Language and Literacy in Refugee Families

Chatwara Suwannamai Duran

language and globalization
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Chatwara Suwannamai Duran

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Chatwara Suwannamai Duran
University of Houston
Houston, Texas, USA

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This book is dedicated to my grandmother, Ngo Suwannamai, whose loving life, mastery of two languages, and immeasurable accumulated literacies, has been my inspiration.

Preface

In the summer of 2003, I left Thailand to pursue a Master's degree in San Antonio, Texas. People often asked why San Antonio? My answer was that one of the universities there had a strong program in teaching English as a second language and it was the program I wanted to enroll on. But, beyond the academic and professional endeavors, I had a personal reason. My great aunt and her US-American husband, who visited my family in Thailand regularly, lived in San Antonio. Due to this 'connection,' my parents could rest assured that I would be well-guided and supported during the transition and whenever I needed help.

The experiences of my adjustment during the first years in the USA were ingrained in me. Some of those included learning to drive on a different side of the road (which is different from that of Thailand), purchasing and ordering food from a drive-thru system, using a nonmetric measurement standard, applying for a credit card and building credit scores, reading food and drug labels, choosing one among countless cereal types on the shelf at the grocery store, writing a personal check, renting and buying a car, and making a doctor's appointment. The list goes on. Not to mention that I had to use English, my second language, in a wide range of settings. I learned how to get things done with guidance from my great aunt and her family in San Antonio, friends, staff and advisors at the university, instructional videos on the internet, and by doing all of these tasks in a real-life setting.

These experiences were intensely recalled in 2009 when I was volunteering helping newly arrived refugees originally from Burma, resettling in Phoenix, Arizona. At the time, I was pursuing a PhD in Curriculum and Instruction with a concentration in Language and Literacy at Arizona State University. I believed that my hard-earned experiences of adjustment in the USA combined with my academic training made me an effective mentor for the newcomers. As the refugees had been sequestered for 15–20 years in refugee camps they were in dire need of help with urban life, English language and literacy, including information about US culture, lifestyle, and society. Like a ball of fire, I was excited to assist the newly arrived refugees with everything they needed ranging from teaching them English, taking them to a medical clinic to being their tutor and friend.

Socializing with the refugees and accompanying them on multiple errands, I learned about the many adaptive strategies they used to overcome the challenges they faced. For example, I was told of when faced with financial struggles the refugees accompanied by their friends, traveled to the US–Mexico border to buy affordable foods and supplies. Often, during a home visit, they offered me food that was cooked with rare ingredients such as pickled fish, chili paste, and dried herbs that I never knew I could find in Arizona. But, they told me that they purchased these items at some family-owned specialty stores in Phoenix. I was surprised how resourceful they were. They never stopped astounding me. One day, I came to one of the refugee families' apartment and found baskets full of fresh fish in the kitchen and in the hallway. They told me that they had just come back from fishing. I was impressed with the large amount of fish they had. I even received some fresh fish as a gift to take home that day. A few weeks after their fishing skills were revealed to me, they offered me food as usual but the taste, although delicious, was unfamiliar to me. I was curious about what kind of meat I was eating, so I asked them. They replied that they went hunting and they got 'a cat.' Before I could ask for more information, they added it's 'a big cat in the mountains' (I learned later that they meant a mountain lion or a cougar that the state of Arizona allows to be hunted). I was astonished when they showed me the animal's head pulled from their refrigerator. But, above all, I felt very thankful to learn about their way of life and grateful that

they always offered me the best food they had even though they lived with a scarce income.

The newly arrived refugee adults I worked with brought with them multiple survival skills, including fishing and hunting skills that they incorporated well in the new context and within the state's restrictions and regulations. In the process, they learned how to obtain the required fishing and hunting licenses, to purchase fishing equipment and a rifle, and to fish and hunt in permitted areas so that they could bring home fresh fish and meat to provide to their families thereby reducing food costs. They also told me that they preferred game meat from their hunt because it was fresher and more natural than meat available in stores. The refugee children, who were labeled English Language Learners at school, enjoyed using, reading, and writing multiple previously acquired languages for both study and play. Some refugee adults formed a Bible reading group for the children in the apartment complex. They had print materials in multiple languages such as Burmese and Karenni. In addition, both refugee children and their parents benefitted from a variety of available electronic gadgets and communication technology such as laptops and cell phones.

After witnessing the use of plentiful resources in their daily life, households, and neighborhood, I realized that they, too, had 'connections' similar to the support I received at the beginning of my stay in the USA. These refugees, although in need of help from the local resettlement agencies and social welfare system, also heavily relied on multilayered transnational connections from their homeland, new land, and their friends and families in Phoenix and elsewhere. I interrogated the assumptions I once had, including the view that most refugees are without the linguistic and literacy resources required to establish productive lives in the receiving country.

Serving as the refugees' family mentor, ESL instructor, and being their close friend, I had unique opportunities to investigate the newly arrived refugees' daily life. I recognized a huge gap between my university-based worldview in US middle-class life and the recently arrived refugees' everyday living. I was also blinded by my own knowledge and ignorance. I decided to explore and understand more about their language and literacy, which were central to my field of study. I revisited the questions

and concerns that have been located in language education and literacy studies: 'What qualifies as literacy?' and 'Whose language and literacy counts?' As the number of refugees from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds increases, there is no one-size-fit-all protocol to help them get started in their new host communities. However, I hope to provide an inventory of language and literacy practices used by the refugee participants in this book.

This book grew out of my 2-year ethnographic research (2009–2011) on multilingual repertoires and accumulated literacies in three recently arrived refugee families in Phoenix, Arizona. I ate, played, worked, talked, and laughed with them during those years while employing transnationalism or the flows of people, language, goods, and ideas originally from one nation to others in order to understand their lived experiences. I give analytic priority to their literacy practices that have existed and emerged as a result of recent migration as well as the newer linguistic practices that evolved within the structures of the receiving context. Rather than assuming that newcomers must acquire a whole new set of linguistic resources in order to adjust and prosper, I investigate what resources are actually used by recently arrived refugee families to accomplish basic communication, to navigate logistical hurdles, to achieve strategic goals, and to sustain transnational connections. Though my work focuses on documenting linguistic repertoires, literacy practices, experiences, and challenges during the resettlement years among the Karenni families originally from Burma, in the USA, the case study reflects on the global refugee situation and current multifaceted issues in human migration and consequences.

In Chapter 1, I discuss the key issues and questions related to here-and-now issues on language and literacy studies due to an increasing number of refugees. I define 'refugees' and the key terms I use to approach their language and literacy practices. Chapter 2 discusses about the historical context of the Karenni people from Burma and their language and culture. The chapter also explores the cause of their flight from their homeland, their refugee experiences in Thailand, including their current situation in the USA. In Chapter 3, I describe processes involved in selecting the research site, how I have approached the refugee participants, and how relationships between the participants and me were established and maintained. I also introduce three families and their stories, biographical

information, insights, and their circumstances during the data collection period. Chapter 4 predominantly discusses the ideology of English that comes with resettling in an English-dominant society. The chapter shows that the participants' attitudes toward English and English learning led to frustration, struggles, and hopes. The data analysis discusses how adults and children 'talk' about and 'do' things with English differently due to the perceived hierarchy of English and English literacy. Such perceptions are shaped by different ideological factors in their receiving context.

I focus on the participants' transnational multilingual repertoires and how they utilize both previously and recently acquired languages in various ways and settings in Chapter 5. The discussion also includes how a linguistic practice such as translanguaging serves as an alternative in communication and in situations that require English language and literacy. Chapter 6 presents how digital devices that have been widely used among these newcomers enable new learning and understanding in the recently arrived refugee community. In Chapter 7, I discuss transnational and community resources that refugee adults rely on and how they establish their own ethnic-based support network. In Chapter 8, I revisit some key terms and draw a summary on the recently arrived Karenni refugees' transnational trajectories, accumulating, existing, and emerging language and literacy skills as part of their refugee experiences. Finally, I highlight the study's pedagogical and practical implications, especially for educators, service providers, and practitioners and resettlement agencies.

Chatwara Suwannamai Duran
Houston, TX, USA

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Contents

Symbols Used in Transcription

[ ]	The texts in the brackets are the English translation. They also include text that has been added to complete a sentence for better comprehension.
( )	The texts in the parentheses are additional information and clarification.
…	Three periods appearing simultaneously together indicate that there is a notable silence. However, the participant has not yet ceased but rather is pausing to gather their thoughts before continuing.
,	A comma indicates a continuing, or slight rising intonation.
?	A question mark indicates a question.
!	An exclamation mark indicates a loud and abrupt expression.
CAPITALIZED	A capitalized word indicates that the word is stressed.

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Introduction: Refugee, Language, and Literacy

One evening at an apartment complex in urban Phoenix, Arizona, Ha Reh (pseudonym), a recently-resettled male Karenni refugee, asked me to read a note he received from his son's teacher. The note was written in English to inform him that his 7-year-old son, Jay (pseudonym), had been suspended—not allowed to attend school for three days. Before Jay returned to school the parents were requested to meet with the teacher at school.

Ha Reh was worried about Jay and asked me for advice so, I inquired for more details. Jay explained in his native language, Karenni, that earlier that day he was completing an assignment in English class using his pencil. All the sudden, a male classmate took the pencil away from Jay's hand. Jay grabbed it back. But shortly after that, the classmate took Jay's pencil away again. This time, Jay was angry, so he spanked the classmate's buttocks. The classmate got upset and went up to speak with the teacher, who was sitting in another corner. Jay did not understand the words in the conversation between the teacher and the classmate because they spoke in Spanish. After that, the teacher came to Jay and gave the note written in English that his father showed me.

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I received only one side of the story from Jay. However, there is a detectable linguistic hierarchy and injustice among speakers here that may have caused an unfair consequence for Jay. All of the people involved in the situation were in an English-dominant setting—English classroom in a strictly-mandated English-only-policy school in Arizona. Both Jay and the classmate were English language learners speaking languages other than English. However, while the classmate and the teacher could speak Spanish to one another, Jay, a Karenni speaker, did not understand it. Jay did not have an opportunity to tell his side of the story, first because he was not included in the Spanish conversation. Second, a conversation in English was not initiated to include all of the parties involved. Though I do not know if the classmate spoke Spanish because he couldn't explain the situation in English or he wanted to exclude Jay, it was clear that the two English language learners did not receive equal treatment. Spanish, a more commonly spoken language in this city and a shared language between the teacher and the classmate, left Jay disadvantaged.

Jay and his father are a representation of newcomers, yet minoritized,[1] whose spoken language is unfamiliar to their host community. As recently arrived refugees they had a minority status, spoke a 'foreign' language and were, postmigration, experiencing culture shock, adaptation, and an uneasy process of socialization (Demirdjian 2011). Differing from economic (im)migrants, refugees are forced to flee from their homes because of wars, political conflicts, and violence. This currently affects 21.3 million refugees (out of 65.3 million displaced persons worldwide) (UNHCR 2016a). Of these refugees 51 % are under 18 years old, or school-aged children, whose education has been interrupted during conflicts, movements, and resettlement. The refugees have to move from one country after another in search firstly for safety and secondly for a better life. Some refugees were reported to be displaced five times in 5 years (UNHCR 2016b). A bitter circumstance is that refugees are repetitively perceived as unfortunate, needy, and powerless (Feuerherm

[1] I was introduced to the word 'minoritzed' in an Anthropology and Education class with Professor Teresa McCarty. While 'minority' can be used, 'minoritized' emphasizes the status of an individual that is placed in a minority by someone else, usually the dominant or the mainstream.

and Ramanathan 2016; Loring 2016). Often they are unvoiced and disadvantaged. One of the factors is that the countries, which have been encouraged and/or pressured by international audience to accept the refugees into their protection, have limited knowledge about the refugees that they are receiving. Policy makers, service providers, educators, and residents in such countries are not fully equipped for the abruptly shifting demography in their classroom, community, and society. In addition, the refugees' previous experiences are often portrayed as traumatic—something to run away from—and that they left everything behind in their homeland with hopes to start 'a new life' in a receiving country. The public media overwhelmingly stress this narrative so that the refugees gain immediate support, funds, and supplies to start off in their new host community. However, the refugees' linguistic backgrounds, cultural values, resources, strengths, and existing skills are not sufficiently emphasized and the long-term goals are vaguely discussed.

The issues such as socioeconomic hierarchy, educational opportunity, and social injustice coexist with mass migration and refugees experience them directly. Often, newcomers that include refugees and immigrants, who migrate from the less-developed or under-developed zones to more developed zones, are viewed as having limited communicative, educational, and literacy resources. This is because their spoken and written languages, including cultural practices and other semiotic systems that they rely on, are different from, or unrecognizable to, those living in the host community (Blommaert 2010; Piller 2016). These historically constructed ideologies, dominant linguistic norms, and resulting tensions often lead to the newcomers experiencing overwhelming pressure and linguistic, social, and cultural inequalities (Blommaert 2009, 2010; Collins et al. 2009; Hymes 1996). While I have heard positive comments from the local host community that the recently arrived refugees are hard-working and highly motivated to do well, these are accompanied with what the refugee newcomers do not have and cannot do, for example, 'The refugee children don't even know how to hold a pencil,' 'They don't know English,' or even 'They don't know how to use the bathroom.' Acquiring the dominant language and adopting the mainstream sociocultural practices of the host country as quickly as possible are expected from these newcomers.

There are agreements as well as discrepancies between the general understanding about the recently arrived refugees and the refugees' actual problems and resources. For instance, many refugee children are categorized as students with special needs or with limited dominant-language proficiency. While this is true to some extent, educational backgrounds among the children vary. Many of them had previous formal or informal education in another language. Many speak, read, and write two or more languages at home. For example, one of my participants, Daw, a Karenni-Burmese teenager has acquired Karenni as a native language but she spoke, read, and wrote Burmese as Burmese was a lingua franca for interethnic communication and a language of instruction in her previous school before her resettlement in another country. Nevertheless, these languages are not recognized at schools in her host country. Lots of refugee adults that have been raised in an agricultural setting with successive generations of farmers are considered 'unskilled' or 'illiterate' in the industrialized host country. They are relocated by a resettlement agency to an urban setting instead of a region where they can use their hard-earned agricultural knowledge for a living. Those who were teachers and soldiers for many years in their homelands have to start again in the host country at entry-level jobs such as cleaning and dishwashing because they do not speak the dominant language of the host country (see also Strömmer 2015). In addition, their previous skill sets and educational backgrounds are not equivalent to the level of qualification certification required in their new location.

As a result of witnessing language and literacy practices, struggles, and sociopolitical issues in the life of recently arrived refugees, I have three objectives: First, to present the language and literacy challenges that the recently arrived refugees are facing in the new host community. Second, to identify the language and literacy resources that they have *accumulated* along the way of their multiple movements, including what is new or evolved within the structures of the receiving context. Finally, I intend to discuss how refugees use their resources to overcome daily challenges. Aiming to provide a clear understanding of the subject matter I present a case study of three recently arrived Karenni families consisting of three different age groups: young children, teenagers, and adults. They are originally from the Karenni State of Burma or the Republic of the Union of

Myanmar,[2] but had lived in Thailand's refugee camp for more than 15 years prior to coming to Phoenix, Arizona, USA. Refugees from Burma are part of the twenty-first century wave of Southeast Asian refugees to western countries such as Canada and Finland and one of the fastest-growing refugee groups in the USA, where 73,000 refugees from Burma have resettled since 2005 (UNHCR 2014). I explored the Karenni refugees' languages and literacy resources brought into new spaces, orally, textually, and virtually both ideologically as well as in everyday practices in order to present the current multifaceted link between language and mobility.

Documenting the refugees' language and literacy, I repeatedly use and refer to language or linguistic and literacy practices. Here, I define 'practices' as the way in which we, as social actors, think, act out, and see things based on what we have been socioculturally, historically, politically, and even academically and professionally taught and trained. For 'literacy practices,' I employ a more expansive definition of texts and a sociocultural stance of literacy to include multiple symbolic schemes that are not limited to only written scripts (Pahl 2004; Pahl and Rowsell 2010). When we are involved in literacy practices, texts can be represented in multiple forms, and scholars such as Gunther Kress calls these representations 'multimodality,' which involves gestures, graphic, images, sounds, speech, among many other forms of communication. But altogether, these texts are socioculturally, contextually, and historically constructed, produced, and interpreted (New London Group 1996; Street 1984). This view on literacy as a social practice is different from the Great Divide approach (Goody 1977), where the connection between oral and written texts and between social and cognitive knowledge are separated. Approaching 'language practices,' I emphasize how linguistic resources, or what I call 'multilingual repertoires,' are being employed and practiced in a social context. Rather than exploring how the grammatical structure of a language or languages is formulated, I observe the linguistic practices

[2] Burma and the Republic of the Union of Myanmar refer to the same Southeast Asian country. Encouraged by its national government, 'Myanmar' is increasingly used in the global arena. While I use the two terms interchangeably, Burma comes more automatically to me because the participants I work with usually call the country 'Burma.' Discussion about the country, its people, culture, language, and conflict is in Chap. 2.

in action and investigate social actors' language learning trajectories, experiences, feelings, and beliefs, including values they put in a language or around their practices (Barton and Hamilton 2000; Baynham 1995).

Several works with recently arrived refugees focus on refugee students in US institutional settings to investigate the refugees' resources and struggles, for example, pre-K-12 schools (Fredricks 2013; Fredricks and Warriner 2016) and higher education (Hirano 2014; Kanno and Varghese 2010; Shapiro 2016). To fill the gap between home and school literacy (Quadros and Sarroub 2016), I give an analytic priority to the research site outside schools, mainly at home, in the neighborhood, and the recently arrived Karenni refugees' immediate community where the language ideology that privileges one language or one discrete form of practice is challenged and contested. I recruited 'recently arrived' refugees that had just arrived in their host country (resident for a couple of months) and where they intended to be long-term residents. I followed them for 2–3 years. The first years are the critical period of adjustment to the new environment before they become a permanent resident or citizen of their host country. In the following sections, I discuss the definition of refugees that this book uses. After that, I present conceptual frameworks that I employ to approach their language and literacy that take account of multilingual texts, multiple modes, and transnational literacy practices.

Refugee: Legal Definitions and Terms Used

There are numerous reasons for mass migrations throughout human history and there are many meanings of the word 'refugee,' legally, presumably, and contextually depending on purposes of the message about refugees (Ludwig 2016). Therefore, it is important to define 'refugee' and, for clarity, to distinguish the term from other categories of migrating populations. My goal here is to identify the refugees' life trajectories and historical and sociopolitical factors for fleeing their places of origin and to formulate background information of my refugee participants that leads to the theoretical frameworks. The study families are introduced in Chapters 2 and 3. Refugees are one among a few groups who experience forced migration. There are strict criteria set by the United Nations to

provide legal refugee status, which I employ as the construction of refugee identity in this book. According to international laws and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees' (UNHCR) legal definition, a refugee is an individual who:

> owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, memberships of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country, or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, unwilling to return to it.

By the above definition, refugees are 'entitled to international protection' and no longer benefited and safeguarded by 'the state in which they are a citizen' (McDowell 2013, p. 66). Refugees' decision to flee from their home countries may be made in seconds due to an attack, armed conflicts, and human rights abuse caused by political, religious, or ethnic disagreement. However, millions of people that migrate around the globe are defined as being in a refugee-like situation and become Persons of Concern (UNHCR 2016). For instance, Persons of Concern consist of Internally Displaced Persons or IDPs who have been relocated due to armed conflict and human rights violations but remain within the territory of their own government 'without crossing a clear border between countries' (Goodnow 2013, p. 340; UNHCR 2016). Another group of IDPs according to UN is survivors from natural disasters, such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and wildfire. These people are categorized as environmental refugees or climate refugees who move because the geographical and environmental condition is too risky to remain in (see also McDowell 2013). The difference between this group of IDPs and refugees, as defined above, is that the survivors are not persecuted or forced to leave their habitual residence by other human beings. Importantly, most of them still receive their own state's protection, frequently simultaneously with international help, for example, survivors from the USA's 2005 Hurricane Katrina, Burma's 2008 Cyclone Nargis, Haiti's 2010 earthquake, and Japan's 2011 tsunami.

Persons of Concern also include asylum seekers, who 'clearly crossed a border between countries, but need to meet additional criteria for being classed as a "refugee". The decision is usually made by immigration authorities and much or most of the waiting time, for those already in the country, may be spent in a detention center' (Goodnow 2013, p. 340). All of these Persons of Concern have been welcomed and received by the USA since its formation; as President George Washington remarked in 1783,

> The bosom of America is open to receive not only the Opulent and respectable Stranger, but the oppressed and persecuted of all Nations and Religions; whom we shall welcome to a participation of all our rights and privileges, if by decency and propriety of conduct they appear to merit the enjoyment.

Nevertheless, several events throughout the 200-plus years of its history mean that the process of admitting a refugee has become lengthy and more involved.[3] The ongoing heated debates include: whether or not the USA accepts refugees; and the setting of the criteria for sorting refugees, immigrants, and undocumented immigrants. One of the significant events was when the US Immigration and Nationality Act or INA was created in 1952 after the 1951 Refugee Convention. Under US law, criteria that were added include that the refugee:

1. is located outside of the USA;
2. demonstrates that they were persecuted or fear persecution due to race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group;
3. is not firmly resettled in another country; and
4. is admissible to the USA.

Based on the above definition, at the time of application, to be admitted to the USA, a refugee has to live outside the USA without full right to become a US citizen or legal resident. The refugee has to wait until his

[3] Please note that I discuss refugee admission to the USA here. There are other groups that the USA admits under the Refugee Act. Asylum seekers, Cuban/Haitian entrants, certain Amerasians, Special Immigrant Visa holders and victims of severe forms of human trafficking are among the other humanitarian immigrants eligible for assistance and services under the Refugee Act.

or her case is approved before traveling to the USA. This is different from asylum seekers, such as the Cubans, who could be admitted into the USA upon arrival at the borders. In addition, unaccompanied minors crossing the southern and southwestern borders of the USA have been accepted for humanitarian reasons. Other asylum seekers may already be in the USA as a result of a certain type of visa and may apply for permanent residency later.

The refugees used as case studies in this book were initially forced to cross national borders because of persecution in their homeland due to their race, ethnicity, or membership of a particular political, social, or religious group. Their own government could not provide them with protection, and often, they experienced abuse by the more powerful group in their own country. Their first flight to a different part of their own country or the closest neighboring country was for safety. Then, being a refugee, in US terms, means that the USA is their third country because the second country while capable of offering temporary relief was not able to offer them full rights and protections as residents or citizens. Their journeys did not end after arriving in the new host country. In this book, I documented their experiences during their resettlement as part of the 'refugeeness' that comprises refugees' perception of threats, decision to flee, the stage of dangerous flight, camp lives, and processes of resettlement (Stein 1981). I use the word 'refugees' with a note in mind that they are newly or recently arrived refugees. Years later they may become citizens of the host country or some may call them people 'with refugee background.' I use 'recently arrived refugees,' 'refugees,' 'participants,' and 'newcomers' in this book interchangeably to refer to my Karenni participants.

Using a Transnationalism Paradigm to Research Refugees' Language and Literacy Practices

Transnationalism explains cultural, social, economic, and demographic developments that occur within a nation yet transcend across borders to one or more nation-states with varying levels (Kearney 1995; Levitt and Khagram 2008). The flows of 'commodities, cultures, and ideas across national boundaries' go side by side with the flow of people, with the

ambivalent feeling and perceptions of 'here' (new land) and 'there' (homeland) and of 'looking back' and 'moving forward' (Duran 2012, p. 8, see also Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Kearny 1995; Levitt and Glick Schiller 2004; Mahler 2006). These transnational practices are performed in various ways. For example, through the billions of dollars sent 'home' each year by workers residing in the USA in order to support their families living in their home countries and elsewhere; through missionaries sharing a religious ministry have their networks in other countries and continents; and through refugees lodging in one location but who maintain contact with their friends and families left in the refugee camps or in their homeland. Glick Schiller et al. (1992) even argue that the term 'immigrant' is no longer effective because of a person's coexistent relationship with two or more places. Carrying out a study with transnational individuals residing in London, Block (2006) stated that transnational individuals were in positions of staying, considering return, or a position in between. Transnational individuals commit to maintaining simultaneity either physically or by meeting regularly with those from their homelands, or virtually by communicating constantly with their diasporic members around the world via telecommunication and online sites or social media. Transnational individuals residing in one country usually consume, receive, and catch up with trends, cultural products, news, and information from their homeland. It is also vital to note that with current flows of people, the receiving country does not necessarily become the final destination for transnational individuals because they may travel back and forth between the original country and the receiving country throughout their lifetime.

I employ the transnationalism paradigm to approach the study of recently arrived Karenni refugees because it captures people's movement, including dynamic flows of commodities, cultural practices and products, ideas and beliefs, and languages that constitute the shifting world in which we live (Faist 2010; Guarnizo and Smith 1998). In the USA, Bourne (1916) characterized 'transnationalism' during the time of growing numbers of immigrants. Based on the increase of discrimination against certain groups due to war, the previous settlers pressured the newcomers to become US-American with the popular concept of the US-American melting pot, or the way in which people from different cultural backgrounds are assimilated into one uniform 'American' identity.

Bourne argued that such an unrealistical, narrow-minded vision failed. In fact, the brought-in cultures have not been melted down and made into a homogeneous American culture; they have remained distinct but, nonetheless, contribute to the great glory and benefit, not only of themselves but of 'Americanism.' Both previously settled US-Americans and newcomers have sustained practices originating in their country of origin and have sustained connections with people from the homeland.

Nevertheless, the concept of 'transnationalism' or becoming 'American' while maintaining values, cultural practices, and linguistic forms from the homeland, was not in favor in the US mainstream. The ideas of 'assimilation' often come to the mind of the US host community with the belief that it is the newcomers' obligation to fit into the new environment as soon as possible. The one-nation-one-language ideology that remains in many parts of the world (Blackledge and Creese 2010; Cenoz and Gorter 2013) has been adopted and believed as a way to 'Americanize' newcomers. English proficiency is often used as a tool to measure the newcomers' capability to assimilate. Therefore, while the recently arrived refugees have a goal to 'acculturate' by continuing their native linguistic and cultural practices in addition to learning English and US ways of living, the processes often involve challenges, contestations, and contradictions. Based on the transnationalism paradigm and complications in the transnational processes to approach the recently arrived and resettled refugees in their new host country, the three following characteristics of and views on refugees have shaped this study: refugees are transnational agents; refugees are repetitively marginalized; and refugees are resourceful.

