States.

2.2 Method and Procedure

In cooperation with the Chin Community Center of Indianapolis, a 501(c)3 dedicated to helping the various peoples of the Chin Hills residing in Indianapolis whom I had first contacted personally during a previous visit to Indianapolis and remained in contact via e-mail and phone conversations, I was provided seven participants from the local community of speakers of Kuki-Chin languages who were selected at random, and I not provided with any details on how the individuals were contacted and informed about my project. The recommended constraints that I gave to the manager of the Chin Community Center of Indianapolis when selecting participants, was that they must have lived in Burma (Myanmar) for a few years before coming to the United States, and because I am not yet fluent

in any Kuki-Chin language, they must know how to speak Burmese, so that I may communicate with them effectively during the interview.

Using my previous manuscripts as a model, I wrote a set of interview questions in the Burmese language to orally ask to each participant (see [Appendix] for an English translation of each question). I then had an individual of Kuki-Chin descent, who speaks and writes Burmese fluently, check each of my questions for possible cultural constraints.

Using a digital audio recording device, I orally asked the participants each question on my questionnaire in Burmese and recorded their responses. There were several reasons that caused me to choose this method for gathering responses over that of a written questionnaire: The first is that I wanted the responses to be as natural and accurate as possible. Because I was already eliciting information, I did not want any more pressure to be put on the participants. The second reason is because I was uncertain of the level of fluency of these individuals' Spoken Burmese (SB). Being able to speak and reword the questions when necessary would allow me to obtain a response for each question, whereas as a written form might have been problematic if an individual was illiterate in the Burmese script¹ or was unable to understand what was written in its original wording.

After I collected the data, I listened to all of the interviews and prepared codes for the questions and responses which were either in the following formats: yes/no (e.g. "Do you speak Burmese?"), demographic information (e.g. "What is your ethnicity?"), and basic language and culture attitude information (e.g. "Were you punished for speaking your L1 at school?") (see [Appendix] for the tokens and their corresponding codes).

2.2.1 Assessing Fluency in Burmese

I have created a scale from the numbers zero (0) to five (5) to assess each participant's fluency in spoken Burmese. The scale is defined as follows in [the following table](#):

Table 1: Scale For Assessing Fluency in Burmese

0 – Not Proficient	The participant was not able to either understand the questions asked in Burmese or answer the questions in Burmese. Elaborations to responses were not given.
1 – Slightly Proficient	The participant was able to give very minimal answers to questions asked or would often give responses that were unrelated to the question, and often needed clarification or re-wording of the question. Elaborations to responses were minimally given and grammatical and/or lexical errors were frequent.

¹All Kuki Chin languages with the exception of Asho Chin ([reference]) use a roman script.

2 – Moderately-Comprehensible Fluency	The participant did not need clarification on many of the questions, but may have given responses that were unrelated to the question with or without an elaboration to each response and grammatical and/or lexical errors were present.
3 – Mostly-Comprehensible Fluency	While there may have still been miscommunication between the interviewer and the participant, the majority of the participant’s responses were mostly-clear and relevant to the question asked, with elaborations when elicited and grammatical and/or lexical errors were minimal.
4 – Fully-Comprehensible Fluency	The participant’s responses were clear and relevant to the question asked, with elaborations when elicited. There may have been mistakes in grammar, but those mistakes were not detrimental to the content of the participant’s response.
5 – Native-Like Fluency	The participant’s responses were clear and relevant to the question asked, with elaborations when elicited. There were no mistakes in grammar.

The participants were graded on this scale according to both the discourse (lexical and grammatical features) and the responses given to the questions (statistical features). While this scale may not accurately account for the fluency of the participants, it allows the data which was presented to have both a statistical value and be connected with the other sections of the assessment which will be described in [§2.2.2](#).

Table 2: The Participants and Their Fluency According to The Scale²

Participant Number	1	2	4	5	6	7	8
Scale of Fluency	0	1-2	3-4	1-2	2-3	3-4	4

These results show that the majority of speakers were at least able to communicate their ideas and respond to the questions given with little assistance from the interviewer or their peers. Given that the nature of the interview is not something that one would expect each person in a random selection to think about daily, it is at least good to see that the speakers were able to convey their meanings well.

²Upon the request of Participant #3, they were not included in this analysis.

2.2.2 Assessing Language Attitude

In order to assess the language attitudes of the speakers, my interview contained eleven questions which had to do with language attitude. Instead of listing them here, the reader is advised to look at Appendix [?] and to refer to questions 3, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 18. There were four (4) questions which dealt specifically with the participants' L1s³, five (5) questions which dealt with Burmese, and two (2) questions which dealt with both languages.

2.2.3 Language Attitudes For Burmese

To measure the general attitude of each speaker with regard to the Burmese language, the responses given in the survey with a yes or no nature will be analyzed to see if the response was positive (+) or negative (-), and the open-ended responses pertaining to the domains in which Burmese is used will be answered with a number, depending on the number of domains listed by each participant.

Table 3: The

	Question #	8	9	12a	14	15	16a	16b	Positivity/ Participant
Participant #	1	+	+				+		3
	2	+	+				+		3
	4	+				+	+		3
	5	+	+			+	+		4
	6	+					+		2
	7	+	+				+		3
	8	+	+				+		3

2.3 Complications and Adjustments

2.4 Results and Trends

³None of the participants spoke Burmese as an L1.