Refugees are Transnational Agents

The legal definition and status of refugee frames a specific kind of experience that is different from other migrating populations. Refugees are often viewed as 'uprooted victims of conflict and persecution,' (UN 2016) whose past is left behind and whose future is uncertain. Nevertheless, unlike the experiences of refugees in the past when communication and travel were inconvenient, refugees in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries have more opportunities for transnational practices and plans. For the refugees, the current host country is not necessarily the final

destination. They want to live and work in their current host country but also to communicate with the people who share similar history and experiences with them elsewhere. They may move to another country in the future. My Karenni participants in Arizona always asked me how to return to visit Thailand or even the Karenni State in Burma. Some of them have been granted a travel document or a US Permanent Resident Status that enables them to visit friends and family members outside the USA. Many hoped to receive US citizenship in the next few years. Their goal is to uphold transnational ties. Holding US citizenship not only assures their rights and protections but also allows them to visit other countries as a holder of a US passport (Duran 2016).

Refugees' experiences that include their flight across borders, camp life in another country, and resettlement in a third country culminate in transnational identities that are collective, hybrid, and multiple (MacDonald 1997). Much research indicates that refugees' everyday experiences involve contradictions and negotiations between their own linguistic and cultural norms and the adjustments and accommodations required in the host countries (e.g., Ong 1999). The mixture of 'looking back' and 'moving forward' commonly occurs throughout their experiences. Therefore, sustaining heritage language and culture as a way to maintain connections to the refugees' roots involves transformation of linguistic and cultural practices in the process (e.g., MacDonald 1997; Sarroub 2010; Weinstein-Shr 1993). Macdonald (1997) worked on the Iu-Mien or Mien refugees, who fled from Laos during and after the Vietnam War and resettled in Oregon. He found that some Mien linguistic and cultural practices were maintained while some evolved because of the host community's dominant beliefs and practices. For example, many Mien people converted to Christianity and their literacy practices involved reading religious print-based and romanized texts. Dropping their previous religious beliefs, they developed US Mien characteristics. Their new literacy practices created another tool to connect with other Mien community members. With the transnationalism paradigm the changing practices based on the amalgamation of old and new resources (Weinstein-Shr 1993) emphasize the 'in-process' or 'ongoing' trajectories rather than the end product. This is in line with the poststructuralist perspective.

The 'web of social relationships' (Haines 1996, p. 32) and kinship (Weinstein-Shr 1993) that develop within and between ethnic groups

and extended family networks, who shared similar migratory experiences, have led to transnational communities and coethnic businesses in many cities, where refugees resettled and constructed a transnational city. These communities competently create their unique social space and multiple sociocultural organizations where they share news and information, provide and receive services, and purchase food and cultural products related to their origins (Blommaert 2010). Haines (1996) emphasized that refugees recreate ethnic ties and strengthen these bonds in the new land in order to compensate for their losses resulting from persecution, flight, and war. As a result, refugees prefer to relocate near kin and coethnic networks for comfort and support because the assigned host communities cannot fulfill the refugees' needs (Kula and Paik 2016). The familiar support networks are helpful for easing many of the problems and adjustment in the receiving country. Thus, years after resettlement, an ethnic-enclave space and neighborhood is visible. In this book, I pay attention to what the Karenni refugees do to continue relationships with both the home and host countries linguistically, culturally, and socially. Through their transnational trajectories, I identify the resources and factors behind their practices (Heller 2012).

Refugees are Resourceful

In one of my earliest readings about refugees' experiences, Weinstein-Shr (1993) started her chapter on Hmong refugees from Southeast Asia in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania by describing refugees as extremely resourceful. She offered the statement that if they 'have not been resourceful, they would not be here; they would be dead' (p. 272) as an opposition to the public discourse that often portrayed refugees as helpless. Weinstein-Shr emphasized that the refugees attempted to integrate both old and new resources to fulfill their needs effectively. For example, her Hmong male participant used his new reading print skills of skimming and scanning to search a phone book to find his Hmong clans. Similarly, Dudley (2010) documented the Karenni people's experiences in the refugee camps by observing how they interacted with past and present objects, materials, and cultural products. She emphasized that the Karenni refugees 'are not passive victims of circumstances but busy giving meaning to their

displacement and seeking to make the best of their lot' (p. 155). A few decades after the first big wave of Southeast Asian refugees, predominantly from Cambodia, Laos, and Vietnam in the 1970s and 1980s, the public perception of refugees as 'needy, passive recipient[s] of our care and concern' continued (Kirmayer 2013, p. ix). Having worked with Karenni refugees in the USA since 2009, I agree with Weinstein-Shr and Dudley that refugees are resourceful. From getting fishing equipment and a fishing license from Walmart so that they can provide for their families to establishing an ethnic-based organization for community support, they are inventive survivors. In this book in particular, I open up their home spaces to present the language and literacy resources they have, and discuss their practices for incorporating these resources in their daily life.

Refugees are Repetitively Marginalized and Minoritized

Refugees are socially, historically, and politically marginalized. Such marginalization is a fundamental reason for people becoming refugees when some ethnicities, political affiliations, or religious beliefs, in a given nation, are viewed as adversaries of that nation. The way in which that nation deals with their unwanted populations involves brutality leading to wars such as clan wars, ethnic-cleansing wars, or civil wars. More often than not, marginalization, or the position of being powerless followers and having no right to make choices, continues even when the refugees are under the protection of another host nation, which is supposed to be a safer place. For example, in the case of refugees fleeing persecutions from Burma and living in Thailand's refugee camp, visible cultural practices that sustained the refugees' self-confidence, familiarity, and comfort, such as traditional clothing, style, and jewelry, provoked prejudice against the refugees themselves (Dudley 2010). Walking in a Thai village, the Karenni refugees, who wore distinguishable ethnic clothing may be seen as 'Burmese' (the general term Thais use to refer all ethnic groups from Burma), 'enemy,' 'vulnerable,' or even seen as suspicious illegal immigrants despite holding valid travel permits. Many had to avoid going to the Thai village or to wear clothing similar to the Thais in order to hide their identity.

Exclusion and marginalization due to refugees' minoritized status in their host country take place in part because of the minority languages the refugees speak. Marfleet (2006) pointed out that refugees' job opportunities and educational advancement are delayed by their nondominant languages or even their unapproved dialects. This phenomenon influences multiple language programs to teach both refugee children and adults to be proficient in the dominant language of the host communities. Even so, such language programs have been analyzed and found as a site of continuous marginalization. In his work on Southeast Asian refugees and their struggles as an aftermath of the Vietnam War, Tollefson (1989) argued that English education and curriculum for the refugees before and after their arrival in the USA taught the refugees the language of the subordinates and low-paid labor force. According to Camps' (2016) analysis of 'the U.S. Refugee Policies' and resettlement goals (p. 55), the texts read 'employable refugees should be placed on jobs as soon as possible after their arrival in the United States' (p. 61). She pointed out that the ambiguous definition of 'employability' created a 'hierarchy in which employment is elevated as the primary goal' (p. 52). Consequently, as I have observed, the resettlement services are encouraged to reach this aim as soon as possible and the overall effective resettlement and the long-term goal are insufficiently made. Especially in job placement, 'employable refugees' are put to work because of their physical readiness. The 'quick' evaluation places the refugee newcomers in the cycle of low-paid jobs with long hours of work, limited chances to practice the dominant language of the host community, and little time to take courses for language, literacy, and career advancement (Strömmer 2015). In this book, limited English proficiency among recently arrived Karenni adults is presented through their talk about English and how they are positioned in the condition of marginalization.

Marginalization occurs in education system. K-12 refugee and immigrant children are usually put together in the same language programs because of their similar characteristic—the lack of dominant-language proficiency. In the USA, they are English Language Learners (ELLs). Fredricks and Warriner's (2016) research in a classroom setting showed that refugee children speaking other languages rather than English were policized by classmates and teachers. In addition, although the English language development program's goal is to provide English language

teaching and teachers and school set rules such as 'English-only policy' in order to have a unified code for all, such an approach excludes the students with lower English proficiency. At college level, Shapiro (2016) reported that some faculty members avoided working with students with refugee backgrounds as the faculty believed that they could not accommodate the 'needy' students. The students did not receive clear and explicit discussion and guidance to identify their academic strengths and weaknesses that would be a more effective way to help them decide their educational goals and career plans. Another unfortunate consequence of being a refugee is that once the refugee label is applied the stigma and stereotype remain for generations. In fact, many refugees, including their children, have become permanent residents or citizens of their host countries and they are eager to be viewed as competent individuals. Although this book focuses on refugee children's home-based language and literacy practices, implications for pedagogy in schools will be addressed.

The three themes above—transnationalism, resourcefulness, and marginalization in the refugee participants' life trajectories—appear throughout the study and the formation of this book. In the following sections, by taking on the three themes in relation to language and literacy issues, I review interrelated theoretical frameworks that have an impact on my perspectives while investigating the recently arrived refugees' language-learning experiences and literacy practices. I start with how I define, approach, and review the uses of the term 'literacy' with three standpoints: accumulated literacy, literacy and numeracy, and digital literacy. Next, I discuss how a language socialization framework is employed to approach language-learning trajectories and generational differences between refugee families. In addition, I characterize other terms used to capture the complexity of today's mobility of people and languages and the consequences in language practices: multilingual repertoires, language hierarchy and ideology, language naming and translanguaging, and contested language ideologies.

Social Aspects of Literacy

A sociocultural perspective (Lave and Wenger 1991; Vygotsky 1978; Wenger 1999) of literacy or the notion that our understanding, meaning-making processes, and perceptions are acquired and constructed by social

interaction and sociocultural norms generated in a given community greatly impacts my views on and approaches to language and literacy practices. I employ the notion of literacy as a social practice. Within this framework, literacy is acquired by making meaning of texts in everyday living and socially-constructed interaction (Barton and Hamilton 2012; Gee 2012; New London Group 1996; Street 1984). This view relies on the belief that there is no unidirectional form of literacy. In fact, literacy practices are ideologically context specific. As part of this endeavor, I explore diverse representations of texts in the recently arrived refugees' lived experiences by using the notion of 'accumulated literacy.' I also clarify two other kinds of literacy—numeracy and digital literacy—which have impacted the newcomers' learning experiences.

Accumulated Literacy

Deborah Brandt's (1995) *Accumulating Literacy* addresses how local literates read and write or have learned to write before formal schooling, and how each life event, including social transformation throughout life, has contextualized and influenced the kinds of literacy practices people do. For example, one of her participants, Charles Randolph, began his early literacy with poetry, the US Southern oral tradition of African-American preaching, memorization, and debate. Later on, he moved to the Midwestern USA and became a teacher, earning his doctorate degree. Throughout these years, he developed a mixture of writing skills based on both personal and professional experiences, ranging from writing an essay, a speech, to a book manuscript on civil rights. His writing tool and scene changed from a pen and paper on his porch to a laptop in airplanes or a hotel room.

Exploring literacy practices among recently arrived refugees, I call the transnational agents' existing and emerging knowledge, activities, and skills *accumulated literacy* to indicate that literacy is made up of social-cultural-historical practices learned, collected, modified, and utilized throughout one's life and through different experiences. With a consideration of the transnational dimension of the refugee participants with the notion that literacy practices have a capacity for travel (Luke 2004; Warriner 2009), the recently arrived refugees' households and neighborhoods provide different literacy resources that are a mixture of old and new (Weinstein-

Shr 1993). 'Accumulated literacy' as a theoretical and methodological approach allowed me to observe linguistic and cultural artifacts in the households, interview the participants, and identify a wide range of literacy skills that the participants may already have, including adapted as well as evolved practices due to their movement across national, linguistic, and cultural borders. This includes practices that the families have developed to serve their goals such as to access particular communities of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991), make meaning (Vygotsky 1978), establish connections, and acquire information and resources.

Literacy and Numeracy

Numeracy or 'the ability to access, use, interpret, and communicate mathematical information and ideas, to engage in and manage mathematical demands of a range of situations in adult life' (US Department of Health and Human Services 2016) is believed to complement literacy in modern life (National Numeracy 2016). The United Nations often uses the phrase 'literacy and numeracy' in their initiatives and working projects to improve education, especially in low-income and developing countries (UN 2016). In addition, many developed countries, such as New Zealand, the UK, and the USA, have increasingly valued numeracy as an essential skill for economic opportunity or marketability in the work place.

Although I do not focus on the refugee participants' numeracy proficiency in particular, knowledge of numeracy sometimes appears as a part of the everyday learning experiences of the Karenni refugees. Although the Karenni language has words to express numbers from zero to a million and concepts of numeral expression can be produced in a complicated way just like the use of numbers in an English speaking society, the refugees from different age groups and with different educational and professional backgrounds may use, see, and interpret numeracy differently. For example, young children may not have learned numeracy in a formal educational setting before their relocation to the USA. As a result, learning numeracy for these young children co-occurs with learning English in a US school. Therefore, words for numbers in English come more easily than those of their native language. In addition, numeracy

as related to the metric system, lunar calendar, and lunisolar Buddhist calendar system, to name a few, that many adult refugees have learned in their native culture and previous countries may be disrupted by the new systems used in the receiving country. These different systems are collected as accumulated literacy influenced by context-specific norms.

Digital Literacy

Today, new technology and its affordability and accessibility offer multiple modes and accelerate digital-mediated practices. As with studies of transnational literacies that celebrate the technology advancement and digital literacy as a social practice (e.g., Black 2009; Gee 2003; McGinnis et al. 2007; Yi 2009), I adopt an ethnographic approach to explore how individual family members engage with a range of texts on digital devices. As Lam (2009a) defines literacy as 'the literate abilities to navigate and negotiate across diverse social practices and text forms' (Lam 2009a, p. 378), text forms here include written script and symbols on screens, for example, computer screens, TV screens, and mobile phones.

For many refugee families, crossing national borders means gaining access to digital technology and additional communicative modes. Gilhooley and Lee (2014), for example, studied three recently arrived Karen brothers in the USA who used the internet as a site to connect with the larger Karen community as they struggled with resettlement and marginalization in their new school and host community. Their digitally mediated language and literacy activities, including making video clips, chatting, social networking, and reading Karen literature online, created a hospitable online space to build 'coethnic friendships' (p. 391). Other recent studies have shown that digital-mediated activities create English learning opportunities and allow English language learners (ELLs) to establish a community among themselves outside school. Their practices include web browsing, blogging, fan page discussions, chatting, and fiction writing (Black 2009; Lam and Rosario-Ramos 2009; Lam 2008, 2009b; Yi 2009). Unlike formal classrooms, this space has no formal instructors and no scripted lessons. ELLs may use and develop the English language learned from their classroom in this out-of-school space, but without being tested or corrected. As presented in this book, some

participants used their English resources as a strategic tool in the online community where they shared with those who had similar migratory and language-learning experiences and interests.

Another popular digitally mediated practice is playing a video game. Video games are well established as a site for learning and literacy (e.g., Gee and Hayes 2011; Hayes and Games 2008). Empirical investigations in educational research show that principles underlying effective game design and engagement may lead to effective learning practices. Gee (2003) describes online multiplayer games as constituting a group affiliation because of gamers' shared endeavors, values, and practices. Each gamer is a knowledgeable contributor to the game's system. Playing together, gamers pass on their tacit resources (i.e., sociocultural norms of games, tools, and techniques, and seek, disseminate, refer, and exchange information). In this book, the young refugee children were introduced to playing video games immediately after they relocated and playing video games became a major pastime in their free time at home. The activity created possibilities for literacy development that included multiple modes, such as gestures and touches along with spoken communication. Therefore, when investigating the children's video game playing, I adopted a multimodal perspective on literacy practices and consider games as one of many representational forms of texts that carry meaning across a range of modes, including audio, visual, and moving images. The physical space of the playing site allowed me to observe and follow the children's speech, social interactions, physical coordination, and responses to the virtual world as well as the other gamers and audience in the inherently multimodal research site (Lotherington and Jenson 2011). Altogether, digital literacy has become a part of the recently arrived refugee families' lives in this study.

Language Socialization Pathways in Refugee Families

A person's relationship with language and language activities starts within the family (Fishman 1991). Families Language Socialization (LS) has been studied in both monolingual and multilingual communities where the focus has been on the language and sociocultural development of

children across cultures, language acquisition, and literacy practices, and language choice, maintenance, and shift among bi- and multilinguals. In this study, I add that movements across cultural and national borders amplify modifications of refugees' everyday language practices. For many resettling individuals, learning a new language as well as learning how to get things done in an unfamiliar sociocultural set up is immediately needed. In many families, the learning pathways are different for different members within the same family due to age, expected responsibilities, interests, the stage of language acquisition, and the level of language competency prior to their movement. For example, young children may not have fully acquired their native language in the previous country while their parents and older siblings have acquired their native language as well as how to read and write in the language. In the new host country, the parents and older siblings may continue to speak their previously acquired languages and consume literacy products in the native language while the younger children may not be able to do that.

To approach language practices, the framework of LS guides me to observe and follow the recently arrived refugee participants' 'socialization through language and socialization to use language' (Ochs 1986, p. 2) or their language acquisition along with the development of sociocultural and communicative competence (Goodwin 1990; Ochs and Schieffelin 1995; Schieffelin 1990). Early LS studies focused on how children learn to become fully competent speaking members (Cook-Gumperz 1987; Schieffelin and Ochs 1986) and 'speakers of culture' (Ochs 2002, p. 99) in a given social group, and how that process might vary from group to group and within a group (Lancy et al. 2010). In such processes of socialization, children experience countless verbal interactions, various paths and forms of participation, and different 'objectives and outcomes that are culturally defined' (Lancy et al. 2010, p. 5, see also Duff 2007).

Unlike earlier literatures of LS, several studies add a further dimension to these processes, where LS is a multidirectional process—a hybrid exchange of knowledge in which learners of all ages can be both receptor and agent of socialization (e.g., de la Piedra and Romo 2003; Duran 2014; Orellana 2009; Paugh 2005; Pontecorvo et al. 2001; Sterponi 2010; Watson-Grego 2001). Linguistic and sociocultural norms can be transmitted in a variety of ways, for example, from adults to children, children to adults, among

adults, and among children in all contexts throughout our life (Bayley and Schecter 2003; Duff 2008a). Although adults usually have a caretaker role, in diasporic families children often prove to be knowledge mediators, especially when the parents need the children's particular language learned through school and/or from the dominant-language community (Duran 2014; Orellana 2009). In some contexts, however, adults retain their authority to transmit their native linguistic and cultural norms to the children. Building on and extending the contributions of such scholarship, I examine the situated language practices in three Karenni families, where each family member's practice is 'fostered, shared, and fashioned' (Fishman 1991, p. 409). I focus on LS in different age groups, across generations, and its multidirectionality that is shaped by discursive and material influences alike. To gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamic nature and generational differences of LS in multilingual families, I explore systematic connections between experiences, behaviors, and relevant features of the context (Johnson 1992, p. 84).

Multilingual Repertoires

I use 'multilingual repertoires' as an inclusive term to include bilingualism, multilingualism, and plurilingualism. I define 'multilingual repertoires' as linguistic resources—accumulative knowledge, usage, and practice of more than one language or more than one variety of language. I have noted elsewhere that multilingual repertoires are an integral part of history in a person (Duran 2014; see also Holland and Lave 2001; Lave and Wenger 1991). This means that speakers of a language may have learned an additional language recently or learned it a long time ago and they might not be equally proficient in their full language range (Canagarajah 2009: Kramsch 2009). However, the collective knowledge serves as a multilingual resource for comprehension, communication, and social interaction. Word choice and language use tell the audience about the speaker's thoughts, experiences, beliefs, and 'unique life trajectories' (p. 75). I use the notion of multilingual repertoires to capture the multilingual practices and strategies of the participants. Language choices and strategies made based on available repertoires and goal-oriented activities

(Wortham 2001) are emphasized rather than their language proficiency. In addition, with this definition and focus, multilingual speakers in this study are viewed as social actors, whose identity is contextualized, not a fixed category (Schecter and Bayley 2002). For example, a child may be quieter and more passive in one domain but may become an active knowledge mediator in another.

Multilingual repertoires can be understood as resources for individuals as well as for a larger community. An individual and the individual's immediate community such as family and kin (Moll et al. 1992; Velez-IbáÑez and Greenberg 1992) can be used to build and maintain social networks within the receiving context and to sustain connections (with people, institutions, ideas, events) across national boundaries. In addition, households filled with linguistic, social, cultural, and intellectual resources can be bridged to school discourses as scholars have documented and applied the plentiful resources in order to disrupt the misconception that linguistically minoritized families are deficient (Cuero 2010; González and Moll 2002; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

The second view of multilingualism as resources draws on the flow of languages at a larger community level (e.g., interethnic community) and international level. Blommaert (2010) approaches multilingual repertoires from the perspective of migration and globalization that cooccurs with 'super-diversity' (p. 6), which also means that many parts in the world currently represent linguistic and cultural flows from and to both local and global levels. Even though a more popular language such as English has been widely used as a lingua franca among people from linguistically different backgrounds (Crystal 2003). Blommaert (2010) explains that immigrant neighborhoods usually represent complex multilingual sites where various linguist forms are intermingled. Often, multiple sociocultural organizations and communities are established in these neighborhoods where their residents follow media from their home countries, exchange news and information, create services and support networks, and obtain supplies of foods and cultural products related to their native origin. Both levels of multilingual repertoires provide a framework for analyzing the specific ways that languages become resources in local contexts. Each of these constructs helps to identify language profiles in a community and understand the consequences of globalization and transnational flows that shape the way languages are used and viewed.

Language Ideology and Hierarchy

Languages are often viewed as resources but they are practiced with sociopolitical norms and influences (Heller 2007). Ideologies of language or the values and beliefs attached to language, attitudes toward language or a certain language variety, and how people talk about a language, are an integral part of linguistic and literacy practices. According to Woolard (1998), languages and their speakers are positioned in and through talk, thus, they serve as a bridge between language and social, vertical hierarchy. From this point of view, ideologies of language (as a theoretical framework) allow us to identify connections between daily interactions at the micro level and linguistic and social hierarchies (Makoni and Pennycook 2007; Woolard 1998) that are shaped by higher-level institutions, such as the legal, education, and social welfare systems (Norton 2000; Ricento 2005). It is also believed that proficiency in a certain language and a particular form of language is one of the key tools that a more-dominant social group uses to seek a way to control others (Fairclough 1989; Tollefson 1991). Such a power-related aspect of language has an impact on language teaching and learning and generates the norm of how a language is used, including establishing language hierarchies in which some languages or forms of use, such as standardized language used in school and by news reporters, are more valued than others (Fairclough 1989; Foucault 1991).

The USA does not have an official language but English has been the dominant language used as a medium language of instruction in schools as well as a language of wider communication (for example, in official contexts and institutional encounters), communication in public space and everyday living, such as road signs, safety regulations at work, medical instructions, public announcements, and environmental hazards (Crystal 2003, p. 135). The extensive usage of English means that English knowledge and understanding by residents is required. This reinforces the need for English among speakers of other languages in the country. Simultaneously, English is believed to be the language of opportunity yet serves a number of gate-keeping functions (Tollefson 1991; Pennycook 1995). The contradiction is constructed by complex sociolinguistic and sociopolitical factors. Often, the privileged status of English affects unique power relation at different levels, not only in the

formal setting but also 'in personal relations, face-to-face encounters, and the invidious distinctions of the workplace and residential neighborhood' (Woolard 1989, p. 121). That is, English is spoken among the majority group in the USA who are perceived as idealized US-Americans and generally hold the position in the 'mainstream-oriented American middle class life' (Fishman 1989, p. 647; Ricento 2005; Sonntag 1995). This construct shapes the way in which the English language is used and valued by the mainstream. Newcomers, consequently, believe that acquiring English creates socioeconomic opportunity for them similar to that of the mainstream. They often study and learn English with a desire for recognition, affiliation, security, and safety as well as a desire to own the identity that indicates what they can do (Norton 1995, 2000; West 1992) in this English-dominant society. On the other hand, speakers of other languages and nonstandard varieties of English are marginalized (Labov 2001; Lippi-Green 1997; Preston 1996; Ricento 1996).

In addition, it is widely believed that those who have and perform an adequate competence in the language form accepted as standard, especially its written form, have a higher chance of success academically and socioeconomically. Though many persist in using their own regional English variety or their native language other than standard English to maintain their social and ethnic identity, inevitably teachers and learners become fond of a particular variety of English (Lippi-Green 2012) because of 'the social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital' (Bourdieu 1986) believed to be delivered to the learners.

Another dimension of language ideology in a multilingual society is the hierarchy of non-dominant languages. While English is believed to be the most highly-valued in the USA it is also important to note that many new, small, and minoritized languages in immigrant communities remain mostly unacknowledged in the public space. Literacy and languages of the older or larger immigrant communities are more publicly seen and recognized. For example, in Phoenix, Arizona, Spanish speakers are more common in immigrant neighborhoods. Print materials, newspapers, and public signs in Spanish can be easily found in the area. In schools, there are more ELLs from Spanish-speaking backgrounds than others. Schools' newsletters and announcements may be translated into Spanish for Spanish-speaking parents. Speakers of smaller or more minoritized

languages such as Burmese, Karen, and Karenni receive limited support. A Karenni teenager I worked with, for instance, told me that when she didn't understand something in class, she asked her teacher. This might not have been helpful because the student still didn't understand the English words that the teacher used. However, the teacher was able to explain the material in Spanish to Spanish-speaking students.

Contested Language Ideologies

Values of languages may be implemented differently from nation to nation and from space to space (Makoni and Pennycook 2007). Therefore, in multilingual transnational communities, language ideologies and practices are contested (Blackledge 2009) or contradictory as a result of migration. When resettling in an English-speaking nation, for example, it is strongly believed that 'the only route to' success (Blackledge 2009, p. 84) is to acquire English as quickly as possible and leave one's native language, which is not English, behind. This, to some extent, may conflict with the transnational individuals' intention to maintain their native language and connection to their linguistic and cultural roots. I identify and analyze such contested or contradictory language ideologies with a poststructuralist view and argue that language ideologies vary over time at the individual level, in the local community, and across contexts (Blommaert 1999).

According to Wortham (2001, 2005), individuals' thoughts and language and literacy practices are collectively and gradually produced along with their sociohistorical factors and experiences. I examine those thoughts and practices regarding their specific sociohistorical factors revealed through discussion of their lived experiences and household observations. During my data collection process in a multilingual refugee community, I was able to explore beliefs about language by examining participants' talk, their reflective talk about language, and their language and literacy practices 'from the ground' (Kroskrity, personal communication)—in other words, what people do with language in their daily life. I am interested in the relationship between the status of English (and its speakers) relative to other languages (and their speakers). I pay attention

to the participants' perspectives on their acquired multiple languages and their actual interactions and face-to-face encounters to sketch their language ideologies. A number of interactions in this study articulate the participants' beliefs about language (and language varieties)—including how a particular context shaped the way they used each language and languages.

Language Naming and Translanguaging

Naming a language according to its speakers and the place where a given language is spoken is a common practice. In other words, we usually connect the name of a language to the name of a country or the name of a certain group of speakers, for example, Burmese as related to or a language of Burma, French to France, German to Germany, Japanese to Japan, Thai to Thailand, Turkish to Turkey. Language naming also affects the way in which we analyze code-switching data and grammatical features of such data from bi/multilingual speakers. For example, 'Raul is a man agresivo' can be analyzed as English-Spanish intrasentential code-switching with the Spanish phrasal structure in 'a man agresivo' (Salinas 2015). This code-switching analysis is different from translanguaging or what García (2008) and García and Wei (2014) defines as the bilinguals' expansive practices that go beyond code-switching strategies. The view is based on the holistic view of bilingualism (Canagarajah 2011; Cook 1991, 2008; Grosjean 1985, 1989) as opposed to the fractional view that a bilingual is the sum of two monolinguals or two separate language systems in one mind. In fact, a bilingual does not acquire two discrete systems, but constantly evolving linguistic features drawn upon two systems. The features include grammatical structures (morphology, phonology, syntax) as well as the sociocultural norms and conventions around how and when to combine them. Bilingual individuals have developed collective translanguaging to use in a specific circumstance. As García (2008) concludes, the two languages are contextually embedded and integrated into the language repertoires of the bilinguals based on social status, appropriateness, preference, ability, and other supportive factors such as local ideologies, social meaning of different language varieties,

and surrounding sociocultural resources (Gort and Bauer 2012). All of these factors enhance the sense-making process, 'shaping experiences, gaining understanding and knowledge through the use of two languages' (Baker 2011, p. 288, cited in Garcia and Wei 2014). Collectively, the holistic viewpoint views multilingual repertoires as advantages and assets, where two or more languages and cultures are 'blended, harmonized, and combined [uniquely], not simply the sum of two parts' (Baker 1992, p. 78). In this book, I present linguistic data from the multilingual refugee participants and refer to the notion of translanguaging. Although I call a certain language by its known name, I present how translanguaging is practiced as a method as well as a technique for the meaning-making process, shuttling between languages because the multilingual repertoires allow the participants to do so in a given context and for a specific goal.

Summary: Refugees, Language, and Literacy

In this chapter, I have discussed growing issues when the number of refugees is on the rise. The flows of the refugees fueled by distribution of various languages, numerous ways of practices and modes of communication, and current and emerging language and literacy practices challenge applied linguists, educational researchers, and sociolinguists to think about linguistic diversity and its consequences in theory and practice. In this book, I will address the complex issues by presenting findings from the specific case of three recently arrived Karenni refugee families—a total of sixteen individuals. They arrived in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2009 and I conducted an ethnographic study from 2009 to 2011.

I employ the transnational paradigm as the working concept to approach refugees, who move across national boundaries. Transnationalism is not a new phenomenon (Block 2006). However, the flexibility of the transnational paradigm can be employed to capture the flows of refugees and their linguistic and literacy practices. The practices they have brought with them to the host community can be viewed as a way of maintaining their linguistic and cultural roots. On the other hand, emerging and evolving practices can be observed to explain factors of the practices in their current settings, the goals of those practices, and how they are simi-

lar to or different from the previous ones. For example, learning English as a second language may result in translanguaging among the refugees because English is in contact with their native languages.

As families consist of all age groups (children, teenagers, and adults), I have also discussed key theoretical approaches to multilingualism that contribute to generational differences in language socialization pathways, language ideologies, and literacy. With the belief that the multilingual families' households have plentiful intellectual and linguistic resources as discussed in the section of home-based literacies, both traditional (e.g., prints, documents, posters) and digital artifacts (e.g., texts on screen, digital graphic) are taken into account as a result of globalization and its counterparts—movement and accelerated information technology. All of these language and literacy practices culminate in what I call accumulated literacy. Finally, the present study captures language-learning experiences during the first years of the refugee participants' resettlement that, to a great extent, will present a mixture of fluctuating, contesting, and contradictory ideologies of language. This is because their previously acquired languages and literacy practices in the sending country and the language dominant in the receiving country are valued differently. All in all, I value the refugee participants' existing and emerging multilingual repertoires and literacies and the collective resources used to navigate in the new context and to create new understandings for educational access and socioeconomic opportunities.

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2

'But, We Are Karenni. We Are Not Burmese.' Historical Contexts and Lived Experiences of Karenni Refugees from Burma

Increasing international attention has been paid as to how democracy will be advanced in Burma or the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, especially when the country had been under the military regime after General Ne Win, the Chairman of Burma Socialist Program Party, led a coup d'état and became the Prime Minister of Burma in 1962. After a number of affirmative events that suggest democracy will grow stronger, Burma's future looks promising. Those events include the 2010 release of the leader of the National League for Democracy, Daw Aung San Suu Kyi, who had been under house arrest for the total of 15 years; Burma's 2012 democratic election; and a revival relationship with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the global community through trade and tourism. What receives less attention, though, is its internal ethnic conflict that is deep-seated in the perceived discrimination by the Bamar or Burman majority and their Burman-dominated areas against non-Burman or ethnic minorities, especially those living in the border regions (Pedersen 2008). This chapter outlines the historical and sociopolitical circumstances and experiences of refugees from Burma or Myanmar with the focus on the Karenni people. I discuss their life trajectories, the linguistic and cultural distinction between the Karenni and other ethnic

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groups, the cause of the Karenni's exile, their life in the refugee camps in Thailand, and their resettlement in a third country, particularly in the USA. While this book primarily focuses on the Karenni refugees during their first years of resettlement in the USA, their previous experiences, life events, and language learning trajectories in this chapter offer background knowledge for understanding their current language and literacy practices. The journey of the Karenni people provides a clear pattern of the repeatedly marginalized status of refugees in both home and host countries—an archetypal phenomenon called 'hegemonic topography' (Malkki 1995, p. 5). I deliberately add some quotes and insights from the Karenni individuals' interviews.

Burma's Historical and Political Contexts and Ethnic Conflicts

Burma is often considered one of the most ethnically diverse countries in the world with the largest group called the Burmans or Bamar (Lang 2002), often called Burmese, coexisting with more than non-Burman 130 ethnic groups.[1] Its ethnic diversity has been the cause of tensions between groups especially between Burmans and non-Burmans. The largest area predominantly on the lowland or central plain belonged to the Burman monarchy while ethnically based territories in the highlands and frontier areas were divided into several small kingdoms ruled by tribal princes and political systems. According to Lang (2002), British colonial rule from 1886 to 1948 outlined ethnic diversity rather than attempted 'to integrate everyone into a common political entity' (p. 31). The dissection of the land and the conceptions of a variety of ethnicity have shaped the current nation's internal political boundaries. That is, currently there are seven ethnically based states on Burma's east and west sides (Ranard and Barron 2007) (See Fig. 2.1). Among 130 distinctive ethnic groups, the Karen or Kayin, the Karenni or Kayah, the Mon, the Kachin, and the Shan are the biggest ethnic groups and

[1] These include ethnic, tribal, and hill-tribal groups.

Fig. 2.1 Map of Burma. Vidiani Maps of the World. (2012). *Administrative map of Burma*. Retrieved April 20, 2012 from http://www.vidiani.com/?p=4022

rule the ethnically-based *states*[2] named after their respective tribes along the 2000-kilometer-long Thailand-Burma border from the North, the Northeast, to the South of Burma, an area of fertile rain forests and high mountains. The other two ethnically-based states are the Chin and the Arakan or Rakhine states in the west bordering with India and Bangladesh, respectively. Meanwhile, the majority group, the Burmans, form 68 % of the estimated population of 55 million, who mainly live on the central plains where seven *divisions* are located around the Irrawaddy River Basin (Bamar Heartland).

In modern day Burma (from 1948 to present), ethnic conflicts continued after national independence was granted by Britain. Aung San (the father of Aung San Suu Kyi), the leader of the political movement for Burma's independence, and his cabinet proposed to unite the country as a single entity. Along with this proposal, Aung San established a sociopolitical relationship with the leaders of ethnically based territories. He recognized the significant role of ethnic minorities and promised that all ethnic groups would have equal rights and responsibilities under the national constitution, which honored the right for ethnic minority groups to secession in the next 10 years. However, Aung San was assassinated before the full independence of the nation. U Nu, another leader who was part of Burma's movement for independence, became the first Prime Minister, and Sao Shwe Thaik became the first President of this independent republic named the Union of Burma. It was the 'era of parliamentary democracy' (Lang 2002, p. 35) but the parliament was unstable and more than twenty ethnic insurgent groups and several splinter units, especially in the border regions, were founded (Pedersen 2008). The three most-observed groups, active today, are the Karen National Union (KNU), the Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP), and the Shan State Army South (SSAS).[3] Democratic rule ended in 1962 with

[2] Based on many scholars and how the people of Burma divide the country, 'state' is used for the ethnically based territories where the ethnic minorities form their lands in the frontier areas whereas 'division' is used to refer to the Burman-dominant territory on the central plain.

[3] According to Pederson (2008), the insurgent groups started with the Karen in 1949. Other recognized ethnic-based groups include but are not limited to Arakan Liberation Party (ALP), Democratic Karen Buddhist Army (DKBA), Kachin Baptist Convention (KBC), Karen Human Right Group (KHRG), Kachin Interdependent Organization (KIO), Kayan New Land Party (KNLP), NDA-K (New Democratic Army-Kachin), Pao National Organization (PNO), Palaung

a military coup d'état led by General Ne Win. His takeover formally established 'a military-backed Socialist government' or military regime (Lang 2002, p. 36) and proposed a 'Burmese Way to Socialism' (Trichot 2005, p. 1) that consequently amplified the ethnic conflicts. The proposal intended to unite, in other words to Burman-ize, the country by governing both the Burman-dominated divisions on the central plain and the seven ethnically based, or non-Burman states, as one single geopolitical nation under the centralized military regime.

The 1974 constitution continued commitment to ethnic diversity by 'declaring that all groups had the right to preserve and protect their cultures, languages, and religion.' However, linguistic and cultural practices were not to undermine the unity and security of Burma (linguistic diversity will be discussed below). All citizens 'had to share a common identity' and loyalty to Burma by using Burmese as the official language while minimally using minority languages as needed and permitted (Lang 2002, p. 37). Although the ethnic languages had been maintained in family and community levels, the Burmese language policy was practiced in education and legal systems. As a result, Burmese has become a highly valued language in part because the ethnic minority groups use Burmese as a tool of interethnic communication. However, the relationship between the Burman-dominant divisions and ethnically based states was difficult due to the regime's centralized economic and political policies that did not follow the previous constitution's promise of independence for the ethnically based states.

Since 1988, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC) replaced Ne Win's party and started conducting the Program for the Progress of the Border Areas and National Races Development or the Border Development Projects (Lambrecht 2004). The central government invested in the construction of road and transportation infrastructure to the isolated regions with the objective of supporting economic and social works (health and education), to preserve the culture of the national races, and to promote amity among all races. In 1997, SLORC

State Liberation Army (PSLA), Shan National League of Democracy (SNLD), Shan State Nationalities Peoples' Liberation Organization (SSNLPO), Shan Women's Action Network (SWAN), and United Wa State Army (UWSA).

was reconstituted as the State Peace and Development Council (SPDC), which remained the same in its policy, goal, and structure for the most part. The SPDC continued until 2011.

Under SLORC and SPDC, peace hardly existed. To the international audience, their determination as mentioned above was to unite all divisions and states as a single geopolitical entity and to bring development and quality of life to the isolated border regions. However, several ethnic minority groups from Burma's border regions reported otherwise. The Karenni refugees, in this project, currently living in the USA, talked about the conflicts they experienced before fleeing to neighboring countries. Sherry, 46, a female Karenni refugee currently residing in Phoenix, Arizona, discussed the struggles the Karenni had and her flight when she was a teenager:

> We used to have big land of Karenni before the Burmese came in and ruled us. If we live there, we have to accept that we are lower than them, whatever they want us to do, we have to do it. Many of us ran away and lived in the jungle.

Loh Meh, 36, another female Karenni refugee, told me about her years growing up in the border state of Karenni in 1980s and 1990s:

> When I was young, I loved going to school. But, the school was burnt by the Burmese soldiers. Sometimes the Burmese came to shoot us at school, I ran away. When the new school was built, I went to school again, but for a little while, it got burnt again … my mother had experienced the shooting attack, so she was too scared to live there.

She added, 'Everyone in my village ran away. They will hurt us if we don't run.' Nway Meh, 46, had similarly traumatic experiences even though she is from a different part of the Karenni State. She recalled, 'If we don't run away, the Burmese will burn our houses, burn schools, everything on their way.'

According to Lambrecht (2004), the military regime's real intention is to uphold economic control over the production and distribution of the many rich natural resources in the border regions that include jade, gemstones, minerals, natural gas, silver, and unexploited hardwood forests

among others. Their aggressive exploitation of these natural resources caused deforestation but brought in billions of dollars to the regime. From 1993 to 1999, the declared export of unprocessed woods and products generated more than one billion dollars (p. 160). In addition, the regime's development policy expansively created jobs mainly for Burmans and moved them to the border regions. The movement purposefully promoted the Burmese mainstream social, cultural, and economic values as well as forcing ethnic minority groups to flee from their homes due to feelings of insecurity and the possibility of invasion.

During these policies, ethnic insurgents resisted the imposition of the Burmese government control over their local laws, political and educational policies, territorial claims, and resources. This resistance has led to many decades of civil war[4] between the Burmese military regime and various ethnic minority insurgent groups and their troops mentioned earlier. In the aftermath of this chronic conflict, the ethnic minority groups experienced attacks and faced the fear of being killed. Hundreds of thousands fled to the neighboring countries (Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Thailand) for security. *Human Right Watch/Asia* (July 25, 1997) reported that the Burmese government continued their human right abuses of ethnic minority groups 'which include killings, torture, forced labor and forced relocations.' They continued 'even in areas where cease-fire agreements with rebel armies have been signed.'

The historical events noted in this section, namely British colonial rule, Burma's independence, and Burmese military regime, affected the Karenni nation and its people tremendously. In the following sections, I discuss the Karenni people and describe their past experiences and current circumstances as refugees.

The Karenni People and their Circumstances

Little is understood or studied about the Karenni people (Dudley 2010) and many incorrectly think that the Karenni and the Karen are the same. In fact, the Karen and the Karenni are two distinct groups under the wider Karenic family, a Sino-Tibetan people. The

[4] For the non-Burman states, they understood the war as 'an international war' (Dudley 2010).

majority of the Karen, also known as Kayin, predominantly live in the Karen State just south of the Karenni State, where the majority of the Karenni people reside. Culturally speaking, 'ni' in Karenni means 'red.' Often, the Karenni are called the Red Karen as they use pink and red in their traditional clothing though other colors may be used among small tribes in the Karenni State, for example, black with gold ornaments. In contrast, the Karen or Kayin, who wear white are often called the White Karen. Apart from the term 'Karenni,' Kaya, Kayah, and Kariang Daeng are often used to refer to the Karenni group, their language, culture, and the Karenni State. With distinguishing colors in their traditional clothing, their tribes usually have the color word as the nickname as mentioned, which is not related to skin colors as some might assume.

The Karenni are a relatively small ethnic group compared to other groups in Burma. Before their current geographical residence, the Karenni people originally migrated, before Christianity was established, from Mongolia due to conflicts with other tribes, especially those in China. The Karenni walked south along the river until they found the land, where the Karenni State is located today. The area they claimed as their territory never belonged to nor was a part of Burma (Rogers 2012). The Karenni people and their independent territory, which was divided into five subdivisions, were ruled by their native kings or princes, called 'Saophya' (Rogers 2012, p. 58). In 1875, during the British Burma regime, the British government guaranteed the Karenni's independence, which meant the Karenni territory belonged neither to the British nor to Burma during the period of British rule. In 1947, however, the Karenni nation was forced to become part of Burma when the Burmese movement for independence took place. In 1948 after Burma became independent, the Karenni leader was assassinated and the Karenni nation was included as a state of the Union of Burma. The Burmese Way to Socialism was enacted. Similar to other ethnically based states that disagreed with the Union of Burma, the pro-independence party was formed and called Karenni National Progressive Party (KNPP) and was backed by its own Karenni military. They put every effort into their fight for independence because the Karenni people understood that their state had been illegally occupied by the Burmese since 1948 (Dudley 2010). This understanding is fundamental to the Karenni refugees that I worked with in Phoenix,

Arizona, as they used the words 'invade' or 'intrude' as verbs to describe what the Burmese government and military did to them. In addition, they are unhappy with the label 'Burmese refugees' and often they emphasize that 'we are Karenni, we are not Burmese.'

Geographically, the Karenni State is located in the eastern region of Burma and has Loikaw as its capital city. The Karenni State is approximately 4510 square miles (slightly smaller than the state of Connecticut, USA). The state is mountainous with rivers, lakes, and waterfalls that restrict accessibility, transportation, and fast communication. It is considered the poorest state in Burma, with inadequate healthcare. In spite of its smallest size of all states in Burma and the difficulties involved in accessing the area, its natural resources, especially teak wood and tungsten, have attracted the Burmese government. The majority of the Karenni peoples are farmers, growing rice, maize, garlic, wheat, and vegetables. Many of the Karenni also hunt and collect natural products from the forests such as bamboo shoots, beeswax, honey, potatoes, shellac, taro roots, and thanaka (sandalwood bark used as cosmetic powder). The refugee participants in Phoenix, Arizona, told me that agricultural life had been a big part of their upbringing in the Karenni State even though there were also former teachers and soldiers among them. Teh Reh, one of the Karenni male participants, recalled his life in the Karenni State:

> We can plant—cucumbers, vegetables, ANYthing. We plant when I grew up. I like it. I REALLY, REALLY like it. I miss it … We also had cows, chickens, and fish. Sometimes we go to the jungle and go to fight … We have Karenni guns and go to fight with the animals (hunt). Sometimes we get goat … giant goats … wild animals, like wild pigs.

The umbrella term Karenni covers around ten to twelve self-identified subgroups such as Kayah, Kayaw, Geko, Padaung, Pa-O, and 'various Kayan clusters' (Dudley 2010, p. 12; see also Dudley 2000; Ranard and Barron 2007). These subgroups may have different ethnolinguistic backgrounds but they have a collectively strong tie among them (the linguistic diversity will be discussed below). According to Dudley (2010), Karenniness as their shared identity and experience has long been constructed due to their imagined community (Anderson 1991) within the geographical and political border of the Karenni State and increasingly later on as a tie

among refugees from the same state of origin. The Karenni refugees that I worked with, for instance, usually introduced themselves as 'Karenni' due to their place of origin. They also differentiate themselves from the Karen from the Karen state, the Shan from the Shan State, and from the Burmans from the lowlands. Many added specific information such as their village's name, subgroup's names, or the language they used in their village to specify their ethnic affiliation and identify such Karenniness. For example, one participant said, 'I'm a Karenni from Lai-Go village.' Asked what language she spoke, she said that she spoke Kayan (not Kayah or Karenni) as her mother tongue.

Despite their ethnic diversity, the different groups share similar folk wisdoms and philosophy that are rooted in the values of hard work and their agricultural backgrounds. They are resilient and believe that life is difficult and full of hard work. They respect the seniors both in their own family and in other families. Extended family and community ties, including sense of ethnic identity, are at the heart of the Karenni people. Nevertheless, they love to make new friends. Being kind to others is practiced as a good merit. In addition, to the Karenni people, dining is a communal activity and offering food to guests (invited or not), neighbors, and friends is a common practice.

The Karenni annual cultural celebration called Dee Ku or Diy Kuw[5] Festival is one of several cultural events that show the aforementioned collective values. It serves as a symbolic practice of their unity, identity, territory, and shared history. Based on the Karenni's agricultural history, celebrating Dee Ku signifies the Karenni people's success in the past and also brings prosperity and a good harvest. Every year in a Karenni village, a male senior villager uses a chicken bone prophecy to determine the auspicious day on which to celebrate Dee Ku (Dudley 2000). On the Dee Ku Day, the Karenni make a lot of food, especially sticky rice wrapped in green leaves and rice beer, to welcome guests as they are expected to visit as many families and friends as they can (like Thanksgiving in the USA). At their gathering, a senior of the village or community tells a story of the Karenni people, how the Karenni nation was created, and how they settled down at the current location (in the Karenni State of Burma).

[5] Dee Ku means sticky rice.

The story gives the Karenni people a strong sense of their identity and territory. Children and teenagers are trained to sing traditional songs and dance in their traditional costumes for this festival. The day of the festival may be different from village to village. Therefore, villagers from one village travel to a different village to join the festival there.

Their lifestyles have been led by their connection with nature; for example, their belief in spirits requires a variety of rituals and sacrifices (Ranard and Barron 2007). The Karenni people are traditionally animists. However, many have become Buddhists (Buddhism is the national religion of Burma with 90 % of the Buddhist population) and many have converted to become Christians, especially Catholics. But no matter what their faith, the Karenni simultaneously and strongly retain their original animist belief system based on the appeasement of spirits (Ranard and Barron 2007). For example, they continue to value traditional ceremonies and rituals, such as sacrificing chickens during their annual festival. They strongly worship nature, forests, water, lakes, and other natural objects. They believe that a person has a number of souls or kla that should be retained (Ranard and Barron 2007). When a person is ill, it is believed that a kla has fled. Either a good merit should be made or a ceremony should be done to call a kla back to the person. Many also associate the causes of illness with evil spirits (see also, Dudley 2010).

The Karenni people's educational background ranges from no formal schooling to a college degree. The overall literacy rate of the Karenni population is low. The older generations, especially from the remote forested and mountainous area, had limited access to formal schooling and education. During 1970s and 1990s the education system was monitored by the Burmese government and as mentioned earlier Burmese was used as a language of instruction in addition to Karenni. Even so, among all states and divisions in Burma, the Karenni State has the lowest number of schools. Currently, there are three small universities in Loikaw. In the Karenni State, access to healthcare (facilities and equipment) is limited. In spite of its extreme remoteness and rurality compared to other neighboring countries and newly industrialized countries elsewhere, the Karenni refugees that I worked with mentioned every now and then that they loved and missed their Karenni state's natural landscape, peaceful site, and their past agricultural life.

Linguistic Diversity Among the Karenni and Other Ethnic Groups from Burma

A total of 117 out of 118 living languages under Austroasiatic, Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, and Tai-Kadai families are learned and used by the population of Burma as their first language (Ethnologue 2015). However, Burmese is the official and national language spoken as a primary language by 33 million people including the majority Burman and some of the Mon, Shan, and Karen groups (Ethnologue 2015). Burmese is highly valued and taught in elementary and secondary schools throughout the country, especially since the Burmese Way to Socialism. More than 10 million people of ethnic minorities learn Burmese as a second language at school or in their local community and commonly use it as a lingua franca in interethnic communications.

In addition to Burmese, other widely spoken languages among ethnic minority groups in Burma include Shan or Tai (3 million speakers), Karen (2.6 million speakers, especially in the Karen State), Kachin (nearly 1 million speakers), Chin (780,000 speakers), Mon (750,000 speakers), and Karenni or Kayah (590,000 speakers, especially in the Karenni State), in addition to other less commonly spoken languages. Another recognized language is English. Due to British rule, English had been taught in schools and was a primary language of instruction in higher education from the late-nineteenth century to 1964. However, English education was not promoted during the Burmese Way to Socialism although it had been a commonly used language among political figures, social elites, and college graduates. During the past few years, the teaching and learning of English has been encouraged again because the country is gearing up to be a democratic nation and a tourist destination, as well as achieve international recognition. Students from different ethnic backgrounds in Burma are attracted to learning English for further education and job opportunities, especially in the tourism industry (Takahashi 2014).

Under the umbrella term Karenic language there is a wide range of what linguists call languages and dialects. Many say that Karen and Karenni are from the same language family. The use of the two languages can be identified by geographical location. The two languages are mostly learned as a home language on the eastern and southeastern borders of Burma. Hill tribes in the Northern and Northwestern Thailand also use

them. Variations of Karen include S'gaw Karen, B'We Karen, and Pa-O or Black Karen are mainly used by the Karen in the Kayin or Karen State. Others include Pwo, Manumanaw, Mobwa Karen, and Zayein, which have a smaller number of speakers (Ethnologue 2015). On the other hand, Kayah or Karenni, Kayaw, and Kayan or Paduang are primarily spoken in the Karenni State. My Karenni participants have explained to me on occasions that the Karenni language they speak is so different from Karen spoken by the White Karen that they are not intelligible.

The Karenni language is a tonal language and has several spoken dialects. However, it has its own distinct alphabet system called Kayah Li (see Fig. 2.2) invented by Khu Htae Bu Phae in the 1950s. The Karenni written system 'appears to be modelled, to some extent, on scripts such as Thai and Burmese' while the Karen language script appears to be the Mon script (Ager 2016). The writing direction of Karenni is from left to right on a horizontal line. Tones are marked below the consonants. This written system is promoted by KNPP and is commonly used as a language of instruction in the Karenni refugee camps. However, it had

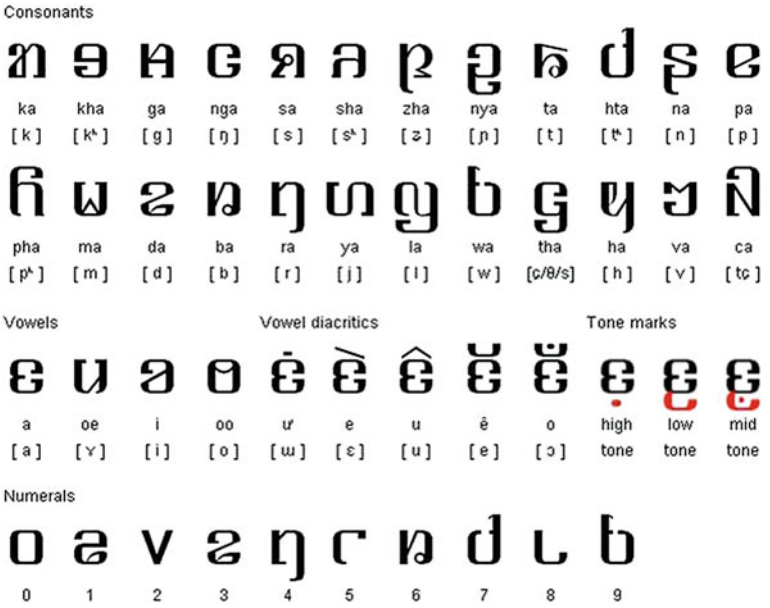


Fig. 2.2 Karenni writing system (Kayah Li). Source: Social Development Center 2015

been banned in schools in the Karenni State in Burma as part of the Burmese Military Regime's policy. According to the state assembly in Loikaw, Kayah Li has been permitted to be taught in school since 2014 (Social Development Center 2015). Saw Reh, a male Karenni teenager whom I met in Phoenix, Arizona, explained to me that the Karenni written language has three forms. These are: (1) Karenni written in Karenni alphabetical system, or Kayah Li); (2) Karenni written in the Burmese alphabetical system; and (3) Karenni written in a romanized (Latin) system. Based on these variations, I have noticed that different generations have different literacy repertoires. Saw Reh said that he learned the Kayah Li alphabetical system in the camp school. Many younger Karenni speaking children I met in Phoenix read Karenni written in the romanized system such as in the religious texts introduced by Western missionaries. The older generations, conversely, are more familiar with the Karenni written in the Burmese alphabetical system. To date, the availability of Karenni written system as a font in computer software is extremely rare. Many Karenni users use Burmese and its written system instead.

Karenni Refugees in Thailand and Their Camp Life

The distinction between migrant workers, illegal immigrants, and refugees from Burma residing in Thailand is not clear cut. According to Trichot (2005), ethnic minorities from Burma became refugees when they fled to Thailand as a result of armed conflicts and human rights abuse. However, hill tribes or upland minorities in the mountains along the northern part of Thailand (Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai and Mae Hong Son provinces) and the Shan State of Burma are allowed to travel back and forth between the two countries since before Burma's Way to Socialism because they and/or their family members have settled in both countries. Several of them have Upland ID cards issued by the Thai government identifying them as people belonging to hill tribes, yet not as Thai citizens, and they can only travel around the upland area. On the other hand, thousands of documented and undocumented immigrants from Burma, especially the Burmans, Mon, and Karen, have resettled in Bangkok's metropolitan area and other big cities (e.g., Chiang Mai) in search of jobs. It is difficult to identify whether

they crossed the border due to persecution in their homeland or solely for better economic opportunities. At any rate, all of the above are historically, politically, and socioculturally marginalized and perceived as 'non-Thai.'

I gathered the majority of my information of the Karenni refugee camp experience by way of interviews and conversations with my Karenni participants who had already left the camps. Other sources are from scholarly works, the United Nation High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) website, and other related websites. Even though Thailand did not adhere to the 1951 Refugee Convention and does not have a formal asylum protocol (UNHCR 2015), the Thai government allows temporary asylum along the border for humanitarian reasons (*Human Right Watch* 2004, p. 10). As of January 2015, Thailand hosts 645,400 people of concern (refugees, asylum seekers, and stateless people). Among these, 72,900 registered refugees from Burma and an estimated 51,500 unregistered asylum seekers or people in refugee-like situations from Burma reside in nine camps along Thailand-Burma physical border (UNHCR 2015).

Refugees from Burma have been one of the most protracted groups in the world, some having lived in Thai refugee camps for 30 years (UNHCR 2015). The reason for the protraction is that the Thai Government has refused to allow the refugees to reside and work outside the camps legally in order to avoid creating a pull factor[6] and none of the refugees are willing to return to Burma. In addition, Thailand would like to maintain a good relationship with Burma because they share natural resources from the Andaman Sea. Thailand's support for the refugees from Burma was viewed as a challenge to the Burmese military government. Nevertheless, the Thai government allows both local and international organizations to assist the refugees. Therefore, the refugees receive aid, food donations, and healthcare from international agencies such as the UNHCR, the International Refugee Committee (IRC), non-profit organizations, and faith-based organizations. Volunteers and social workers around the world have travelled to the camps and gotten involved. In addition, refugees can increase their food supply in the jungle through collecting plants (bamboo shoots and other vegetables) and fruits (papayas and bananas),

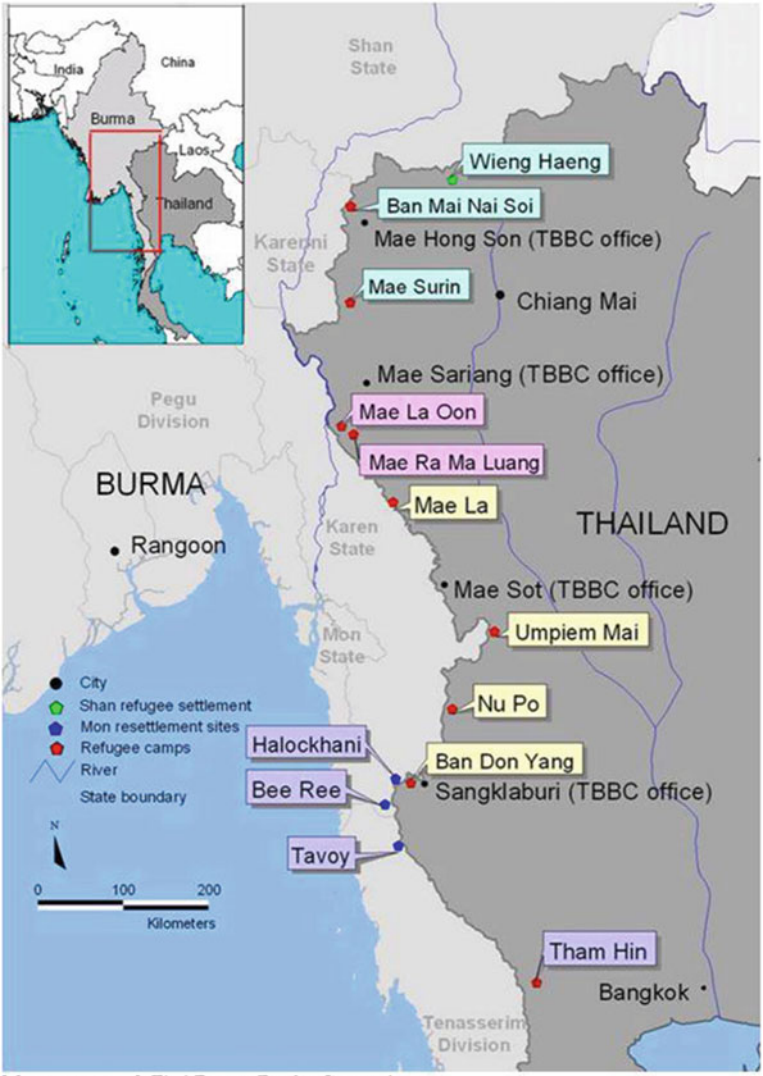
[6] People's decision on migration is influenced by push and pull factors. 'A push factor induces people to move out of their present location whereas a pull factor induces people to move into a new location. To migrate, people view their current place of residence so negatively that they feel pushed away, and another place so attractive that they feel pulled toward it' (Rubenstein 2005, p. 85).

hunting, and fishing. Many have a connection with Thai locals and are allowed to travel to Thailand's local towns to get food and supplies.

One of the first groups crossing the Burma-Thailand border due to persecution and fear of being killed was the Karenni. They fled to the border's remote jungle area and built shelters there in 1988 and 1989 with hopes that this would be temporary and that they would be able to return to their homeland shortly. The camp was moved a few times due to border conflicts. From 1995 to 1996, another influx of refugees from Burma, not limited to the Karenni people, came to live in the jungle area due to the Burmese army's Mass Relocation Program. Thousands of Burma's Internal Displaced Persons (IDPs) could not bear the violence, stress, and life in hiding. They crossed the border to shelter on Thailand's side. Several temporary shelters were built and became big camps, which caught international attention and drew international support. Finally, the UNHCR registered these border crossers, who fled from human rights violations in Burma, as refugees.

There are nine camp systems altogether along the borders (see Fig. 2.3). These camps enabled many more refugees to cross the border for protection and safety. The border outlets for refugees here are different from other geographical pathways that border crossers from Burma use. In particular the Mon and the Burmans cross the border with economic motivations—to find a job in Thailand with a corporation that is willing to register them as documented immigrant workers.

Among the nine refugee camps in Thailand (see Fig. 2.3), the Karenni group has mainly been sheltered in the camp called Ban Mai Nai Soi, in Mae Hong Son province. Its size is 440 Rai or 174 acres (0.7 sq.km). It is located only two kilometers from the Thailand-Burma border and twenty-six kilometers from the town of Mae Hong Son. The camp was first established in the Karenni State of Burma and moved to different locations from 1989 to early 1990s. The camp was established in the current location, Mae Hong Son, Thailand, in 1996 and named after a Thai village, Nai Soi, nearby. Many refugees have relatives and friends in the Thai village. From an interview with Loh Meh, she said that her parents, siblings, and she herself were among those in the first Karenni groups in the area. When the group size doubled (5500 in 1996 and 11,000 in 1997; see also Dudley 1999), local and international news reporters, vol-



Map courtesy of: Thai Burma Border Consortium
http://www.tbbc.org/camps.html

Fig. 2.3 Map of Refugee Camps in Thailand

unteers, and other humanitarian groups came to document, assist, and publish the refugees' stories. Since then, international organizations, including the UN, have joined in to provide food, supplies, healthcare, and the like for the refugees. From 1997 to 2003, there were five Karenni refugee camp divisions under the Ban Mai Nai Soi camp system. Later, these camps were merged into Camp 1 and Camp 2. The system of camps is now home to 10,602 refugees (The Border Consortium 2016).

Geographically, the camp site is in the middle of the rainforest with dirt and muddy roads to get in. Until recently, there has been no phone coverage. Once in a while, the images of the refugee camps along Burma-Thailand borders are featured in the media. For example, Angelina Jolie, a standing and active UNHCR Goodwill Ambassador, visits the camp regularly, drawing international attention and raising awareness of refugees' wellness in the overcrowded and inhumane camp conditions. Many reported that there is a high percentage of depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress among adults and seniors living in the camp. However, based on a survey by the Centers for Disease Control in 2001, the social functioning among the Karenni refugees was relatively high under such circumstances. Strategies the Karenni refugees used to cope with stress and anxiety included talking to family or friends (59 %), sleeping (19 %), thinking about homeland (14 %), visiting the medical clinic (5 %), singing and dancing (2 %), and drinking rice wine (1 %) (Ranard and Barron 2007, p. 47). From conversations with the Karenni refugees in Phoenix, I found that many Karenni refugees did not see the congested housing in the camp as a problem. They sometimes told me in that they had a strong sense of community in the camp, where neighbors helped each other watch their belongings and children. The children often told me that they missed their friends whom they met every day in the camp, went to school with, and played soccer with.

Education in Ban Mai Nai Soi camp is highly valued (Dudley 2010). According to the report (Social Development Center, 2013), Camps 1 and 2 have altogether eleven elementary schools, five middle schools, two high schools, and some post-ten schools. Several adult refugees, who had gained the necessary knowledge to teach the younger generations, became teachers in the camp because individuals from outside had to go through a lengthy process for an approval to the camp in addition to

the camp's isolated location and inaccessibility to transportation (see also Banki 2011). Two refugee adults I met in Arizona said that they taught Karenni and Burmese in the Karenni camp school. Karenni, the native language of most children, was predominantly used as the language of instruction. Many Karenni textbooks are photocopied by the KNPP's Education Department (p. 41). Multilingualism and multilingual education are promoted as well. Stated in the monthly report by Karenni Social Development Center (October, 2013),[7] Karenni, Burmese, and English 'are important' for students to learn (p. 2). These three languages are taught at all levels. The Karenni Literacy Center was founded to prepare and produce learning resources, books, and booklets. But still, the materials are limited and need updating. In addition, education in the camp employs the traditional Karenni way of learning by memorizing. Loh Meh, who went to the camp's school explained her experiences:

> LOTS of Burmese and Karenni lessons, books, and homework. I had to memorize many full pages each night. I just had to read and memorize in my head a lot. In the past, there were no colorful materials. No pictures. They only had chalk and blackboard.

Teh Reh, Loh Meh's husband, explained that a typical school day in the refugee camp included five to six subjects: 'Karenni language, Burmese, mathematics, science, geography, and English.' He added that the teachers were Burmese and Karenni, including teachers of English from New Zealand and other parts of the world. He also mentioned that he was happy that he was always given free pens and paper at school. Some other Karenni explained that they sometimes had instructors who were Thai volunteers and Thai monks. However, the Thai volunteers did not stay long in the camps because of their fear of Burmese military attacks, which happened every now and then.

Although life in the camp meant no connection to agricultural production the Karenni refugees continued to celebrate their Dee Ku Festival. Dudley (2000), who had stayed in the Karenni camp from 1996 to 1998, reported that KNPP paid for and distributed sacks of rice carried on all available trucks from Mae Hong Son market a week before the festival.

[7] https://sdcthailand.files.wordpress.com/2014/11/sdc-publication-november-14-report.pdf.

Then, the Karenni busied themselves making beer and sticky rice wraps for their big day. On the festival day, stories were told. Songs were sung. Traditional music was played and dances were practiced. Dudley concluded that the Karenni enjoyed the festival in the way that they, as farmers (rather than refugees), had gathered for foods, drinks, and good company.

After having stayed in the camps in Thailand for a number of years, children and adult refugees have learned Burmese (the official language of Burma), English, and sometimes Thai in the camps' schools (Ranard and Barron 2007; UNHCR 2009). Additionally, interethnic communication commonly found in the camps gives the camp residents an opportunity to learn other ethnic languages and become multilingual. Several Karenni refugees told me that they were able to carry conversations in Karen and Shan learned from friends and neighbors.

Since these refugees were not allowed to live outside the camps and they were not safe to return to Burma, their frustration was very high (UNHCR 2009). A resettlement plan in a third host country for the refugees' better life and opportunity has been introduced and practiced as an alternative since 2005. The number of registered refugees in all nine camps was brought down by more than 10,800 people in 2010. Major resettlement countries that accept refugees from these camps are Australia, Canada, and the USA, followed by Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden.

Karenni Refugees in the USA

For the Karenni refugees, the process of application to relocate to the USA is complicated and the whole process may take a few years. The U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' (USCIS) field office and NGO organizations located in or near the camps help refugees with filing the application and documentation. The majority of applicants apply for themselves as well as their immediate family members. Applicants must receive a referral to the US Refugee Admissions Program (USRAP) for consideration as a refugee. Mostly, the referral is completed by UNHCR, who initially determines their refugee status. After the initial application is complete, applicants are interviewed by USCIS, who determines if they are eligible and meet the criteria to be resettled in the USA (see also Chap. 1 and USCIS 2015).

After approval, the Department of State determines the destination of refugees and their families. The decision as to where the refugees will be located in the USA depends on many factors, especially the readiness of the host state and city in terms of school system and educational support, employment or job placement, healthcare, funding and sponsors, support networks, and available housing. If the refugees inform the officers during their application that they have family members and relatives in a specific city, there is a possibility that they will be assigned to be located close to their families. Before their travel, a medical examination, cultural orientation, and support with the travel plan are provided (USCIS 2015). Therefore, Karenni refugees' first exposure to the US culture and lifestyle may start in the refugee camps when resettlement agencies, volunteers from faith-based organizations, local sponsors, and other local non-profit organizations help them prepare for adjustment and resettlement.

Burma, followed by Iraq, ranked the top country of origin of refugees to the USA in 2015. As of July 1, 2015, 146,037 refugees from Burma went directly from nine of Thailand's refugee camps to resettle in major US cities (BACI 2016). This was the biggest wave of Southeast Asian refugees to the USA since the Fall of Saigon in the 1970s. Texas, California, and New York are the top three states receiving refugees from Burma.

In Arizona, more than 4100 refugees from Burma have been resettled since 2001, with the majority of refugees from Burma arrived during 2007–2012. During my fieldwork there were about 100 Karenni families, among other groups from Burma such as the Burmans, the Karen, the Shan, and the Chin, residing in Phoenix, Arizona. The number may slightly fluctuate as some refugees reported their country of origin as Thailand. For instance, many Karenni children introduce themselves, 'I'm from Thailand,' because they were born in the refugee camps on the Thailand's soil and their birth certificate identifies their birth place as Thailand while their nationality indicates Burmese. However, the participants often give more details. For example, Toh Reh, a 9-year-old boy, who was born in the refugee camp said, 'But, we are Karenni. We are not Burmese.' The Karenni people's presence in Arizona was often a surprise to the locals, educators, service providers, and even law enforcement officers because the Karenni are a new and non-traditional group in the area. During the time that I was helping the Karenni families to settle in,

teachers at the children's school and police officers in the public space asked me about the Karenni: who they were, what language they spoke, and how they came to the USA.

During the resettlement, refugees are assisted by Arizona Refugee Resettlement Program (RRP) under Arizona's Department of Economic Security (DES) that is fully funded by Department of Health and Human Services. For the first few months (up to 6 months), the refugees in Arizona were officially assisted by DES with a housing allowance and food stamps. However, the newly arrived refugees are encouraged to achieve 'economic self-sufficiency as quickly as possible after their arrival in the United States' (Arizona's DES 2015). Case Management and Employment Services, Medical Assistance, and Area Agency on Aging are among the fundamental aids provided to refugees. Existing and emerging local NGOs, faith-based organizations, and volunteers also help with the resettlement and transition. Many available programs have been created by the city and local agencies, for example, prenatal classes at a hospital, bus commuting and traffic classes, and English as a second language (ESL) programs for refugee adults.

The refugee resettlement agencies often place the Karenni families in assigned housing at the very beginning. The factors of a chosen location are agreement with the apartment complex, price, distance to school, and distance to stores and service providers. Access to public transportation is also crucial because many Karenni refugees cannot drive and are not familiar with laws and regulations, traffic, and directions. However, after a few months in their first apartment, many refugees want to move out. From my conversation with teachers and community volunteers, the refugees are transient during their first year of resettlement because they tend to move to be close to their friends, extended family members, and support networks in a different part of the city. Karenni and other groups from Burma in Phoenix, for example, predominantly live in an ethnic-enclave neighborhood, where housing is more affordable than the other parts of the city. Job opportunity is another motivation to move, even to a different city within the same state, to another state, or to a different region of the country.

Due to their previous camp life in a restricted environment, including agricultural backgrounds that are dissimilar to the host community, Karenni refugees and other refugee groups from Burma have struggled with the urban lifestyle of Phoenix, Arizona. In addition, many laws, rules, and regulations do not work well with their cultural backgrounds.

For example, many Karenni families hold on to their traditional background by living with their extended family in a small apartment unit despite the fact that many apartments allow two people per one-bedroom unit. Another reason for this is that they cannot afford a bigger unit to fit their family size. Luckily, many landlords understand the situation and seem to be less restrictive about the rules. Instead of being evicted, one Karenni family of five that I know arranged with their apartment manager to move from a two-bedroom apartment to a one-bedroom unit within the same complex because the family could not afford the bigger one.

Although refugees are highly motivated to be successful in their new host country, the majority of Karenni families live below the poverty line because their educational backgrounds, language proficiency, and previous professional trainings earn them a scanty income in the new urbanized and industrialized environment. Usually, Karenni male adults are the breadwinner but they are only qualified for entry-level jobs such as dishwashing, cleaning, and lawn care. They are usually introduced to these jobs by the resettlement agencies, volunteers, and Karenni networks in town. The majority of Karenni women are homemakers taking care of young children and grandparents, and responsible for household chores. In addition to school work, female youth are expected to help their mothers take care of their younger siblings after school. Female Karenni tend to get married early not only because of their tradition but also for the economic support required of them in the USA.

Most Karenni women I met told me that they wanted to have a job to help their family if they had a good opportunity. However, many of them believed that their lack of English proficiency would prevent them from so doing. Additionally they would like to take care of their young children themselves. Doing errands outside the apartment complex was a challenge for many Karenni women because they were frightened of getting lost due to their unfamiliarity with the city, inability to read signs, and, what they always said, 'No English.' It is rare that a Karenni woman learns to drive and work outside the home.[8] Grocery shopping was usually within walking distance. When they needed to go for grocery shopping farther away, they gathered as a group for a car-share with a friend

[8] For this reason, in many US cities, non-profit organizations have found a solution by jobs using the Karenni women's (and other groups from Burma) traditional knowledge of arts and crafts such as weaving clothes and scarves that they can do at home.

who had more experience driving in the USA. One of the popular Asian markets in Phoenix offered a shuttle/van service upon request.

Similarly Pederson (2008) has observed that the exile groups or those ethnic minorities that have resettled outside Burma have developed and strengthened in the USA, Europe and elsewhere. They maintain a solid connection with friends and relatives in the host community and elsewhere. In Phoenix, Arizona, the Karenni have founded organizations and support networks within the Karenni group (e.g., Arizona Karenni Social Community) and among many groups from Burma (e.g., Arizona Burma Ethnic Based Community Organization or AZ-BEBCO). Many former senior leaders and soldiers, who fought during the war with the Burmese military, are highly respected and serve as consultants. Webpages on social media have been created to exchange news and information (e.g., Karenni Social Development Center, Shadow Journal).

The Karenni Dee Ku Festival is held annually by the Karenni in the USA—I attended their festival in 2010 and 2011 in Phoenix, Arizona. The community usually prepares for the festival about a month before the set date. The Karenni children, both boys and girls, were guided by some adult artists to sing and dance for their big day's performances. On the Dee Ku Day, food was prepared at the apartment complex. Most of the Karenni residents wore their traditional outfits and friends and family visits were done during the day. Later in the afternoon, they all walked and carried food to the cafeteria of a local nearby school that had agreed to host the party for them. The celebration continued with dining, performances, storytelling (the Karenni history), and socializing. The festival is practiced and observed in many places outside the Karenni State in recognition of the Karenni people's place of origin. After my stay in Phoenix, Arizona, I moved on to another city. Nevertheless, the Karenni friends keep in touch with me and send me an invitation to their Dee Ku Festival every year by using their online Facebook group page and texting.

Education in Arizona

Most Karenni parents enlisted their families to move out of the refugee camps for their children's education (more in Chap. 3). In the USA, children with refugee status, aged 5–18 years, are eligible to receive free

education from public schools. The office of Refugee Resettlement 'established Refugee Children School Impact Grant (RCSIG) that provides for some of the costs of educating refugee children incurred by local school districts in which significant numbers of refugee children reside. School districts use the grant to fund activities that will lead to the effective integration and education of refugee children.' The grant is allocated to ensure that all refugee students have access to qualified teachers and other well-prepared support staff to meet their diverse needs.

Many schools accepting refugee children are also eligible to receive Title III—also known as the *English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act*—which provides funds to eligible schools that have a large body of English Language Learners (ELLs), including immigrant children and youths, to implement language instruction and educational programs designed to help LEP students achieve good academic standards. In Arizona, where Proposition 203, *English for the Children*, was passed in 2000, 'all schools (public and charter) implement policies that segregate' ELLs from the English-proficient students (Fredricks and Warriner 2016); the English instruction for these ELLs is state-mandated. The Arizona English Language Learner Assessment (AZELLA), a standards-based assessment that meets both state and federal requirements to measure students' English language proficiency, is used for assessment and placement purposes. Students who have been identified as ELLs on the Home Language Survey take the AZELLA test. Their scores determine appropriate placement or level for instruction in the English Language Development (ELD) block for four hours a day, locally called the 'English four-hour block.' ELLs are drilled on vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammar in the ELD program daily and are reassessed by AZELLA annually until they achieve 'proficient' level, which is a way out to a mainstream classroom. Students with a proficient score are monitored for 2 years to ensure success after transfer (Arizona Department of Education 2015).

In spite of being newcomers and ELLs, newly arrived refugee students are required to take Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards, or AIMS, like mainstream students. AIMS is a standardized test administered by the State of Arizona that includes four content areas: writing, reading, mathematics, and science. The reading and mathematics are administered in all grades. To graduate from an Arizona public high school, a student must meet the AIMS High School Graduation Requirements by passing

all four content areas. High school students have multiple opportunities to take and pass these tests that occur once a year. Karenni refugee students have mixed feelings about the tests. Some are discouraged by their low test scores because their limited English proficiency leads to limited understanding of the content in all subjects. Some are highly motivated and want to graduate. All of these requirements seem to be massive for the newly arrived refugee students, who have had interrupted schooling or no formal schooling experiences at all. Not to mention that the educational 'resources' as defined by the US school system such as books at home, parents' time and involvement, and funds for extracurricular activities such as sports and educational trips, are not available to these families, as they live below the poverty line and have very scarce resources.

Support for adult refugees' continuing education comes from local institutions (schools, community colleges), local sponsors, non-profit organizations, faith-based organizations, and the IRC, which provides free or affordable ESL classes. Some organization-based volunteers and private volunteers are also found teaching English and guiding the newcomers at the apartment complex. While ESL classes are highly valued and considered an urgent need in the USA, I found vocational training to be mandatory as well so that the newcomers can become qualified for skilled jobs and make a career.

Summary

In this chapter, I reviewed the conflicts in Burma that caused the forced migration of the Karenni people. I described the Karenni people's history, language, culture, and their life trajectories in the Karenni State and in Thailand, including an overview of the Karenni's situation in the USA, particularly in Phoenix, Arizona, my main research site. Throughout their life trajectories, the Karenni people are recurrently minoritized and marginalized, in their homeland, Thailand, and in the USA. Their minoritized language, Karenni, has been the cause of struggle since they were in Burma, where Burmese was the official and national language.

At the crossroads of 'looking back' and 'moving forward,' the Karenni people in the USA are currently adjusting to their resettlement, getting education, working, and becoming self-sufficient. The support they have

received from the state, local levels, and ethnic support networks are lined up, especially the path to acquire English. However, is the help and support they receive effective? Are the Karenni newcomers' needs, the state's expectations, and the public's desires regarding these newcomers aiming at the same result? What kind of help do they actually need? What do the Karenni families do to cope with the circumstances? Will the Karenni newcomers become self-sufficient and successful by being proficient in English? Where's the place for their previously learned languages and skill sets? These questions are at the heart of this study and I explore and describe them in the following chapters.

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3

The Three Families

My work started out with focusing on only one family, the first Karenni family I have ever known in my life. However, in the process of conceptualizing transnationalism and the relationship between migration, language learning, and literacy practices, the ties and communal practices among individuals and their family members, friends, neighbors, and Karenni refugees' transnational community was so profound that I could not leave them out. I finally documented the stories of three Karenni families, a total of 16 individuals. In this chapter, I introduce the families, my multiple roles on the research site, and how I worked with them. I provide the families' histories, personal stories, and daily life and circumstances in Arizona, USA. My goal is to 'craft a profile' (Seidman 2006, p. 128) of the participant families and to explore the details of their life trajectories.

As the President of Thai Student Organization in Phoenix, Arizona, in 2009, I received an email from a volunteer working for a refugee resettlement organization. In the email, she hoped to recruit more volunteers and explained,

> I work to teach them English and help them get started in Arizona. These refugees speak a variety of tribal languages, but also some Burmese, Lao

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> and Thai. Many of the families are very homesick. Just having someone to talk to them in their native language and encourage them would be a big help … some of the teenagers—they speak Thai very well but they are having difficulty learning English. (E-mail conversation, September 16, 2009)

She also added that although she had taught English in Thailand before, she only knew a few words in Thai. And, often, when she spoke to the Karenni refugees in English, she did not know whether the refugees understood what she said. Email exchanges with her opened my eyes. I did not realize that my country of origin, Thailand, has received refugees from Burma for at least the past 20 years along the border and that thousands of them were resettling in the USA. I also saw commonalities between me and the refugees. As an international student from Thailand who at the time had lived in the USA for 7 years, I understood the struggles faced by the newly arrived refugees, who shared Southeast Asian cultural backgrounds with me. I believed that working with them was an undeniable opportunity to use my hard-earned experience and knowledge to assist them in navigating their new host community and country.

From First Encounters to Researcher's Multiple Roles

My first introduction to the first family was through the volunteer who emailed me. The Karenni family consisted of two parents and three children. We met at their small apartment unit, one mile away from the heart of downtown Phoenix. The family was surprised that I looked like them and could speak Thai, which was one of the languages spoken by the father and the daughter of the family (see Teh Reh's family below). They were excited to learn more about my experiences living in the USA, learning English, and becoming a college student while sharing a similar Southeast Asian background as theirs. They expressed their desire to know how to become like me, whom they described and perceived as 'educated' and 'having no problems.' Then we discussed about our availability for home visits and what kind of assistance they needed.

My home visits started a week after the first meeting. I could fulfill their needs in English language learning by holding an English session for the whole family. Both parents and children sat with me during the English session. We would pick a topic of the week, for example, colors, days, fruits. Later, I brought real foods such as fruits and vegetables to them after I learned that they were not comfortable buying some items at the store because they did not know what they tasted like. For example, during an English lesson on colors, I showed pictures of different fruits and vegetables so that I could point out both colors and words for those fruits and vegetables. There was a picture of a yellow lemon. I showed it to them and said, 'It's yellow. And, this is a yellow lemon.' Soon after, I was going to show another picture. But, the mother of the family was still curious. She asked, 'Is it sweet?' I was surprised, then, realized that I made an unforgivable assumption that they knew what a lemon was. I, then, put more attempt to teach English with additional information about life in the USA.

Apart from English language learning, the family also needed assistance with everyday living such as translating their mail and bills, identifying items with labels in English, calling service providers (e.g., auto insurance company, internet carrier, truck rental), giving them a ride to a doctor clinic, church, and a grocery store, and helping with the children's homework. Having a relatively similar custom of offering food to guests (whether or not invited and acquainted) and dining as a communal activity and as a bridge for socialization and casual conversation, the family regularly offered me food. We often dined together and learned more about each other's experiences, movements, problems, and current situations. We also talked about fairly complicated issues (e.g., future plans, politics, and religion), and attended community meetings, festivals, and events together.

After a few months of regular visits, my roles multiplied as I became their teacher, family mentor, and friend. I prioritized my time with them and was also open to urgent requests. Socializing with the family regularly, I was introduced to the network of refugees from Burma along the way. Through this network, I recruited another two families to the study. I explained to the families that I was happy to continue working with them as their tutor and family mentor whether or not they withdrew

themselves from the study. The three families were Teh Reh's family, Ka Paw's family, and Nway Meh's family. I identify each family by using the name of the family's leading parent because the use of last names or surnames is not common in Karenni tradition. The names of the Karenni normally consist of two or three syllables. However, the syllables are written and spelled out as separate words. For example, Toh Reh is the name of a boy. Both portions, Toh and Reh, are combined and equated to the boy's first name. Neither part of the name indicates his last name or family name. With the name Toh Reh, a Westerner may assume that Toh is a first name and Reh is a last name. In fact, many Karenni males have 'Reh' as the morpheme 'Reh' in Teh Reh, Saw Reh, and Eh Reh indicates that the person is male. On the other hand, many Karenni female names have 'Meh,' which signals female, as in Boe Meh, Hla Meh, and See Meh. Often, among close friends and relatives, only the first syllable is used to address a person, such as, 'Boe' instead of 'Boe Meh.'

In spite of the multiple roles in the recently arrived refugee community, I was known as 'teacher' followed by my nickname Oui ('Teacher Oui'), and often called 'sa-ra-mo,' which means teacher in Karenni. In US culture, addressing or calling someone who teaches and acts as a mentor 'teacher' instead of 'Miss_' and 'Mr_' seems distant and even rude (LeBeau 2009). However, in this research context (as in many Asian cultures, including Thai and Karenni cultures), addressing or calling someone 'teacher' indicates politeness, trust, and great respect. I happily accepted the title and considered the term a great honor while working with them.

The three families had similar experiences of movement from the Karenni State to the Thai-Burma border and finally to the USA, as mentioned in the overview of the Karenni circumstances in Chap. 2. In the following, I describe the research site, methods, each family's history, lived experiences, challenges, and circumstances to help us understand their unique linguistic and cultural resources (Moll et al. 1992; Pahl 2004) that may be less-commonly known by the public discourse in general and the US locals in particular. The three families arrived in the USA at different times in 2009 with support from a faith-based refugee resettlement agency and International Rescue Committee (IRC) that provided services in Thailand's refugee camps and in the USA. At one point in 2010, they

became neighbors living in the apartment complex called La Frontera (pseudonym) that became my research site. Both adults and children of these three families were close friends, always socializing with one another. The site was three miles from the center of Phoenix, Arizona. It was filled with recently arrived immigrants and refugees from many parts of the world such as from the Middle Eastern countries, African countries, and Mexico. There were about twenty Karenni families, among other ethnic minorities from Burma. The families lived here because the rent was very affordable for the recently arrived families, who were still struggling economically. The flat-rate rent at La Frontera included water and electricity, which was an excellent deal in Phoenix, Arizona, which has harsh summer months when the temperature can climb up to 115–120 Fahrenheit. The majority of the Karenni families had at least two school-aged children and lived below the poverty line, and were eligible for food stamps or a voucher from the Department of Economic Security that they exchanged for food. The children were also eligible for free school lunch.

La Frontera was surrounded by a residential area and other apartment complexes. An elementary school, where most of the K-8 refugee children from this complex went, was within walking distance. From the apartment complex, it was convenient to walk to a big grocery store (three blocks away), a gas station, a convenience store, and some fast-food restaurants. The complex of La Frontera itself consists of ten two-story apartment buildings. There were roofed parking lots in front of each building. The residents could walk throughout the complex using the sidewalk paved along the apartment building lines. There were two swimming pools. One pool was in the front of the property manager's office, where the laundry room and mailroom were located. The other swimming pool was in the back corner of the complex near a sand pit, playground, swings, and slides. There was also a sizable field, where children played soccer or flew kites.

La Frontera appeared similar to any US urban neighborhood but it is crucial to emphasize that the residents were underprivileged in terms of socioeconomic resources and opportunities. The neighborhood had a high crime rate and safety concerns. I often saw a police officer interrogating the residents in the apartment complex during my weekly visits.

Crimes and safety issues in the neighborhood that were related by the residents included a Nepali teenager drowning in the apartment's swimming pool, a Karenni wife abused by her husband, a newly arrived refugee hit and killed by a car, a suicide, and a female Karenni killed by her boyfriend.

Despite the issues, the Karenni families felt it was good to live here due to their own support network. Many Karenni refugees agreed that the way they lived at La Frontera was uncannily similar to how they lived in the refugee camp, where adults and children comfortably and freely spent time with each other. One might turn on the radio very loud, while elsewhere a group of teenagers played instruments and sang, or a group of children played noisily but no one felt compelled to intervene. The refugee parents and children from both Burma and Thailand felt at ease to make friends and socialize with each other because they shared similar languages, cultures, and experiences. They talked with each other, exchanged goods and foods, and left their doors unlocked during the day. As the parents knew each other and were comfortable with their children playing with neighboring children without adult supervision, it was common to see groups of children spending time around the apartment complex, in the parking lot, at the playground, and in front of an apartment unit.

Multiple Methods

My multiple roles in the Karenni community allowed me to employ multiple qualitative methods. As a friend of the Karenni families, I socialized and talked about each person's personal interests, feeling, and challenges. Language socialization and literacy as a social practice framework guided me to observe the participants' language use, discursive strategies, modes, and communicative goals. As a family mentor, I learned about their daily obstacles through the kind of assistance they needed and about their resources through observation and artefact collections. As a tutor and ESL teacher, I was able to identify the participants' prior knowledge and linguistic repertoires. And, as a researcher, I arranged formal interviews of the participants.

Participant Observation

To produce an inventory of language repertoires and accumulated literacies, and 'to capture' the world of the three refugee families, I observed the participants in their homes and neighborhood (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988, p. 224). These served as sites for language socialization, family language practice, and out-of-school literacy practices (see also Moje 2004). In three homes, I examined their unique linguistic strategies, literacy practices, and the way in which they performed a range of identities (Moje and Luke 2009; Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988).

I observed texts delivered in multiple modes that include our complex semiotic system: written and oral texts, digital texts and graphics, pictures, signs, sounds, and symbols that the families drew on, utilized, and encountered in their everyday living. The written texts were usually on displays in the forms of posters and books. They also appeared in documents and letters, and on product labels the participants encountered daily. I identified the languages of the texts while observing the participants' experiences of reading, interpreting, and interacting with such texts. The observations provided me with more information as to which language they used for reading and writing and for what purpose.

Collection of Artifacts

Bartlett and Holland (2002) argue that Bourdieu's 'habitus' or the embodiment of cultural capital is limited by the underplaying role of 'culturally produced narratives, images and other artefacts in modifying habitus' (p. 12). Therefore, I explored and examined artifacts as evidence of literacy practices and ideologies of language in the households. Literacy materials and print artifacts often serve strategic functions and as social resources (Levine 1982). These observable artifacts include but are not limited to books, religious texts, documents, multilingual texts in the forms of decorations, food/product brands, calendars, mails, magazines, posters, and texts and notes written by the participants. In addition to the traditional texts, data from digital gadgets that included screens of cell phones, laptops, TV and videogames, and CDs/DVDs, were collected.

Both the children and the parents were encouraged to describe these artifacts, including their roles and functionality as literacy and social resources (see also Pahl and Rowsell 2010). Second, I took pictures of the scenes/settings in which both individual activities (doing homework, internet surfing, reading, talking on the phone) and communal activities (dining, family conversations, watching TV, visits) commonly took place within living and dining spaces.

Through observation, I paid attention to the role of these texts to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the families used artifacts in their daily lives and how the artifacts were utilized and culminated into the families' *accumulated literacies*. Such literacy resources presented multiple channels, various modes of communication, and a variety of semiotic systems (García et al. 2006) in the participants' everyday social and cultural circumstances (Taylor and Dorsey-Gains 1988).

Interviews

Using interviews as a way of 'understanding the lived experiences of other people and the meaning they make of that experience' (Seidman 2006, p. 9), I employed the three-interview series as a framework for formal interview sessions. Each interview was used as a check-in and a follow-up. During the first interview, I endeavored to establish a *focused lived history*. According to the definition of refugees, refugees are created when they are forced to leave their homeland (Malkki 1995; Ong 1999). Stein (1981) proposed that the refugees' perception of threats, decision to flee, and the stage of dangerous flight, camp lives, and the processes of resettlement are included as refugee experiences. Although I have researched the historical accounts of refugees from Burma, the first interview contained questions about their movement, reasons for the movement, and challenges in their resettlement in order to understand their refugee experiences. In addition, the first interview also focused on their family and educational backgrounds and their language repertoires since leaving their homelands.

The second interview, which focused on the *details* of experiences, served as a way to begin creating an inventory of the participants' daily activities, literacy practices, and what mode and language was used in

those practices. The second interview took place after I had observed the participants and taken notes about their activities in the households and neighborhood and wanted to gain more understanding about those practices. The third interview, conducted 1 month after the second interview, provided an opportunity for *reflection on meaning*. I was able to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' thoughts and feelings concerning their particular language use and literacy practices and the factors of how and why they used a certain language, performed a certain practice, or chose a certain mode to complete their tasks.

Group interviews were conducted more often than one-to-one interviews. Because the research site was in the participants' households where all of the family members, both adults and children, shared the space, group interviews were more manageable onsite. From group interviews, I obtained even more information, especially about the families' history, in part because an interpreter, often a family member or a friend of the interviewee, was available (discussed below). In addition, interviewing child participants was more successful when they were accompanied by other children (I also explain about working with children below).

In addition to formally recorded interviews, I engaged in conversations with family members about the more general topics and discussions of everyday life (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988, p. 226). Informal conversations provided another way to check in with the families' experiences on a daily basis while increasing trust and improving the relationship between the participants and me. For example, because the family wanted to discuss their children's performance in school, I was able to make recommendations that would help the family in ways that also gave me a better understanding of the relationship between home-based literacies, school-based literacies, and transnational literacies. During these conversations, children and adults asked me about my personal experiences and we discussed family, school, work, future plans, and preferences about food, and the challenges of everyday life. At certain points, our roles reversed when I encouraged them to ask me questions about my life experiences. I found it perfectly acceptable as this was a natural dialogue, not a scripted scene that contributed to building our 'collaborative venture' (Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines 1988, p. 228).

Interpreters and Translations

While I have some shared experiences with my participants, who had lived in Thailand for at least 15 years, we did not speak the same primary language. Some of them were not able to speak Thai or English and others were uncomfortable using a language other than their primary language in the interviews. This was sometimes quite difficult as there were a limited number of professional interpreters, who understood both Karenni and English or Karenni and Thai. When interviewing a Karenni speaker, an interpreter who could translate Karenni-Thai or Karenni-English was required. Also, when interviewing a Burmese speaker, an interpreter who could translate Burmese-Thai or Burmese-English was employed. As a result of these challenges, participants' multilingual repertoires helped me with data collection by being a language and culture broker (Duran Forthcoming). They not only translated the verbal language but also explained the cultural meanings attached to words, explained the sociolinguistic norms, and sometimes came from the participants' very own community or family (Liamputtong 2010). As all of the three participant families were close friends and neighbors and they lived in the refugee community originally from Burma, participants across families or their neighbors also served as my interpreters depending on their availability. With interpreters from inside the community, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of their sociocultural backgrounds, transnational support networks, and how we, multilingual individuals, worked together to overcome language barriers by using linguistic resources in our very own community. The need for and limited availability of interpreters also explains why I conducted more group interviews than one-to-one interviews in this study.

Collecting Data from Children

I had experienced firsthand that 'children know how to read what adults are looking for and give answers adults expect' (Orellana 2009, p. 135). In addition, when a series of questions bored them their answers became shorter and shorter. One of the Karenni boys in the study, for example, became quiet and did not want to answer even a direct, yet simple, ques-

tion such as 'What class do you like?' or 'Do you like to do homework?' The other issue I found was that one of the younger participants talked less and was not comfortable when he was interviewed while his parents were around. Conversely, the children wanted to be around and to join in when the parents were the interviewees. To solve these problems and to learn more about each child, I asked for information from people around them such as teachers, parents, siblings, and friends. Even though asking around provided me secondhand stories, I verified the information by conducting participant observation.

According to Orellana (2009), children open up most when they are not responding to direct questions. Therefore, I needed to be ready to listen to them 'when they initiated conversation—often in the context of doing things together' (p. 135). I found that they responded most when I asked about what they were doing at the moment and let them lead the conversation. Interacting with the children in this way with their concentration on an interest of theirs such as 'playing' (Bauer and Mkhize 2012), a conversation could be carried out easily and naturally. I did all of these listening experiments and lessons by hanging out and playing with the children and observing them in 'a variety of contexts, situations, activities, and relationships' (Orellana 2009, pp. 135–136). Often, I observed their activities quietly as an outsider, not interacting with them while taking field notes. With careful listening and observation of how they reacted to a situation or to other people, I learned great deal about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

Using an interpreter did not work well with the children because they did not understand the whole process of the interpreter's role and involvement. As a result, young children and I used English, our second language as a lingua franca. My understanding of how to approach them with the English language started by being their teacher of English and helping them with homework by using English as the medium of instruction. Consequently, they perceived me as an English speaker and that led me to join them in other activities by using English. Therefore, without a formal interpreter or series of questions, interviews with the younger children were often carried out as a group conversation, which established a more comfortable and authentic interaction and relationship.

Analysis and Interpretation

My goal for data analysis was to produce a systematic narrative description by looking for patterns, repetitions, and themes. After interviewing, the interview data was transcribed. By analyzing data from observations, interviews, and artifacts, the current study investigates the beliefs regarding language among Karenni refugees living in the USA and sheds light on the experiences of an increasing number of refugees. The interview transcriptions were triangulated (Charmaz 2006) with field notes taken during observations and artifacts such as photos and documents that were cataloged in a file. I sorted each file to allocate data for each family to help me analyze the case, cross-case studies, and generational differences between the participants.

To gain an emic understanding and to sustain the inductive, data-driven nature of my investigation (Duff 2008b), my theorizing process was grounded in (and influenced by) processes of data analysis and interpretation. Three sets of coding were generated. With the interview data (Corbin and Strauss 2008), *open coding* was used to conceptually develop the analysis of the content (Corbin and Strauss 1998) by identifying and sorting the topics and themes of texts. 'During the open coding, data are broken down into discrete parts … events, happenings, objects and actions/interactions that are found to be conceptually similar in nature or related in meaning are grouped under categories' (Corbin and Strauss 1998, p. 102) or names (examples of open categories are 'future plan' and 'problems').

After reviewing the data for the *open coding*, I used *focused coding* to build, clarify, and elaborate concepts (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006) and to specify particular themes of the interview data that potentially answer my questions about literacy practices, language and mode use, and transnational linkages. Finally, *context coding* (Corbin and Strauss 2008) was used to identify and analyze the focus of the analysis, what the activity of interest was, when and where this activity occurred, and the consequences that emerged as a result of such activities and engagements. This analysis highlighted the frequency, duration, space, and circumstances of the literacy practices at hand. Context coding is one way to understand the ideological components of literacy events and practices as well as the situated identities of the participants (Gee 2005).

In the following, I present each family's backgrounds, stories, and their current circumstances in the USA as a foundation for the following chapters.

Teh Reh's Family: 'We Come Here for Our Children's Education'

Teh Reh's family arrived in the USA on February 28, 2009. The family consists of five family members: two parents in their thirties, Teh Reh and Loh Meh; a daughter, See Meh; and twin sons, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee. When See Meh turned fourteen and Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee were five, Teh Reh and Loh Meh decided to relocate to the USA for better opportunities, but mostly for their children as Teh Reh and Loh Meh often told me, 'We come here (the USA) for our children. We come here for our children's education.' When I met them in September 2009, the previous volunteer told me that the family 'hasn't been fortunate so far.'

Within the first 2 years of the resettlement, Teh Reh's family had lived in three different apartment units. Their very first housing in Phoenix was a two-bedroom apartment in the Villa Bonita Apartment Homes (pseudonym), where the majority of the residents were immigrants and refugees. Among all of the residents, only two families, Teh Reh's family and another family, were originally from Burma. Their apartment was within one mile of the children's schools and within walking distance of a grocery store. During their first 6 months in the USA Teh Reh's family received housing funds from the government so they did not have difficulty paying the rent. However, after this initial 6-month period, the family was required to pay their own rent. The housing funds stopped and the resettlement agency tried 'to get the families self-sufficient.' The circumstances resulted in the family's financial hardship. The family requested more financial support but the funding was insufficient. In November 2009, all five family members had to move to a smaller living unit, a one-bedroom apartment within the Villa Bonita Apartment Homes, to fit their budget. In this unit, two beds were set up in the bedroom while the living room served as a communal living space during the day and another bedroom at night. In December 2009, Teh Reh's

family was the only family originally from Burma living at Villa Bonita because the other family from Burma moved to Tucson. During this time, the other residents were from the Middle East, Mexico, and Latin America. Teh Reh's children were usually inside the house after school. They played outside their unit only when accompanied by an older family member.

In December 2010, Teh Reh's family moved to the new apartment complex, La Frontera, where they paid the same amount of rent for a larger two-bedroom apartment. The new complex was seven miles away from Villa Bonita. Teh Reh explained that he moved to be closer to the Karenni refugee community; there were more than twenty Karenni families in addition to other immigrants and refugees that lived at La Frontera. After the move, the parents did not change jobs, but all three children had to enroll in a new school, one which served the majority of refugee children in the Phoenix area. Their movement, even within the same city, reshaped the way they socialized, used languages, and engaged in varied literacy practices with other refugees because they were exposed to more people from their homeland.

Teh Reh

Teh Reh was 33 years old when I first met him. He was born in 'the Karennni State, or the Kayah State,' which he called 'my home country.' Karenni is his native language.

Although he and his parents enjoyed living in their homeland as farmers, they moved to Thailand when he was 12 years old. Teh Reh explained that they had to leave their home because there were 'LOTS of problems' there. He added that the country had 'poor government … and then, Burmese and Karenni soldiers fighting.'

Teh Reh, his parents, and siblings crossed the border into Thailand and found their asylum at the Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp. In the refugee camp, many refugees had already been resettled and some schools had been built. Teh Reh began to attend classes in the refugee camp. He was taught to value education. Once he shared his parents' statement that he

always remembered and passed on to his children, 'We are not rich, we are uneducated people but all my kids need to attend school. Your education level is good for you to get a good job.' During his stay in Thailand, Teh Reh's parents applied to be residents of Thailand in order to move out of the camp. The family was granted permission and Teh Reh moved with his parents outside the refugee camp. During this time, he learned the Thai language through Thailand's formal education system. However, after 1 year of living with his parents outside the camp, he decided to move back and live in the refugee camp, where he enjoyed meeting more refugee friends originally from Burma. Teh Reh learned other two languages, Shan and Kareni, by making friends from different ethnic groups who were living in the refugee camp, and spoke these in addition to Karenni, Burmese, and Thai.

Teh Reh met his wife, Loh Meh, at the refugee camp's school where they later became teachers of Burmese and Karenni and had one daughter together. After their twin sons were born, Teh Reh stopped teaching at the school and started his own business to earn money for the family. His language skills and his pass to get in and out the refugee camp facilitated his job, as 'a salesman.' He explained, 'At that time, I went to the Thai village, I use the Thai language' and role-played his task in Thai to me as the following:

> Teh Reh (portraying himself): สวัสดีครับผม มาซื้อ ลูกมะหนุน กิโลละเท่าไหรครับ [Greetings, Sir! I want to buy your jackfruits. How much a kilo?]
>
> Teh Reh (portraying a Thai): กิโลละหนึ่งบาท ถ้าตกลงนี ไปเก็บเอาคนเดียว แล้วก็มาทีนีเดียวจะชั่งกิโลให้ [One baht a kilo. If you agree, you can go harvest them in my field on your own and bring them here. I will weigh them for you here.]

Teh Reh described his work in Thai to assure that I understand his experience as a 'salesman':

> ถ้าหนึ่งร้อยกิโลนีเราต้องให้หนึ่งร้อยบาท สองร้อยกิโลกี่ต้องให้สองร้อยบาท แค่เนีย ถ้าห้าร้อยกิโลก็ให้ บาท ไทยเนียห้าร้อยบาท กี่เต็มรถแล้วห้าร้อยกิโลเนีย ห้าร้อยเนียเราใส่น้ามัน เราเดิมน้ามัน เราทำคนเดียวไม่ไหว เราก็ให้ลูกน้องมีหนึ่งคน ก็ให้เขา สองร้อยบาท ไม่ใช่ทุกวันนะ อาทิตย์หนึ่งไปหนึ่งครั้ง ถ้าไปทุกวันนี ขนุนไม่มีแล้ว

> [If 100 kilos, I have to pay him 100 baht. 200 kilos, 200 baht. That's it. If 500 kilos, I spend 500 Thai baht. With 500, my truck is full. Another five hundred baht, I spend it on gas. I fill my gas tank. And, me, only person cannot do everything. I have one assistant, whom I pay two hundred baht. But, not every day, you know. I do it once a week. If every day, no jackfruits to harvest](Duran 2016, p. 221).

Although his profession and language skills afforded him and his family a peaceful and happy life in Thailand, he was concerned that his children would not have access to a quality education. Therefore, Teh Reh arranged for his family to move to the USA with a Thailand-based refugee resettlement organization in the hope that his children would receive a better education than he did. 'I would like to continue my child[ren], continue school, like a college … university. Education, like HIGH, high level. This is my plan, my objective, my ambition, my goal…'

During the first year of his resettlement, Teh Reh felt desperate at times when he could not speak, read, and write English as proficiently as he expected. So, during the first 7 months in Arizona, when Teh Reh was sick and unemployed, he studied English at home by watching videos of English lessons that included basic English conversation and job-interview drills. The volunteer teacher who introduced me to Teh Reh borrowed the videos from the library for him. In addition, he took over household responsibilities such as walking the children to school, paying bills, and doing errands. To complete these tasks, he used public transportation or a bicycle he received as a donation.

Teh Reh kept in contact with the International Rescue Committee (IRC) and a faith-based organization that later recognized his multilingual ability, especially in Karenni and Burmese. They hired him as a part-time interpreter. As a result of this job, he found more interpretation jobs with an interpreting service called Language Line, where he could do the interpretation service on the phone, with hospitals, where newly arrived refugees came for check-ups, and with local hotels and companies, where he helped with orientation for newly hired employees from Burma and Thailand. From 2010 to 2011, he enrolled in a professional interpreter training program and hoped to become a certified interpreter. When he was at home, neighbors and friends originally from Burma

from various ethnic groups often came to ask Teh Reh for help in translating documents, mail, and letters, including filling legal forms and job application. Acclimated to the US urban lifestyle, he became aware that self-sufficiency in US society was defined and practiced differently from the Karenni state. He explained,

> Here, we have to pay for housing and go to work on time. In the Karenni State, we don't have to pay for housing. We don't have to work as scheduled because we have our own farm (Duran 2016, p. 221).

Loh Meh

Loh Meh, Teh Reh's wife, was 36 years old when I first met her. She was also from a family of farmers in the highland Karenni State in Burma. Like Teh Reh, she valued education and had attended school since she was 8 years old. However, her education was interrupted by the events of the war. Loh Meh ran away from the Karenni State with her mother and siblings when she was fourteen. She was able to recall her border passing experiences:

> We hide in the jungle, if they know where we are, they will come to kill us … It's very far … we walked for a week in the jungle, walk and hide, and walk and hide. When we pass a village, we ask the people there for food. We have to be alert all the times so that we can run if they are reaching us. Every day in the jungle, I hear the shooting … every day.

After these terrifying border-crossing experiences, her group arrived at Thailand's border thus starting their lives outside their homeland for the first time. Loh Meh continued going to school in the refugee camp. In addition to her native language, Karenni, Loh Meh learned Burmese as an academic language in school, both in the Karenni State and in the refugee camp.

As a result, Loh Meh can 'read and write Burmese very well' but she admitted that she learned how to speak Burmese 'from listening to other people and talking to friends.' This is because Burmese had been used for interethnic communications between the numerous ethnic groups living

in the Karenni State and the refugee camp. When Loh Meh was eighteen, she finished what she called Poh Paed, in which she added, 'เป็นครูได้ [it's enough to be a teacher]' according to her experiences in the Karenni school system. Then, Loh Meh became a teacher, her dream job since she was a child. She taught Burmese and Karenni to children and adults in the refugee camp's school. She was proficient in reading and writing in both Karenni and Burmese. Her parents settled in a Thai village outside the refugee camp. Loh Meh said that she would have acquired more Thai if she had socialized with Thai people outside the refugee camp.

Although she loved being a teacher, she said, 'I can't be a teacher here. I can't speak English.' In Phoenix, Loh Meh had been working at a store, called '99 Cent Only,' since the beginning of her resettlement. Her job was to arrange the merchandise on the shelves. At work, Loh Meh interacted with her supervisor, a Thailand-born Burmese, in Burmese. At home, she loved cooking and always tried to find ingredients to make Karenni and Burmese food. In early January 2011, Loh Meh shared with me that she thought she was pregnant. A few days later, she told me that her family doctor confirmed that she was expecting another baby. Although Teh Reh and Loh Meh were happy with having their fourth child, they were preoccupied with their family's well-being, responsibilities, and earning more money.

See Meh

See Meh, the eldest daughter of Teh Reh and Loh Meh, was 14 years old when she arrived in the USA with her family. She explained in Thai that her refugee experiences were different from her parents, as she stated:

> ไม่เจออะไรเลยค่ะ ไม่เจออะไร พ่อแม่เค้าเล่ากันว่าเจออย่างนั้นอย่างนี้ แต่ว่าหนูไม่รู้เรื่อง ค่ะ เจอความลำบาก แล้วก็พม่ามาทำร้ายอะไรแบบนี้ค่ะ แต่ว่าหนู ตั้งแต่หนูอยู่ Refugee Camp ไม่เจอไม่รู้อะไร
>
> [I haven't experienced anything like that, nothing like that. My parents told me they experienced this and that. I don't know a thing. Like, difficulties, the Burmese attack, something like that. But, I, since I have been in the refugee camp, I have never experienced that].

In addition, See Meh's schooling experience was very distinct from other refugee children and her family members. She acquired Karenni as her primary language and first entered school when she was 6 years old. There, she learned Burmese as an academic language. See Meh also acquired the Karen language, used by the Karen or the White Karen group, another ethnic minority group from the Karen State of Burma, by socializing with refugee children in the camp.

When See Meh turned nine, she was sent out to stay with her grandparents, who lived in a Thai village outside the refugee camp. After having lived only for a few months with her grandparents, she was sent to live in a Christian dorm sponsored by a non-government organization because she 'ไม่ช่วยงานบ้านค่ะ [didn't help with the grandparents' household chores].'

The opportunity to live in the Christian dorm outside the refugee camp and to attend a Thai local school turned out to be a major influence on See Meh's life and education. The dorm was sponsored by a Finnish organization that sheltered about forty refugee girls from a variety of ethnic groups. Finnish families, who sponsored the refugee girls that lived in the dorm, paid for food and other needed supplies. See Meh said that some girls had the opportunity to meet their sponsors because the sponsors from Finland sometimes visited. See Meh was provided sponsorship by a Finnish family whom she had never met but who would send a card to her at Christmas during her stay at the dorm. She wrote greeting cards in Thai as she explained,

> แล้ว ก็มีคนฟินแลนด์ทีเค้ามาอยู่เมืองไทยนานๆ แล้วค่ะ คนทีแบบ เป็นบอส เป็นนายใหญ่ เค้าก็แปลเป็นภาษาฟินแลนด์ให้ค่ะ เค้าแปลให้ [and the Finnish boss, I mean, the one who had the authority in the dorm, who has been in Thailand for a long time, translated it to Finnish for me.]

Living in the Christian dorm in Thailand and going to the local Thai school had greatly contributed to See Meh's Thai language and literacy development. See Meh learned every academic subject in Thai and learned English as a foreign language at school. When her parents decided to move to the USA, See Meh followed them. In the USA, See Meh studied hard with the reason, 'My parents said that they came here

for me, for my education. I really hope that I'll be successful in America.' From March 2009 to December 2010, See Meh was enrolled in the 9th grade and joined her school's volleyball team. In January 2011, See Meh had enrolled in another high school as her family moved to the other side of town. At this school, she had advanced to the Intermediate Level of English and was taking regular (non-ESL) content classes such as math and biology with mainstream students. She was the only one among the Karenni students her age at this school, and among the Karenni teen participants in this study, who had achieved this level. On weekends, See Meh always attended tutoring classes held at her school though her attendance was voluntary, not for credits. In a conversation, she told me that as a 10th grader, she wanted to pass the AIMS (Chap. 2) as early as she could, so that she would not have to worry about it anymore. She also wanted to graduate from high school as soon as possible. To accomplish this, she planned to take Level Four English (Advanced) and History to collect more credits in summer. Her instructor of English said that See Meh was distracted very easily in part because she was friendly and talkative. However, the instructor told me (during a casual conversation) that when See Meh concentrated on her studies, her work was very good.

On weekdays, See Meh traveled to and from school with about five other female Karenni teenagers who lived in the same apartment complex as her. She said that it was enjoyable to have friends to talk to while taking the bus and the light rail (train) to school, especially since they talked in Karenni and no one else on the train understood it. At school, she had a variety of friends from different places of origin as she was the only Karenni in her ELD program and in the content classes. See Meh had teenaged friends to do homework and hang out with more often than in her previous neighborhood.

Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee

The two boys, Gu-Gu (means 'big brother') and Ngee-Ngee ('little brother') are identical twins and I have to admit that I often misidentified them. I would call one name and ask them to raise their hands to confirm

their identity especially when I wrote field notes. Unlike their parents and older sister, the twins had not been enrolled in school prior to coming to the USA because they were still very young. Living with their parents and playing with children their age in the refugee camps, the twins acquired Karenni as their primary language, but had not been exposed to Karenni literacy and academic language when they arrived in the USA at age five. The first year of their stay in Phoenix, Arizona, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee went to a small school close to their apartment. In August 2009, at age six, both boys were enrolled in kindergarten; however, Ngee-Ngee was soon placed in first grade while Gu-Gu remained in kindergarten. Teh Reh and Loh Meh explained that the school wanted to separate them so that the boys paid more attention to the class content and would not play and talk to each other too much. This is one reason that the two boys were placed in different classes.

At the end of December 2010, when the family moved to a different apartment complex, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee were enrolled in another elementary school that was within walking distance from their new home. Here, they were put together in the first/second grade classroom, where all of the students were English language learners (ELLs) enrolled in the ELD program. The teacher reported that she sometimes did not recognize the physical differences between the two boys either, but she knew from their academic performance that one was a faster learner than the other. In addition, the move from Villa Bonita to La Frontera allowed Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee to spend more time playing with friends, either from Karenni or other refugee groups, because more children their age lived there and went to the same school.

Ka Paw's Family: 'It's Very Very Important for the Children to Go to the School'

I have known Ka Paw's family since February 2010, when the family came directly from Thailand's refugee camp, Baan Mai Nai Soi, to Villa Bonita Apartment Homes in Phoenix, Arizona. Ka Paw's family became good friends and neighbors to Teh Reh's family. Ka Paw's family consisted of two parents, Ka Paw and Sherry, a teen daughter, Daw,

and a son, Je Ru. The family moved to the USA for two main reasons. First, both Ka Paw and Sherry agreed that the children needed a better education than that which was available in the refugee camp. Ka Paw said, 'It's very very important for the children to go to the school, and get the education. It is very very important to make improve the education of my children.' Second, Ka Paw and Sherry desired a better life and opportunities outside the refugee camp, and it had to be a safe place without war. They added that it was too dangerous to try to go back to Burma. Therefore, they moved to the USA with the support of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Having lived in the USA for a year, Ka Paw and Sherry shared with me that they felt safe, unlike their life-threatening experiences in Burma, as they stated, 'Everyday, it's not dangerous for us. It's not dangerous for us. Not in fear and we are not afraid.'

During the first few months of their resettlement, a US family sponsored Ka Paw's family. They came to visit the family monthly with food and supplies. On occasion they took Ka Paw's family out to the zoo, a park, or a museum. Since December, 2010, Ka Paw's family had moved to La Frontera with Teh Reh's family for similar reasons—affordability and being close to the Karenni community. Their apartment unit was right next to the Teh Reh family's unit. All of Ka Paw's family members were devout Catholics. Every Sunday, the family either attended a Catholic church in Phoenix or held mass at home or at their Catholic friends' house. In the living room, many decorative items were religious. For example, there was a portrait of a religious figure—a middle-aged, tanned, Asian man in long white gown with a gentle smile on his face and a decorated miter (pastoral headdress) on his head. In the portrait, he stands in front of a white building with a cross on top of the pointed gable. In his left hand he holds a metal shepherd staff and his right hand gently touches his chest. On the upper shelf of the TV stand stood a 12 × 12 inch piece of white cardboard decorated with a colorfully drawn heart and a small representation of Jesus painted in the middle. A framed picture of a crucifix stood directly in front of the cardboard along with a small display of a nativity scene. A small smiling Santa Claus stood in one corner of the shelf with some candles and matchboxes.

Ka Paw

Ka Paw was 43 when I first met him. Like Teh Reh's family, Ka Paw came from a family of farmers in the Karenni State. He was born in an area called Lai-go that belonged to a native tribe known to westerners and neighboring countries as the long-neck tribe, an indigenous subgroup of Karenic families, in which the women wear brass rings around their necks. He acquired Kayan (pronounced /kəjəŋ/), the language of his tribe, as his primary language simultaneously with Burmese, an official language of Burma. Among all of the participants in the study, Ka Paw admitted that he had the least Karenni proficiency, as he acquired it later and it was not his primary language.

Ka Paw told me that he had a peaceful childhood. He went to school in the morning and helped his parents work on the farm in the afternoon. However, when Ka Paw was sixteen and his father passed away, his life drastically changed. He decided to become a soldier and join the Karenni military and experienced fighting throughout his 12 years of service. After his final and most life-threatening fight, he ran away to Thailand, where he lived for 15 years. Ka Paw spoke of the sorrow he felt for not having seen his mother since he joined the military. He did not know whether his mother was still in Burma or even alive as he stated, 'No, there is no way we will know or contact her. Thailand and Burma, we can't…' In the refugee camp, Ka Paw met his wife and started his family. He worked as a security guard and within a few years he became a head security guard there.

Since his initial resettlement in the USA, Ka Paw worked as a janitor at a shopping mall in Phoenix, where he worked the night shift after the mall closed. He normally took the bus from his apartment around 7:00 pm to work and returned home between 6:00 and 7:00 am the next morning. He slept during the day. Talking about his life in the USA, he said, 'We are comfortable right now' although he said that he had 'many many problems.' He claimed that it was because he and his wife 'are not education man and woman.' He also mentioned that other problems included not knowing directions (such as how to go to a doctor's clinic) or how to complete forms in English. He was also puzzled by life in the

city, where there was 'LOTS of traffic.' Nevertheless, he told me that it gradually became easier for him due to support from a network of friends, especially from Teh Reh, to whom he always turned when he needed help with errands and documents. In addition, living in the USA gave him hope for his children's future as he stated, 'I have a wonderful plan … I'm trying to teach my children to do homework and go to school.'

Sherry

Sherry, Ka Paw's wife, was 46 years old and a homemaker when I met her. Like Ka Paw, she was from Lai-go in the Karenni State. However, her cultural practices were slightly different from Ka Paw's. For example, in Ka Paw's native village, the women wear brass rings around their necks, but in Sherry's village the women do not. Sherry, growing up in a family of farmers, had worked since a very young age. She helped her parents in the fields and sought firewood in the woods. She was enrolled in school in the Karenni State for 7 years, even though she failed and had to be re-enrolled in the same level. Sherry learned Kayan and Karenni as her primary languages and she learned Burmese and English at school. She could read and write Kayan, Karenni, and Burmese very well, although she admitted that her English was limited, only 'A-B-C.'

Sherry moved out of the Karenni State when she was 13 years old due to the Burmese invasion and military rule. With a group of young Karenni people at the time, Sherry decided to relocate to Thailand while her parents stayed in Burma. She continued her education and met Ka Paw in the refugee camp, where she later became a teacher of Karenni and Burmese. She lived in Thailand for 20 years before coming to the USA. Although she liked living in Thailand, she disliked the fact that her job opportunities and her children's futures were limited because they were not allowed to leave the fenced camp.

In the USA, Sherry enjoyed taking care of her family and reading religious books written in Kayan, Karenni, and Burmese. Often, she sang a 'God's song,' as she called it, to calm and entertain herself while she was cooking and sewing. She also liked to study English from an English picture dictionary and a Burmese-English textbook for English learners

she brought over from Thailand to improve her English. Although she wanted to earn more money for the family by possibly working as a babysitter or a housekeeper, she could not manage her time to do that because she was busy taking care of her husband and children. Sherry hoped that her children studied hard as she stated,

> I try to speak to my children, to, like, guide, you know, how education is important, like, 'You need to go to school.' Maybe … if my children listening to me, it may be good for them. If my children don't listen to me, maybe it's not good for them.

She also mentioned that the main challenge in the USA was that she 'cannot get the English to talk … very slowly speaking English.' Nevertheless, like Ka Paw, Sherry felt comfortable and happy mainly because of support around her as she stated, 'I don't have a lot of friends. I don't have many friends but I can ask for help from my friends (laughing).'

Daw

Daw was almost 15 years old when I met her. She was born in the refugee camp in Thailand and acquired Burmese as her primary language. Her parents, Ka Paw and Sherry, rarely used Kayan (their primary language) with her. When Daw started school at the age of four, she learned Karenni from the school and her friends. Since she was surrounded by Karenni users in the refugee camp and in the USA (her close friends were all Karenni girls), Daw used Karenni daily. She explained, 'I used Burmese the most at home and used Karenni the most with friends. I switch between Karenni and Burmese with my mom.' She could read and write in Karenni and Burmese very well. Nevertheless, Ka Paw and Sherry told me that Daw had increasingly used Karenni with her younger brother, Je Ru, since they moved to the USA.

Daw liked to watch DVD movies in a variety of languages (Burmese, English, or Karenni) and listen to music in her free time. She had a boom box that could play both cassette tapes and CDs. Her sponsor family had given her some CDs of US pop music (Carrie Underwood and Colbie

Caillat) that she liked very much. In addition, her favorite activity was going to church on Sunday. She added that she prayed every night before going to bed.

At school, Daw was placed in the Pre-Emergent/Emergent level in ELD program, and she took physical science and algebra classes designed for ESL students. Therefore, she only had Karenni students and ESL students from other national origins as her classmates. She expressed that studying here was enjoyable and there were a lot of interesting subjects for her to learn. However, Daw had a problem with the language of instruction, English. She clarified, 'The only difficulty is I don't fully understand English and I am not able to speak it that much.' Daw told me that she wanted to be friends with English-speaking students, but her limited English proficiency did not provide her with the confidence to do so. Sherry told me that Daw had been very studious since a very young age and added that Daw always focused on her studies and went to school every day.

Je Ru

I met Je Ru for the first time at Villa Bonita Apartment Homes, where he was a regular visitor to Teh Reh's family, and Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's playmate. Je Ru was 9 years old and fond of rollerblading, drawing superhero characters, and folding paper. In March 2011, Ka Paw and Sherry had purchased Je Ru a video game console, so he had an additional favorite activity, playing video games at home. Je Ru also liked to spend time in the kitchen, where he could play with bright, colorful, magnetic English alphabet letters on the refrigerator. The magnetic letters were rearranged to form new words or sentences each time I visited. When I looked at them, Sherry often said, '[it's] Je Ru' to let me know that her son arranged those magnetic letters. Like Daw, Je Ru was born in Thailand's refugee camp and had acquired Burmese as his primary language. He attended school in the refugee camp where he learned Karenni by attending school and from friends. Je Ru speaks Burmese with his father and he had increasingly begun to use Karenni with his sister and mother as

a result of socializing at school and with friends in Karenni. Je Ru had learned to read and write Karenni and Burmese in the refugee camp, but due to his immigration to the USA he did not fully become proficient. Since he learned English in the USA and his parents wanted the family to continue their faith, they encouraged Je Ru to attend a weekend Bible class with other Catholic refugee children and read religious texts written in English.

At school, Je Ru was enrolled in fourth grade in a mixed class where the teacher explained that 'twenty students are bilingual and five are English-only. They are in different [English proficiency] levels but that's OK.' Even though Je Ru was assigned to sit with students from different national origins, he and his classmates were allowed to freely sit with anybody in math class. There he worked collaboratively with Karenni students. His teacher said, 'They (Je Ru and his Karenni friends) always work together very well in math.' She added that she allowed them all to speak in their primary language to discuss the homework. After they all finished their math exercises, the teacher would explain each math problem again in English.

At home, the family's living room, furnished with a relatively old brown fabric sectional couch in large floral pattern, an armchair made of beige fabric, and long brown wooden coffee table, usually served as the family's gathering space for doing homework, reading, and watching TV or a movie (in English or Burmese). Each family member's linguistic background contributes to the family's multilingual repertoires. Ka Paw and Sherry told me that they used three languages at home—Burmese, Karenni, and Kayan and explained:

> No rules. We don't have rules what language we need to use. Anything is OK. We can use anything, anytime, three languages, Burmese, Karenni, and Kayan.

However, the parents used Kayan more with each other than with the children. Ka Paw clarified, 'they (Daw and Je Ru) understand language but the long neck language (Kayan), sometimes they don't understand. It's too hard for them.' In addition, Ka Paw and Sherry also used Kayan

as a secret code among themselves when they wanted to exclude their audience as they gave an example,

> If we go to the church [and] we want to talk about a person we met there [in a bad way] we talk in Kayan because if we talk in Burmese, maybe she will understand. So, we use our own language (laughing).

Nway Meh's Family: 'I Came for My Children and Their Future'

I had known Nway Meh's family since January 2011, right after Teh Reh's and Ka Paw's families moved to La Frontera. See Meh of Teh Reh's family introduced me to her friend, Hla Meh, who had lived at La Frontera since 2009. After talking with me, Hla Meh felt comfortable with me and indirectly asked me for help as she said, 'I want a job to pay the rent.' I learned that her family was in dire need of funds. Hla Meh explained that her father, Phae, lived with the family in Phoenix and had worked at a restaurant as a dishwasher since 2009. Responsible for five school-aged children, an adult, and an elder, Phae's income was not enough to support the entire family. The family received approximately $1000 a month for food in the form of food stamps from Arizona's Department of Economic Security but had to pay $650 a month for rent and for other bills. Hla Meh's father was encouraged by his Karenni friends in Iowa to find a higher-paying job there. In the hope that he could get a better job opportunity, Phae moved to Iowa in early January 2011. He planned to move his family to Iowa after he found a job and was well established. However, he did not find a job like he expected. I was intrigued by the family's story and was eager to know the family better.

Phae was in Iowa during the entire data collection process. In March 2011, he started his new job as a butcher in a chicken meat factory in Iowa and he stayed there to build up his financial savings and to pursue his plan. In the following, I provide background information on the seven other family members including Nway Meh (mother), Boe Meh (grandmother), and the five children, Hla Meh, Saw Reh, Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh. All of them speak Karenni as their primary language.

Nway Meh

Nway Meh, a mother of five, was 45 years old when I first met her. Since January 2011, she had been the leader of the family taking care of her children because her husband, Phae, had gone to look for a new job in Iowa. For her, this new role was extremely challenging because she only spoke Karenni and could not read or write in any language. Such literacy and language skills were required to do errands and to fulfill the family's needs. Nway Meh expressed several times that she did not want to come to the USA but added, 'I came for my children and their future.'

Nway Meh was born and raised in a family of farmers in the Karenni State. With her husband, whom she met in the Karenni State, she grew rice and vegetables and looked for food in the woods such as bamboo shoots, potatoes, and mushrooms. She added that there was no need to buy food when she lived in the Karenni State. Nevertheless, in 1996, Nway Meh, her husband, and their 3-year-old daughter fled to Thailand because 'the Burmese invaded and built houses in the Karenni State.' Nway Meh explained the situation:

> If we don't run away, the Burmese will burn our houses, burn schools, everything on their way. Before heading to Thailand, we tried to hide and built houses in the jungle but the Burmese found us and started burning again.

Nway Meh and Phae relocated to Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp, where four more children were born. They were encouraged to move to the USA when they saw many of their refugee friends moving out of the refugee camp in the hope of better living conditions and an education for the children. After arriving in Phoenix, Arizona, Nway Meh's top priority was her children and their safety, especially the three younger sons who were 5, 9, and 12 years old. She went to her younger children's school twice a day or more. Every morning she walked her three sons to the elementary school located within walking distance of the apartment. In the afternoon she kept an eye on her watch for the time to pick up her children. On the days that one of her sons had a tutoring class that finished at a later time, she walked to school again to pick him up. Nway

Meh told me that she only went to the places she was familiar with in her neighborhood because she was afraid of getting lost. If she had errands to do somewhere else, she would go with her friends or neighbors who knew the way or had a car.

Boe Meh

Boe Meh, Nway Meh's mother-in-law, was in her seventies and the oldest participant in my study. Similar to Nway Meh, Boe Meh only spoke Karenni and could not read or write in any language. When the family planned to flee to Thailand, Boe Meh first went to Thailand with one of her children. Then Nway Meh, Phae, and 3-year-old Hla Meh came next and they reunited in the refugee camp.

In the USA, Boe Meh spent all day at the apartment complex. Often, she was found outside the apartment unit, sitting in the parking lot silently. During the day, Boe Meh liked to chew tobacco, prepare simple dishes like cucumber salad, and watch music videos (in Karenni) or TV shows that her grandchildren turned on. Often, she expressed that she missed her home in the Karenni State. During times of financial difficulty, every family member, including 70-year-old Boe Meh, was eager to make money. She showed me a large trash can that she used as a container for recycling cans, plastic, and bottles that she collected around the house and the apartment complex. She sold these items for $1 a pound to a private recycling dealer who regularly came to the apartment complex with a truck.

Hla Meh

As mentioned, I met Hla Meh because of See Meh from Teh Reh's family. See Meh and Hla Meh always spent time together after school and on weekends. Hla Meh told me that she had met See Meh before in the refugee camp and that Loh Meh, See Meh's mother, used to be her instructor of Burmese (even though See Meh could not recall that she met Hla Meh in the refugee camp). At 3 years old she accompanied her

parents to Thailand but did not have any memory of the border crossing. During the data-collection period, Hla Meh was 18 years old. She spoke Karenni as her primary language and had a high level of Burmese literacy and proficiency. Her Burmese literacy helped the family connect with the networks of refugees from Burma living in Phoenix, Arizona, who maintained the use of Burmese as a lingua franca outside their homeland. She would translate newsletters and announcements written in Burmese to her family and served as her family's representative to attend the community meetings. In addition, being the oldest daughter of the family, Hla Meh helped her mother do household chores, cook, and take care of her younger brothers. In her leisure time, she liked texting and surfing the internet for video clips and music videos (varied languages), and participating in online chat rooms.

At school, Hla Meh was an 11th grader and enrolled in the ELD program, where she was at the Pre-Emergent/Emergent level of English. She also took ESL algebra and biology in addition to the four-hour ELD. Hla Meh was also looking for a job in hopes for more income. She applied for positions at Ranch Market (a grocery store), McDonald's, and two hotels, but she was told that they were not hiring. Hla Meh thought that her limited English proficiency prevented her from being hired and she decided not to apply for any more jobs. Loh Meh, from Teh Reh's family, encouraged Hla Meh to apply for a job at the store where she worked. We all helped her fill out the application. Hla Meh said that if she had submitted the application, she would have been called in for a job interview. She said that she was too shy to do so because it would have been her first job interview.

Saw Reh

Saw Reh was 15 years old at the time of this study. He was enrolled in the 11th grade. In the ELD program, Saw Reh was at a Basic Level that was grouped together with the Pre-Emergent/Emergent Level in which Hla Meh, his older sister, was enrolled. Although he went to school in the refugee camp, he rarely took Burmese there. This resulted in his having only limited Burmese proficiency, unlike Hla Meh who could read and

write Burmese very well. He explained that reading in Karenni was very easy for him while reading Burmese was 'very hard' but he was 'learning' it. Being enrolled in the same English class with Hla Meh, Saw Reh wished he could be provided with a Karenni-English dictionary as there was a Burmese-English dictionary for his sister and Burmese-speaking classmates to help them look up the meanings of new vocabulary, especially for writing.

Outside school, Saw Reh participated in a local soccer team, which consisted of players from different Asian national origins such as Karen, Vietnam, and Korea. He told me that he used English with his teammates and his US coach. He said with pride, 'We never lose it. We play hard.' At home, he liked to listen to hip-hop music in Karenni and Burmese and to sing with karaoke DVDs.

Sha Reh

Sha Reh was 12 years old and enrolled in seventh grade. In addition to speaking Karenni as his primary language, he had acquired some spoken Burmese since he was in Thailand. At school, he was very good at math even though he was a quiet student. Sha Reh said that he wanted to be a teacher of math when he grew up because math was his favorite subject. During lunch and break time, Sha Reh only hung out with friends and classmates whom he knew from the La Frontera apartment complex.

At home, Sha Reh liked to play videogames, especially a soccer game, with his younger brothers. He also loved to play soccer with friends both in the field and in the virtual world of the videogames. He often said that he wanted to go back to Thailand because he has 'a lot of friends' there. He said that when playing soccer here in the USA, it reminded him of playing soccer in the refugee camp and that this was one of the reasons he liked soccer.

Toh Reh

Toh Reh was 9 years old when I met him. At home, he was very open, friendly, and talkative. He liked to join the conversation when his mother

or grandmother had a visitor. If he was at the house during my visit, he did not hesitate to use English with me and utilize his knowledge of English and Karenni to help me understand his mother and grandmother's conversation. He liked to play hide-and-seek, ride his bike, and play soccer and tag with his friends in the apartment complex, and sometimes he invited me to join him and his friends.

At school, Toh Reh was enrolled in a mixed first and second grade class. All thirty students spoke a language other than English as their primary language. Many of Toh Reh's classmates, including Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, were Toh Reh's neighbors and lived at the La Frontera apartment complex. Ms. Lowry, his teacher, told me that Toh Reh was studious but quiet. She added that Toh Reh was one of the top students in her class and knew the class materials very well. He was named 'Student of the Month' in her class several times. However, she explained, 'He'd be lost when he is put in the mainstream classroom. For example, he knows how to do math but he's still struggling with English.' Ms. Lowry added that Toh Reh attended an after-school English tutoring program and explained, 'Actually, all my kids (students) have problems. They are still in ELD program.'

Eh Reh

Eh Reh is the youngest child of the family and the youngest participant in my study. He was 5 years old and was in his second semester of kindergarten during my data collection. In August 2010, Eh Reh started attending kindergarten in the USA. His class was a mixed class, where five students spoke English as their primary language and twenty-one students, including Eh Reh, did not. His teacher Ms. Moradi informed me that Eh Reh started off, like many first-time kindergarteners, with a lot of new things he had to become familiar with. For example, he had to learn how to use the school's bathrooms shared by many students and not to take a nap in the afternoon even though he seemed like he needed to. Fortunately, in his first semester, Eh Reh had formed a strong friendship with a Karenni classmate who always helped Eh Reh with things at school. According to Ms. Moradi, the friend moved out of town at the

end of the first semester and Eh Reh seemed lonely. Nevertheless, Ms. Moradi was positive and said that it might be good for Eh Reh because he had learned to be independent and talk more with other classmates.

Out of school, Eh Reh spent most of his time in the house. Nway Meh only allowed him to go outside when accompanied by an older sibling. When he was at home, Eh Reh usually hung out with Boe Meh, his grandmother, and Hla Meh, his oldest sister. When the other brothers were at home with him, they usually played videogames together. He also liked to play simple computer games such as matching card games on his older sister's laptop.

Since Nway Meh's family had arrived in the USA, all family members lived in a two-bedroom apartment at La Frontera. In addition to the aid they received from the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Catholic charities worked with them during their resettlement and provided them with food and supplies. Entering Nway Meh family's apartment for the first time, I was surprised to see that the family had two televisions placed on different TV stands located side by side. Throughout the data-collection period, the two different TVs often displayed different channels but served the same goal—to entertain the family members. Often, when one TV was used by the young children to play videogames, the other was used for music video, karaoke, or a local TV channel for the teens or adults in the family. With seven family members—two adults and five children—to keep track of, Nway Meh said that having two televisions helped her keep all of the children, especially the younger ones, in the same place. This area was usually used as a place for family gatherings when I visited. It also served as a dining area because the family did not have a dining table.

Biographic and Demographic Information

I summarize here the participants' biographic and demographic information, including a linguistic inventory in the tables below, to lay out the multilingual repertoires at the individual and family levels. The tables help reveal similarities and differences across families and generations. Table 3.1 presents the participants grouped by family and Table 3.2, by age group. Based on the multilingual repertoires presented by age group

Table 3.1 Biographic information of participants from three families

Family	Participants	Place of birth	Age[a]	Primary language (s)[b]	Other language(s) learned[c]
Teh Reh's Family	Teh Reh (M)[d]	Karenni State, Burma	33	Karenni	Advanced Burmese, Intermediate Thai, Intermediate Shan, Intermediate to Upper-Intermediate English
	Loh Meh (F)		36	Karenni	Advanced Burmese Functional English
	See Meh (F)	Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee Camp, Thailand	15	Karenni	Advanced Thai, Intermediate Karen, Upper-Intermediate English
	Gu-Gu (M)		7	Karenni	Functional to Intermediate English
	Ngee-Ngee (M)		7	Karenni	
Ka Paw's Family	Ka Paw (M)	Lai-go Village, Karenni State, Burma	43	Kayan, Burmese	Functional Karenni Functional English
	Sherry (F)		46	Kayan	Advanced Burmese Advanced Karenni Functional English
	Daw (F)	Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee Camp, Thailand	14	Burmese	Advanced Karenni Intermediate English
	Je Ru (M)		9	Burmese	Advanced Karenni Functional to Intermediate English

(*continued*)

Table 3.1 (continued)

Family	Participants	Place of birth	Age[a]	Primary language (s)[b]	Other language(s) learned[c]
Nway Meh's Family	Nway Meh (F)	Karenni State, Burma	45	Karenni	–
	Boe Meh (F)		70	Karenni	–
	Hla Meh (F)		18	Karenni	Advanced Burmese Intermediate English
	Saw Reh (M)	Ban Mai Nai Soi Refugee Camp, Thailand	15	Karenni	Intermediate Burmese Intermediate English Functional Karen
	Sha Reh (M)		12	Karenni	Intermediate Burmese Intermediate English
	Toh Reh (M)		9	Karenni	Intermediate English
	Eh Reh (M)		5	Karenni	Functional English

[a]The table shows the participants' age during my formal data-collection period

[b]Primary Language is the language known best in both depth and breadth

[c]Proficiency levels: **functional** = has skills sufficient for communication but in a very limited way, or only in familiar situations; **intermediate** = able to handle many speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks, especially for routine work and for educational purposes; **upper intermediate** = has all speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in both work and personal contexts; **advanced** = has all skills for both basic and complex content/subject matter and communicative situation, comfortable with communicating in a demanding setting that may require to learn challenging terms quickly (adapted from Berlitz's Proficiency Level, 2016)

[d](M) = male, (F) = female

Table 3.2 Biographic information of participants by age groups

Groups	Participants	Age[a]	Primary Language (s)[b]	Other language(s) learned and proficiency level[c]	Occupation/education
Adults	Boe Meh (F)[d]	70	Karenni	–	Retired
	Sherry (F)	46	Kayan	Advanced Burmese, Functional English	Homemaker
	Nway Meh (F)	45	Karenni	–	Homemaker
	Ka Paw (M)	43	Kayan, Burmese	Functional Karenni, Functional English	Janitor at the mall
	Loh Meh (F)	36	Karenni	Advanced Burmese, Functional English	Shelf stocker at a dollar store
	Teh Reh (M)	33	Karenni	Advanced Burmese, Intermediate Thai, Intermediate Shan, Intermediate to Upper-Intermediate English	Part-time interpreter for different companies
Teens	Hla Meh (F)	18	Karenni	Advanced Burmese Intermediate English	11th grade
	Saw Reh (M)	15	Karenni	Intermediate Burmese Intermediate English Functional Karen	11th grade
	See Meh (F)	15	Karenni	Advanced Thai, Intermediate Karen, Upper-Intermediate English	10th grade
	Daw (F)	14	Burmese	Advanced Karenni Intermediate English	9th grade

(*continued*)

Table 3.2 (continued)

Groups	Participants	Age[a]	Primary Language (s)[b]	Other language(s) learned and proficiency level[c]	Occupation/education
Young Children	Sha Reh (M)[d]	12	Karenni	Intermediate Burmese Intermediate English	7th grade
	Je Ru (M)	10	Burmese	Advanced Karenni Intermediate English	4th grade
	Toh Reh (M)	9	Karenni	Intermediate English	2nd grade
	Gu-Gu (M)	7	Karenni	Functional to Intermediate English	1st/2nd grade
	Ngee-Ngee (M)	7	Karenni	Functional to Intermediate English	1st/2nd grade
	Eh Reh (M)	5	Karenni	Functional English	Kindergarten

[a]The table shows the participants' age during my formal data-collection period

[b]Primary Language is the language known best in both depth and breadth

[c]Proficiency levels: **functional** = has skills sufficient for communication but in a very limited way, or only in familiar situations; **intermediate** = able to handle many speaking, listening, reading and writing tasks, especially for routine work and for educational purposes; **upper intermediate** = has all speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in both work and personal contexts; **advanced** = has all skills for both basic and complex content/subject matter and communicative situation, comfortable with communicating in a demanding setting that may require to learn challenging terms quickly (adapted from Berlitz's Proficiency Level, 2016)

[d](M) = male, (F) = female

in Table 3.2, the younger children under 10 years old (Toh Reh, Gu-Gu, Ngee-Ngee, and Eh Reh) were becoming bilingual by learning English in addition to their native languages. However, the children 10 years old and above, including the teen groups, appeared to have learned or acquired other ethnic languages beyond their primary language and English. All of the teen participants went to the same high school and all of the six young children went to the same elementary (K-8) school. In the adult group, only Boe Meh and Nway Meh were monolingual Karenni speakers.

In this chapter, I described my multiple roles on the research site and the multiple data-collection methods that I employed while working with the recently arrived Karenni refugee families. It is important to note that the parents of all three families said that they moved to the USA for their children's future and education. This introduction to the participants from the three families presents the wide range of language and literacy foundations each individual, each family, and each age group has. Some participants may be less referenced than others in the following chapters but all of them were part of the families' resources and of the recently established Karenni community in Phoenix, Arizona.

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4

Life, Liberty, and (the Pursuit of) English

> If freedom means the right to do pretty much as one pleases, so long as one does not interfere with others, the immigrant has found freedom, and the ruling elements have been singularly liberal in its treatment of the invading hordes. But if freedom means a democratic cooperation in determining the ideals and purposes and industrial and social institutions of a country, then the immigrant has not been free, and the Anglo-Saxon element is guilty of just what every dominant race is guilty of in every European country: the imposition of its own culture upon the minority peoples.
>
> Randolph Bourne 1916

> People are not becoming more free by becoming more mobile.
>
> Blommaert 2005

'America has democracy' was stated admiringly several times by the Karenni adults when we discussed the political conflicts in Burma and elsewhere. Apart from democracy that the Karenni people yearned for, residing in the USA means a major improvement in the Karenni's living conditions. Unlike living in the remote refugee camps, living in the USA has given them access to clean water, electricity, public transportation, technology, better healthcare, education opportunities, and employment.

C.S. Duran, *Language and Literacy in Refugee Families*,
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The feeling of being trapped inside an extremely overcrowded refugee camp is a thing of the past. With the absence of a fenced boundary, the refugees have freedom to travel to every part of the country's vast land—the type of freedom they have not had for more than a decade. However, the recently arrived refugees face daily challenges and the major cause of those challenges was frequently expressed by the Karenni newcomers as, 'Me, little English!' or 'Me, no English.' Because of what many call 'limited English proficiency' (LEP), the recently arrived Karenni refugees appeared to struggle when performing many tasks, such as interacting with local people, contacting local service providers (e.g., auto insurance representative, banker, car/truck rental, pharmacist, shopkeeper), and conversing with institutional personnel. Loh Meh reflected on her and other families' resettlement experiences thus:

> Go to the food stamp office, they don't know, go to the hospital, they cannot speak, go to the work, they cannot … ALL difficult! Yeah, a lot of family. Oh, difficult for they!

From the view in which refugees hold minoritized status, after multiple moves in search of a better life and security, the Karenni refugees' experiences of struggle remain. English, the dominant language of the host country and community, is one among many obstacles that hindered them in completing daily tasks, fully participating in many democratic activities, and receiving the things and rights that they deserve. Tollefson's (1989) documentation of Southeast Asian refugees in the aftermath of the Vietnam War revealed that the refugee experiences and hardship did not end when they arrived in their new host country, which was viewed as a safe haven. During the mass resettlement of the 1970s and 1980s, the suicide rate among Southeast Asian refugees in the USA was higher than the rate in the US population in general because of depression and loneliness. Many were affected by the loss of old patterns of life and by Sudden Unexpected Death Syndrome (SUDS). Older refugees 'stayed inside their homes for weeks at a time, afraid to go out, unsure what will happen, and unable to speak English' (p. 33).

Some of these disheartening patterns remain issues in the process of current refugee resettlement in the United States. The hegemony of language that places English at the top of the linguistic hierarchy impacted the way the Karenni newcomers felt about themselves. Not being able to get things done because of their 'limited English proficiency' belittles their minoritized languages and disparages those who are speakers of such languages. In addition, such ideology shaped the way the refugees are positioned and pressured by others. 'Others' in this case are not only English speakers from outside the Karenni group but also those learners of English within the Karenni newcomers' very own community, especially the children who received formal education in English in US schools. Therefore, unique cross-generational interactions and generational differences and experiences are outcomes of such ideology and practice. In the following sections, I present the Karenni participants' various perceptions and beliefs about English, starting with what Karenni adults think about English, followed by how different levels of English proficiency among family members create multidirectional power relations in language socialization pathways.

'If I Understand English, I Will Be More Happy'

Nway Meh, a 45-year-old mother of five, stayed at home and tried to avoid encountering English speakers as much as possible. One of her daily activities was to walk her two young sons to school nearby and then return later to pick them up. Sometimes, she walked to school yet again when one of the sons had a tutoring class after school. While she diligently followed this routine, she told me that she was unwilling to go anywhere else alone because she thought she would get lost and added, 'I don't know where and how to go.' When Nway Meh needed to go to places further away from the neighborhood such as the hospital or the market, she needed a friend who was familiar with the area to accompany her since she could not ask anyone else in English. Her daily tasks consisted of taking care of the children and doing household chores, includ-

ing cleaning, cooking, and entertaining friends. Asked if she liked living in the USA, Nway Meh replied, 'I can't speak anything, it is not fun. I know nothing.' Speaking of problems living in the USA, she explained,

> When a problem arrives, I don't even know that it is a problem because I don't know anything. I can't speak the language. So, whatever comes to me seems to be a problem.

Nway Meh believed that not knowing English was the fundamental cause of all the problems she encountered in the USA. She also connected her happiness to the ability to speak English as she said, 'If I understand English, I will be more happy.' Despite the fact that she had lived in the USA for 2 years, she was only comfortable in the safe, yet limited, space of the apartment complex and only went to familiar places in the neighborhood because all of these typical interactions occurred in Karenni. Ironically, having lived in the refugee camp for 15 years with its fenced area, she felt more familiar, secure, and free there to navigate and interact with her neighbors, friends, and surroundings. The USA provided her numerous opportunities and is indeed a country that takes pride in protecting freedoms that would theoretically enable its residents' unfettered mobility across its lands. However, Nway Meh seemed to be fenced into a limited space because she lacked the English language, a tool to claim her place, access, and comfort in the larger community. In addition, although she walked her sons to school and picked them up every school day, she had never interacted with any of her sons' teachers. The teachers even asked me to reaffirm that 'the girl (Nway Meh), who always came to pick up' their students every day was the children's mother.

'My children wanted to come (to the USA). My daughter (Hla Meh) went to put our family on the list … now I want to go back to Thailand but I know I can't,' said Nway Meh. During her time in the refugee camp in Thailand, she had seen many of her friends leaving the camp to start their new lives in other countries and she thought that she should leave for a better place as well. In addition to being encouraged by her friends, Nway Meh agreed to come to the USA because of her children. She understood that because she was already out of the refugee camp in Thailand, she could not go back to live there again.

'You Live in America, You Don't Speak English, NOT GOOD!'

Loh Meh, a 36-year-old Karenni mother, was one among very few Karenni women working outside their households. She worked at a franchise dollar store and her job was as she explained '[to] make the line beautiful,' or to shelve and arrange the store's merchandise. During my weekly visits to her home, Loh Meh often asked me for the meanings of words she heard from customers at the store such as 'baby shower,' 'conditioner,' 'shampoo,' and 'lotion.' Although she was not required to interact with customers, she told me that she was sometimes asked by a customer where a certain item was located in the store. She wanted to know what each word meant in order to answer the customer—she was frustrated when she could not respond in English. In addition, Loh Meh received some discouraging words from the customers, who were not happy with Loh Meh's lack of English proficiency.

Loh Meh: Yeah. He show me. Some English [speakers], um, not GOOD! [They say] 'You live in America, you don't, cannot speak English, NOT GOOD! Why you working here?!' Wo! They tell me. Crazy!
CSD: Some people tell you that?
Loh Meh: Yeah, some people CRAzy … but I TRY, [I say] 'Oh, sorry! I don't know. I'm new people. I'm new. I came to the United States not a long time,' ye-yeah, something like that. 'I-I, uh, sorry, maybe two years, next year I know. Oh Sorry! Sorry!'

Loh Meh seemed to be pressured by those who discouraged her by saying that she should not work here in the USA without English. Here we see that Loh Meh recognized the limitations of her outsider status when the US residents positioned her as a foreigner in the US community, where English was believed to be a requirement. The above situation did not end with a good result as both Loh Meh and the customer were disappointed with the outcome. Loh Meh felt extremely apologetic that she could not do her job because of the language barrier. Due to her

limited ability to speak English, Loh Meh told me that she often simply answered, 'I don't know' to her customers and she had learned that it was not a satisfactory response. However, we also see in the excerpt that she demonstrated her hope of becoming better at English and being able to communicate with the customers as she stated, 'maybe two years, next year I know.' She recounted how her lack of understanding prevented her from providing a good service to a customer but she also expressed that some customers' responses were helpful and encouraging.

> Many people here GOOD! When I speak it wrong, they don't laugh, they say 'No' and they will make the sentence. They treat the sentence good. They don't laugh.

Loh Meh liked it when some customers took some time to guide her and to correct her English. Due to her determination to become better at English, Loh Meh had taken a free ESL class offered by a non-profit organization when she had time. Loh Meh also shared with me that she was willing to take ESL classes provided by her children's school when they became available.

'I Can Speak Burmese, Karenni, Shan, and Thai … FOUR Languages. But, None of Those are Valid Here.'

Around 6:00 pm on Saturday, October 17, 2009, Teh Reh called me and asked (with a frustrating tone), 'Can you help me? Can you come to the corner of Twenty-Eighth and Indian School streets?' He said that he was just involved in a car accident and he needed me to serve as an interpreter between him and the police officer. He had called me several times while I was driving in the rush-hour traffic to the scene to ensure that I was still coming. After I arrived, Teh Reh explained that he was driving his friend's car and the accident involved another truck. His friend's relatively old car had a bump in the hood on the passenger's side and was parked at the scene but the truck had already left when I arrived. Teh Reh showed me a piece of paper that I identified as a police report. On

the top line of the paper, the report number was indicated and Teh Reh and his friend told me that the police emphasized the report number as a reference to the insurance company.

A police car was parked about ten feet away. I went to introduce myself to the police officer sitting in the car, writing a ticket. The young female police officer got out of the car and explained to me politely that, although he had a green light, Teh Reh had made an incorrect left turn while the truck had the right of way coming straight from the opposite direction. The police officer explained that she had to write Teh Reh a ticket because Teh Reh violated the traffic laws. After this exchange, I learned that Teh Reh's ID was just a driving permit, not a driver's license, and that his friend, who had been riding with him, only had a one-month-long driver's license. According to the officer, this is not long enough to be able to accompany Teh Reh in the car (she said that Teh Reh's friend needed to have the driver's license for at least three months). After she finished writing the ticket, she explained what was written on the ticket to the three of us in English and suggested that Teh Reh go to a court-certified Defensive Driving School before the court day. She gave us a list of driving schools and informed us the fees for the course. I then explained everything to Teh Reh and his friend in Thai. Before the police officer left, she asked me where Teh Reh and his friend were from and what language we spoke. After I said they were from Burma, she expressed surprise and said that this was odd because 'Spanish' was more common in the area.

During our conversations about the accident, Teh Reh linked the problems and the communicative challenge he encountered during his interactions with the police to his limited proficiency in English. Although he had a number of other useful linguistic resources, he realized that none of the languages he spoke was useful in this situation. In my follow-up conversation with him to discuss plans to go to a defensive-driving school and to court, he said,

> I can speak Burmese, Karenni, Shan, and Thai … FOUR languages. But, none of those are valid here (Duran, 2016, p. 221).

Teh Reh told me that none of his four proficient languages have value here because those four languages are not valid and functional, especially

when encountering law enforcement. He felt that he has no place here. The accident and its consequences, which included the defensive-driving school and the court case, aggravated and emphasized the struggles, stress, and frustration that he encountered during the first years of his resettlement. Later, Teh Reh said to me that the Karenni community needs 'to know the American government policies and stuff.' But, it becomes more challenging when 'policies and stuff' have to be learned simultaneously with English.

'If Someone Can Speak English, She Will Get Helped'

Among the recently arrived Karenni refugees, being unable to communicate for their health and wellness benefits in English is disheartening. In Boe Meh's case, support services that she could have qualified for became unavailable for her because of the unchanged identity on her refugee card. Officially recording one's date of birth was not a common practice in the Karenni State considering that the majority of the Karenni people lived in remote and mountainous areas far away from hospitals and officials. Many Karenni refugees, especially the parent and grandparent generations and the children born before their families had moved to Thailand, have their current birthday recorded as January 1st on their identification documents or ID (that follows the UN practice for records issued in refugee camps), with the 'estimated' year of their birth. As Boe Meh said,

> Some families recorded their birthdays but many don't. I moved to Thailand not knowing my birthday. They (the authorities in the refugee camp) put my birthday and age for me on the ID card but I did not know what it was.

This practice creates challenges for processes of documentation and for those providing support services in the host country, where birthdates are very important pieces of identity and information on official records and documents. For instance, when Boe Meh applied for services in the USA, not having an original birth date complicated the processing of documents. She described, 'When someone (officials) asked me about my age,

I told them to look at my ID card.' This is because she was not able to tell them when she was born and she had to accept what was written on the paper. Although Boe Meh and her family members understood that she was older than 70 years old (they counted by using historical events and age of her children), her ID card and the UN record indicated that she was only in her fifties. Unfortunately, because the services were for senior citizens over 60 years old, she did not qualify.

Boe Meh's grandchildren explained that during the interview process with the authorities and the refugee agencies prior to coming to the USA, they did not fully understand the interviews. They could not explain the problems to the authorities in English or Burmese. They also had difficulties with the documents. In fact, they did not foresee what was waiting for them in the host country or how to deal with it, especially with regard to the fixed identity on the card. When I was introduced to the family, Boe Meh had not received any services from the Area Agency on Aging even though the family had been in the USA for 2 years. Boe Meh and her family members had tried to talk about the problem of her age and date of birth to friends in their language but no one could help and speak up in support of Boe Meh's benefits. They were not able to make an effective argument in English or in a way that the authorities would comprehend. Instead, they needed a good interpreter and representative who could address and clearly articulate the issue.

Teh Reh, the family's close friend, said he believed that Boe Meh deserved support and benefits because '[s]he can't work and she can't see very well.' He added that 'if someone can speak English, she will get helped.' His comments emphasized the significant role of English in their lives and reinforced their belief that the lack of English proficiency had contributed to problems in Boe Meh's case. Teh Reh told me that he did not know how to start the process for Boe Meh, nor whom to talk to, or what to say to those support agents. I called the Area Agency on Aging a couple of times in the hope that the issue could be resolved but was told that I had to discuss the issue with the manager. However, because the manager was not in the office when I called, I could only leave a message for the manager. I was told that I could take Boe Meh to the office with an appointment, but no one returned my calls, and the manager was not there to make an appointment.

Such incidents demonstrate that English was the expected language for creating official documents and for the legal process not only in the US society but also in the international context. English as a gatekeeper to important information had profound consequences for the newcomers, even before they moved to the USA. In Boe Meh's case, the flaws in the document were made at the moment of its creation due to language barriers that compound misunderstandings when speakers of different languages interact. Without English, Boe Meh and her family's voices are silenced and access to benefits is not granted while the English-speaking authorities hold both legal and linguistic power. Even though the family might be able to obtain the services of an interpreter or a family member might later achieve the high level of English proficiency needed to address the issue, I am uncertain about the resolution of the problem because the 'already-made' legal documentation and ID issued by the reliable authorities carries a lot of weight.

'We Don't Know How to Talk to the Teacher'

As all of the Karenni parents ultimately came to the USA for their children's education, knowing how well their children were doing at school was close to their hearts. In all three families, homework, notes, and reports from school were prioritized. The children's homework time became the families' communal literacy practice in these households. However, the language barriers fueled by cultural differences hindered the Karenni parents from full involvement with their children's academic life from time to time. Below, I present what parents from three families did to keep up with their children's academic performance.

In Teh Reh's family, the children's completion of homework and assignments was vital. Every evening before Loh Meh had to leave for her work at the store around 5:30 pm, she opened her twin sons' backpacks to check if there were any worksheets, homework, or letters from school. She took the homework out, looked at the words on the children's worksheet and books. She often read them aloud. When describing this routine to me, she reflected on the literacy practices involved:

> Yes, I would like to, look at the homework. Sometimes he (her sons) can do the homework, he can write, he can do, sometimes he cannot do, I would like to know. Sometimes they don't know [but if] I know, I'll tell them. Sometimes, I don't know, I will ask their father or sometimes See Meh. They don't know, they can't do it, it's bad, not good.

Loh Meh's practice shows that her children's homework and completing the homework were imperative. She admitted that, more often than not, she did not understand the words on the worksheet. However, she emphasized that she 'would like to know' what her children learned and whether they could do the homework. As Loh Meh was checking what the children were learning, she was also checking to see if there was something she understood and if she could help her children. After reviewing the homework she put the homework and some pencils under the lamp on the table located in the living room to signal to her sons that they had homework and needed to finish it. If there were letters, reports, and flyers from school that she cared highly about, she would ask me, her husband (Teh Reh), or her oldest daughter (See Meh) to translate them for her as she wanted to keep up with the information.

In the evening, Teh Reh often supervised the twins doing their homework. As for See Meh, the oldest daughter, Teh Reh and Loh Meh trusted her to complete her assignments. A few girls, such as Daw from Ka Paw's family, Mee Meh from Nway Meh's family, Karenni friends in the neighborhood, and classmates from school, often joined See Meh as well. But when letters arrived from See Meh's school needing a response from her parents, Teh Reh paid very close attention. In April 2011, for example, See Meh brought back a letter from school requesting the parents' permission to let her take summer classes, Teh Reh read the letter carefully. See Meh asked him to quickly sign and Teh Reh responded, 'I have to read first. I can't just sign' as he truly understood that misinterpretation might cause a problem and the most important thing for him was to understand the content thoroughly.

In Ka Paw's family, doing homework was the family's activity. Both parents, Ka Paw and Sherry, sat with their children in the living room during their homework time in the evenings. They told me that this was the way they caught up with the children's academic performance. In

addition, they could learn what the children learned, especially the content in English. When I was assisting Je Ru and Daw with their homework, Sherry and Ka Paw sat on the side as well. I tutored the children in English and Sherry and Ka Paw followed the instructions and checked with their children in Karenni or Burmese to see if they understood the content. Sherry enjoyed the tutoring session and was very happy to know that the school encouraged parents' involvement and that she could join in the activity so that she was aware of her children's understanding. Ka Paw, who worked the night shift (after 8:00 pm) and tried to sleep during the day, often took this opportunity to spend time with his family.

In Nway Meh's family, Mee Meh (18) and Saw Reh (15) led their three younger brothers in doing homework in the family's living room. Nway Meh (mother) and Boe Meh (grandmother) usually stayed with the children in the living room. If they needed to do some household chores such as dinner preparation (e.g., cutting and slicing vegetables), they would bring their work from the kitchen to the living room. Often, they watched the nearby TV with the volume lowered.

Although the Karenni parents prioritized their children's education and paid a great attention to school news and information, one thing that intimidated them was communicating with the children's teachers. During a conversation with Sherry and Ka Paw about their life and difficulties in the USA, Sherry said, 'We don't know how to talk to the teacher.' Sherry often told me that she was concerned about her children's academic performance but that her 'little English' made her reluctant to meet and discuss these concerns with her children's teachers. She said, 'I don't know what to say.' Although Sherry cared about her children's education, she was extremely fearful of the idea of speaking English with the children's teachers. In March 2011, the middle of Je Ru's first semester at his then current school, Sherry received an invitation from Je Ru's 4th-grade teacher to a parent/student lunch with the teacher on the next Friday as an informal gathering. I translated the invitation to Sherry and encouraged her to attend as it was the first step in the start of the connection with her son's school and teacher in a friendly setting. She signed up for the event. However, she did not attend because she was uncomfortable in the English-speaking environment at school. While Sherry felt comfortable doing errands around the neighborhood such as

purchasing money orders at the gas station, going to church, and talking with the apartment's property manager, her limited English proficiency made her feel uncomfortable with such 'institutional' encounters.

While the Karenni parents might have seemed absent and voiceless interacting with their children's school, at home they showed their efforts to learn more about their children's academic performance. In fact, their practices and strategies show their close attention to their children's learning in the USA. Based on their testimonies, their lack of English proficiency prevented them from a strong and meaningful connection with the children's teachers, which is encouraged in US education. This example suggests that building connections between teachers and parents requires more than an invitation to school-sponsored events. It is important to create comfortable environments for parents, who are eager to know about their children's academic performance and other related topics. Such parents really cared about school assessments, classroom activities, and classroom customs. Finding interpreters for multilingual invitations and for events and teacher-parent conferences, having a community-based activity (e.g., cultural night, game day), holding an event in a less formal/institutional space (such as a park or a community center), and home visits may help the parents feel more at ease and be happy to share their talents and time with school.

'We Don't Know How to Read (English)'

Apart from certain face-to-face encounters with the locals and authorities outside the Karenni community, dealing with written English was a major challenge among the Karenni adults. English written texts are involved in everyday living. Frequently, I was asked by the participants and their friends to look at the mail they received, including letters and other materials sent to them from a variety of sources such as local newspapers, auto insurance companies, schools, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the US government. Often, I helped the participants decide which mail to throw away, which mail to respond to last, and which matters required immediate action (e.g., doctor's appointment notices, billing statements, and traffic tickets).

The participants' ability to comprehend and interact with these written texts depended on their ability to decode English texts. While some texts were quite simple and self-explanatory, others were more complex and required more understanding so that the documents could be sorted into categories and prioritized. It was challenging for them to interpret the meaning of legal or institutional forms such as: applications for food stamps (a. k. a food stamp paper[1]); an application for support services; and police reports to secure their safety and benefits in the USA. Reading these texts was frustrating for all of the Karenni participants. Sherry once stated, 'The main problem is that we don't know how to read any document. That's really a problem.' Sherry and her husband, Ka Paw, who owned an electronic Burmese-English dictionary, shared their frustration sometimes when using a dictionary, which was a tool they thought would be helpful. They said, 'One English word, many Burmese words' to emphasize that finding the right meaning or the right Burmese word to use when entering the English word they needed to understand was challenging.

Challenges that newcomers face when they are unable to read English written texts are invisible to the outsiders, even to those who wish to help the newcomers. In addition, writing tasks such as filling out legal forms in English (which requires comprehension of specific technical terms and writing skills) were extremely new to the Karenni. The ability of recently arrived refugees to read and fill out legal forms was complicated by unfamiliar contextual and cultural influences. Understanding and responding to such a variety of written texts requires discursive and cultural understanding. To overcome this kind of challenge, they asked friends and neighbors. For example, in between my visits to his home, Teh Reh collected documents and mail in a bag made of Karenni traditional fabric he brought from Thailand. He always carried that bag when he went out to do errands in the hope that his friends he met on that day would be able to translate the documents for him. Then, he would understand what he was supposed to do with them. At home, Teh Reh often used

[1] The form is 'Application for AHCCC Health Insurance, Cash Assistance/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Nutrition Assistance Benefits, and Tuberculosis Benefits,' created by the Arizona Department of Economic Security.

the English-Burmese dictionary and a picture dictionary that he brought from Thailand to look for word meanings and to comprehend the English in the letters and documents around him.

When we met, Teh Reh showed those documents to me and asked me for help. Although he knew that the letters he received were important because he recognized the symbols and brands of their institutions on the letterheads and envelopes, he did not know how to respond to the correspondence. On one of the letters, he pointed at 'Date: 9/22/09' and asked me for clarification. I saw the problem of misunderstanding dates written numerically and in US-English style that goes by month/day/year. In several countries and languages, dates are written in 'day/month/year' order and may spell out the month. Not realizing this difference may cause misinterpretation and communication failure. In this particular case, Teh Reh missed a Hearing appointment about his benefits because he did not understand that the number '9' positioned in the month section of the US-date abbreviation stands for September.

The misunderstanding of the date in the appointment letter led me and Teh Reh to look at the other correspondence and bills that required a prompt response. Even though Teh Reh wanted to pay the bills on time, he did not know the correct way of paying the bills by writing a check and mailing it. This process worried him enough that he postponed doing it—often to his disadvantage. For instance, although he had learned how to buy a money order from the Circle K gas station to pay his monthly rent, he needed a demonstration of how to write out money orders, to read and write the payment slips, and to write on envelopes to pay other bills.

Teh Reh's experiences highlight the need for newcomers to comprehend both language and sociocultural norms in order to read, understand, and prepare correspondence in response to important letters and documents. In this case, overcoming limited English proficiencies is not sufficient in and of itself. Even though Teh Reh understood the basics of English and made progress with learning to read and write, he was still picking up the cultural nuances needed to understand unfamiliar abbreviations, to interpret the intended message correctly, and to react in accordance with time constraints. Even though Teh Reh had good intentions and wanted

to conduct his business in a professional manner, his lack of English and cultural knowledge caused him to respond slowly.

Another critical problem faced by most of the Karenni participants was that they could not understand product labels written in English. During one of my visits in October 2009, Loh Meh asked if I could describe the items she had collected in a large paper bag. Reading their labels, I identified each item to her: shampoo, hair conditioner, liquid soap, shower gel, facial liquid soap, shaving cream, hand soap, and lotion in a variety of brands, sizes, packages, and colors. All of them were unused. She said she received these items as donations from the refugee resettlement agency and from a local church, but she did not know the use and benefit of each item because she did not understand its label. Though supplies were available at hand, not being able to read the words on the labels limited her ability to use them for their intended purpose. For many months since her arrival in May 2009, Loh Meh traveled a long way to get the hygienic and toiletry items she was more familiar with, often from a store located on the other side of town that took time and energy to get there. Her bathroom had only items with Thai or Burmese labels.

Choosing what to buy in the grocery store was challenging because the labels were not understandable for her. During the first few months of living in Phoenix, she went only to a local store only three blocks away from her apartment complex and she did not know where any of the Asian stores were located. She usually tried to guess what was inside each container by looking at the pictures on the label but she was sometimes wrong. Some pictures did not make sense to her. For instance, one day, she pointed out that the picture on the outside of the Morton Salt container (of a short-haired girl in a yellow dress holding an umbrella in the rain on the label) did not indicate that salt was inside. A few weeks later, while taking an ESL class held at her apartment complex by a local organization, she learned from the instructor that the container with the girl in the rain had salt in it. As for produce, there were many unfamiliar fruits and vegetables that she did not buy because she said it would waste money if they were not the kind her family would eat. During those months, she only picked the produce similar to that which she had seen and eaten in Thailand.

Reading labels become a critical matter when those labels were on medicine containers. One afternoon, Teh Reh picked up the medicine prescribed by his family doctor. I came to visit to find that he was sitting by the lamp with the medicine container in his hand, and he told me that he did not understand the medicine label. When he picked up his medicine from the local pharmacy, he told me that he did not understand what the pharmacist said about the medicine, he just smiled as a response. He hoped that he could decode the text on its label when he came home by using a dictionary. In the end, however, he did not know how much medicine he needed to take, how often, or if the medicine could be refilled.

Another incident occurred when Nway Meh had trouble when her medication was running out. Although Nway Meh had limited writing and reading skills even in her native language, Karenni, she was a little bit luckier in that, at the very beginning of the resettlement, she had moved into the apartment complex that housed more than twenty Karenni families. Therefore, she was assisted by her Karenni friends when going to an Asian market and choosing the products. But when it came to reading labels on medicine, Nway Meh struggled. One Saturday afternoon in April 2011, she showed me a bottle of medicine that had only two tablets left. She explained that she needed this kind of medicine in the household for healing the symptoms as she illustrated by pointing to her head, putting her backhand on her forehead, and touching her back and arms. I checked with her oldest daughter, Hla Meh, and realized that the symptoms included headache, fever, and pain. The label read in Thai and English 'พาราเซตามอล (Paracetamol)' with the name of a hospital in Thailand and the stamp of 'Health Department of Thailand.' Then, I took Hla Meh with me to a pharmacy and showed her the shelf with Tylenol. I found the white rounded ones that looked like what Nway Meh showed me and directed Hla Meh to purchase them. I was afraid that if they were in different color and shape (e.g., capsule, oval shape, red or blue color), she would not be comfortable using them.

The recently arrived Karenni's living conditions may be considerably better than before. But, being unable to access their necessary supplies because they do not understand English texts can either encourage them to learn English so that they can live comfortably or exaggerate the obsta-

cles they face living in an English-dominant community. Based on the data, however, the Karenni adults utilized resources in a sophisticated way and incorporated their strategies in order to read these labels and to communicate their desires. Examples of such strategies include, guessing, making use of visual features such as letters, gestures, and pictures, previous experience, and asking others. These strategies were carried out to navigate in the new context where English for them was a key as well as a puzzle.

In this section, I identify the hierarchical order of English literacy constructed by the Karenni families as they categorized the English literacy required in different domains. Within this hierarchy, the participants connected the most challenging form of English literacy with access to benefits, education, and employment. Apart from reading written texts on product labels for their daily living supplies, more complex forms of texts brought more concerns, especially written texts on institutional papers and documents such as from schools (including children's homework) and legal offices that contained high-stakes information and required a more careful response. These documents usually come with multiple lines and pages of texts with no other clues. Participants in my study learned from their experiences in dealing with these texts that accuracy was prioritized and brought in the benefits and resources they needed. I experienced these needs both from the documents and the participants' circumstances. For example, Nway Meh, whose husband had moved to another state to look for a new job, was filing for child support benefits because four of her five children were under 18 years old. Nway Meh's friend suggested that she request more support. But to provide information about her needs that would bring financial support for her family, she had to fill out the form and prepare supporting materials according to the instructions, and this process filled her with great frustration. The issue strengthened her belief in the importance of English and the drawbacks of not knowing it as she always told me, 'Not knowing English causes every problem here.'

The demands of understanding and filling out such documents also reinforced their belief in the hierarchy of English. Eventually, tasks were categorized according to the hierarchy of literacy that was created among the participants. That is, the written mode associated with institutional

English was ranked more highly whereas the oral and informal written modes were ranked lower. For instance, after a few months, Loh Meh had become more confident in the English needed in the workplace to confidently answer her customers and to direct them to the product they were looking for in the store. However, she admitted that a writing task such as filling out legal forms in English that requires comprehension of specific technical terms and writing skills was extremely challenging for her. Her limited skills in reading these texts led her to believe that her English was 'not good enough.' She once described her limitations: 'I am learning to do that, how to do the application form. BUT, Right now, I cannot do that much.' With a belief drawn from situated practices and ideological forces, she saw that her English proficiency was still limited because she could not accomplish all of the tasks required for living in the USA.

'Karenni Women Don't Speak English'

The dominance of English in the larger US society, formal education, and public perception influences language practices, attitudes, and beliefs at the micro level—refugee individuals. As described in the previous sections, the Karenni adults positioned themselves as limited English speakers. On the other hand, children in the recently arrived Karenni refugee community, who experienced at least two domains on a daily basis, home and school, positioned themselves and were positioned by the Karenni adults as English educated because the children received formal education at school.

To the younger children in the study, I was an English-speaking person. To Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, 7-year-old twin brothers, I had been their English-speaking guest, tutor, and friend from 2009 to 2011. After they moved to a new apartment and school, they started having guests from different linguistic backgrounds. Most of them were children with refugee backgrounds and lived in the same neighborhood. These guests had not talked with me until one afternoon while I was observing them playing a video game at the twins' living room.

I was sitting near Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee when they were in charge of the video game controllers. Four other boys sat around Gu-Gu and Nge-

Ngee while they were watching the screen and waiting for their turn. Watching them playing the video game and listening to their conversations, I got excited and was enjoying the children at play. I said to Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, 'Faster!,' 'Shoot him!' in English to encourage them and show my support and excitement. A few minutes later, a character in the game shouted, 'It's up to you now!' in a firm and loud tone. All of the children repeated, 'It's up to you now!' I, then repeated, 'It's up to you now!' following their example. Immediately, one of the neighbor boys turned his head to me with a surprised look on his face and curious eyes and initiated the following conversation.

The Boy:	Do you speak English? (with a rising tone)
CSD:	Yes! I do. Do you?
The Boy:	Yeah … **You are not Karenni? Karenni women don't speak English**.
CSD:	…Where are you from?
The Boy:	Burma.
The other boy:	I'm from Africa.
CSD:	(to the other two boys) How about you? What's your name?

From the excerpt, when the surprised boy questioned me, the fact that I replied in English astounded him was largely based on his preconceived stereotype of Karenni women. I spoke English but because in his opinion 'Karenni women don't speak English,' a challenge arose to his perceived views. To him, my physical features appeared to be a Karenni woman and he also knew that I was a friend to Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's Karenni family. All of these attributes convinced him that I was a Karenni woman. Overhearing our conversation, the other boy jumped in to the conversation introducing himself in English, and adding 'I'm from Africa' to notify me that he could also speak English and was also participating in the situation. When I asked the other two boys 'How about you? What's your name?' to include them in the conversation, I learned that they used English comfortably. The whole group then started talking to me in English and introducing themselves. I was surprised how easily I was included in the conversation with them by starting with simple English

words that demonstrated our shared linguistic repertoire. In addition, these children have learned to identify the situations where they can take advantage of knowing English to play, to join in activities, and to make more friends.

In this excerpt, the Burmese boy made an assumption about what kinds of people speak English and my physical appearance did not fit with his assumption. Our exchange shows that many refugee children, at a very young age and at the very beginning of their resettlement in the USA, had strong ideas about who spoke English and for what purposes. I also realized that such beliefs (and practices) are socially influenced. This was the first time that I understood that many of the children had not tried to talk to me before because they did not think I could communicate with them in English. The data illustrate the children's responses to English used by strangers and neighbors and their perceptions about English delivered through their everyday practices. The question, 'Do you speak English?' seems familiar yet strange in these multilingual families where many languages intermingle. Again, the question comes within ideological and hierarchical constructs of language. For many of them, most Karenni women stayed at home and did not speak English.

'Her English Is Very Very Bad'

Recently arrived refugee children's exposure to formal English instruction at school in the host community triggers certain kinds of discursive interactions and practices in their home spaces. Apart from Karenni children's construct of stereotypes illustrated above, a unique power relation within the family level occurs as a consequence of English being placed at the top of the linguistic hierarchical order. I encountered repeated evidence of this when the children freely corrected and ridiculed their caregivers' mispronunciation of English words.

A teacher of English at the elementary school that all the younger Karenni participant children went once said to me, 'All my kids have problems. They are still in ELD program.' However, at home, these children were the parents' English-speaking model. The children were

intentionally and unintentionally allowed by their parents, on many occasions, to correct and ridicule the non-standard pronunciation and non-standard usage of English by their caregivers. When we had informal conversations alone, for instance, Loh Meh and I used just English. She spoke English without nervous feelings. She put English words together, often with body and facial expressions. However, during the first formal interview with Loh Meh in 2011, she wanted to use Karenni because she was afraid that she could not express her answers with the right words in English. Therefore, we decided to have See Meh, her daughter, serve as an interpreter. See Meh spoke Karenni to her mother and spoke Thai to me. In later conversations and interviews, on the other hand, Loh Meh became more and more confident with being interviewed in English—See Meh or Teh Reh were not always available. During this time, if See Meh was around and overheard her mother's English, she made fun of or corrected her English pronunciation and interview answers. For example, See Meh overheard Loh Meh offering me some watermelon and saying 'wat-MEL-lon' to me. See Meh laughed and said, 'It's WAT-er-me-lən' to correct her mother. Loh Meh repeated after See Meh a couple times to verify that she could pronounce it correctly. Below are other examples of See Meh mocking her mother's English when she overheard her mother using English. The following conversation is from an interview with Loh Meh about how Loh Meh felt about her English after having been living and working in the USA for a while. See Meh overheard it and interrupted:

CSD:	What do you think? You think your English is better and better?
Loh Meh:	Yeah. I understand more, better … for me. Before, never.
See Meh:	**Her English is very very bad (laughing).**
Loh Meh:	(laughing) See Meh, before, I know, I understand English a little bit, and See Meh said, 'DON'T speak English! Your English is not good. Don't speak English,' See Meh told me. She's shy for me. She said, 'Don't speak English.'

In this situation, when See Meh says that her mother's English is bad, her mother's English is the target of See Meh's amusement within the

family and with me. Both See Meh and Loh Meh were English language learners and newcomers in US society, but See Meh's higher level of English proficiency and exposure to school English allowed her to see the flaws in her mother's use of English. Loh Meh pointed out that her daughter was embarrassed about her own variation of English. On other occasions, I also observed that See Meh often commented on how people around her used English. For example, I wanted See Meh to clarify where Hla Meh's father moved to and she replied, 'Iowa. The way they (Karenni adults) pronounce Iowa is similar to how we say Hawaii' and she continued with other illustrations, 'For Colorado, they pronounce co-RA-do … for California, they pronounce aa-lee … CA … something funny. It's funny! (laughing).' See Meh appeared to believe that she knew better how these words should be pronounced.

Daw was very close to her mother, Sherry, who taught herself English at home with picture books. Sherry was interested in learning vocabulary used for grocery shopping. She turned the page of the picture book and pointed to two simple words 'chicken' and 'kitchen' while Daw was doing her homework on a couch next to her mother. Though Sherry knew the meaning of 'chicken' and 'kitchen' very well, the pronunciation was difficult for her and could lead to a tongue-twisting production. She pronounced 'kit-ken' and 'chick-chen' a couple of times and could not produce them as 'kit-chen' and 'chick-en.' Daw laughed at her mother's pronunciation, then articulated the two words slowly to her mother. Sherry laughed and repeated after her daughter until both of them were satisfied with Sherry's pronunciation.

Teh Reh, who helped his children with their homework, claimed that Gu-Gu sometimes corrected him for the pronunciation of English words such as 'girl' and 'car' by overstressing the word to him like, 'giRl' and 'caR' to emphasize the US-English medial and final /r/ sound to his father. Teh Reh told me that he liked that his children were learning English. This evidence highlights the value of acquiring the English language and the parents, to some extent, encourage the children to correct their English. In the parents' view, they believed that the English language that their children acquired at school was the correct form of English. For these reasons, they believed that their children were able to serve as mediators of good English transmitted from school to their households. In this case, a

certain form of English is valued as correction becomes a familiar practice in these immigrant families. The practices suggest that the children (and parents) subscribe to language ideologies that value Standard English over other languages and language varieties which are prevalent in US society (Labov 2001; Lippi-Green 1997, 2012; Preston 1996). With language socialization lenses, children's agentive acts have been driven by their English proficiency and their formal education in their host country.

The Minoritized Newcomers and the Pursuit of English

If democracy means the societal system where every member has involvement in making decisions and giving an opinion or a voice, many Karenni have not yet fully experienced the democracy in the USA they have yearned for. The stories of their struggles reemphasize their minoritized status. Language, in this case English, is one of the mechanisms that builds 'boundaries between minority and majority' (Byram 1986, p. 2). The establishment of these boundaries, language ideology that privileges English, and the hierarchical relationship between English and other languages are observable in these Karenni newcomers' 'personal relations, face-to-face encounters, and the invidious distinctions of the workplace and residential neighborhood' (Woolard 1989, p. 121). This chapter suggests that the adult Karenni participants connect English proficiency and literacy with access, confidence, and happiness due to their subscription to language ideologies that value English. All these beliefs are rooted in the dominance of English and bolstered by the difficulties the participants faced in every aspect of their everyday living due to their limited English proficiency.

From power perspectives, language is not only a divider between minority and majority but also within the same social class—among people from the same neighborhood with similar refugee backgrounds. The Karenni participants did not receive similar perceived status because of their different levels of English language proficiency. This is because English language proficiency has become the benchmark by which one's

local value and future potential are measured. From the Karenni parents' perspective, their children's exposure to formal English instruction at school and the institutionalized education are in the higher status. This thought triggers a certain kind of ideological and discursive interactions and practices in their home spaces. For example, the children freely correct and ridicule their caregivers' mispronunciation of English words. In addition, they have learned to identify situations where they can take advantage of English to play, to join in activities, and to make more friends. The findings suggest that the dominance of English at the macro level influences language practices at the micro level and that this may involve the younger generation as key. It shows dynamic power relations as well as contested language ideologies within the family level.

With their firm belief in the high prestige and power of English, the Karenni participants (and many of us) forget to look at what the newcomers can do with their accumulated and existing skills. We see the exaggeration of their limited English proficiency and literacy and we may not realize that even native speakers of English have a wide range of English literacy. In other words, we are literate in some contexts and illiterate in some contexts. I have to admit that I do not understand many US legal documents. Although I have been in the USA for more than a decade, filling some forms and filing tax documents are still a challenge for me. This chapter encourages teachers, service providers, social workers, and local hosts to recognize the challenges, especially the linguistic obstacles, faced by the recently arrived newcomers during the resettlement process. The newcomers know in the bottom of their hearts that English is important. However, acquiring English successfully takes time, support, and understanding.

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5

Karenni Youth, Multilingual Practices, and Transnational Literacy

This chapter highlights the children's voices as related to their language learning trajectories, beliefs about languages, and multilingual literacies that are affected and complicated by movement across national and linguistic borders at a very young age. Based on interviews and observations, the Karenni children were engaged daily in multilingual practices at home and in their neighborhood. Their practices were not only context embedded but also goal oriented. For example, many of the Karenni children were learning English at school but used their primary languages as resources to understand better the subject matter (e.g., taking notes in the primary language while learning the content in English for a better understanding of the content). Some children consumed multilingual texts for entertainment while some used them for practicing and maintaining their religion. Many went further and learned a language other than English such as Karen and Burmese to fulfill their personal interests and career goals.

Practices in both previously acquired and recently acquired languages among the Karenni youth presented in this chapter accentuate their role as transnational agents. They brought with them their existing linguistically diverse resources, language ideologies, and practices

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to their receiving nation but such ideologies and practices may be either maintained or evolved depending on their purposes, meaning and functions of languages in those purposes, and the locally driven contexts. In addition, based on the Karenni youth's transnational experiences and consequences, this chapter presents the evidence rooted in a horizontal relationship of languages, or how multiple languages are valued based on their strategic and situated functions rather than on the language ideology that places English at the top of the linguistic hierarchy.

(Un)Intentional Translanguaging

While serving as an academic tutor for the Karenni children in the study and observing them at their homes, I gained an understanding of how they manage to comprehend concepts, ideas, and word meanings in their primary languages and English for socializing and academic purposes. At least two linguistic systems, the children's primary language and English, collaborated in everyday language and literacy practices. Indeed, the data demonstrate the difficulties of separating codes and linguistic systems into discrete categories like code-switching. According to García's (2009) concept of 'translanguaging' (as described in Chap. 1), a bilingual individual does not acquire two separate linguistic systems, but evolving linguistic features drawn upon two systems for a meaning-making purpose in their bilingual worlds.

The two sub-sections below show how the children's meaning-representation tools and linguistic repertoires were used in order to accomplish a task. The first analysis shows the linguistic consequences of migration across national and linguistic borders at a very young age when a primary language has not been fully acquired before the move. The second data analysis illustrates how translanguaging is helpful for the recently arrived children's academic purpose and circumstance, where the language of instruction, English, is not the newcomers' primary meaning-representation code. The two sets of data demonstrate the complicated ways that migration and schooling experiences influence and shape children's learning and language acquisition.

Translanguaging and Counting

Based on my experiences as a multiple language learner, no matter how proficient I am in a second or a foreign language, I believe that using my first language, Thai, is the most accurate process for me when counting 1, 2, 3, and onward. When calculating, my native language comes intuitively. When I see a series of numbers such as in a telephone number, I call out those numbers in my native language. I also memorize my social security number in my native language. I remembered the time when I was interviewed for my Permanent Resident application (Green card) at a local immigration office in Phoenix, Arizona, and an official asked me to verify my social security number. I had to think for a moment and link those numbers in my head to English words and then said them to him. In numerous situations, when I count aloud or call numbers out in English for my audience, I cannot help counting or calculating again (silently) in Thai to make sure I have not miscounted or miscalculated anything. My observation is extended to people around me. It reinforces my belief that many fluent bilinguals use their primary language to count for the most accurate result when I see my friends or foreign cashiers silently counting (e.g., items and money) in their primary languages. Nevertheless, this belief has been challenged since I overheard young Karenni children counting in English when numbers were involved in their everyday conversation. This is a representation of the holistic view on bilingualism.

The twin brothers, Gu-Gu, Ngee-Ngee, and their Karenni friends, who were 6–7 years of age at the time, used translanguaging practices, especially when numerical codes were involved. When I played and talked with Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, we used English as a lingua franca so words they used to communicate numbers (e.g., one, two, and three) did not catch my attention. During one of my visits in early 2010, I was talking to their family members while Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee were talking and playing in one corner of the living room. During the twins' conversation, 'One, two, three, four, …' was uttered in the middle of their interaction in Karenni. I followed them to verify the pattern of this linguistic production and found that all of the Karenni children their age in the neighborhood who played with them used similar English counting

sequences and English numerical words when numbers were involved in their conversations and activities. The following data sets present the utterances between the twins and two Karenni boys during their play on a snakes-and-ladders board game that involved using a spinner to indicate how many squares a player was allowed to travel their marker on the board (see Fig. 5.1). Please note that for these data sets the italic parts were spoken in Karenni whereas the bold parts were spoken in English.

Fig. 5.1 Playing with snakes-and-ladders board game and a spinner

Ngee-Ngee: *Oh, that is there. We need to try again because it is in the middle. We need to see all of them. Can we be in the same group? Is that okay?*
Boy 2: *We copy the letters. And, the letters are beautiful.*
Boy 1: (spins the spinner)
Ngee Ngee: *How many are there?*
Boy 1: *Nothing. There is just* **six. One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six .**

The above exchange was primarily performed in Karenni. When Ngee-Ngee expressed that he would like to team up with Boy 1, he expressed his idea in Karenni. Later, Ngee-Ngee also asked Boy 1 in Karenni about the number he got from spinning the spinner. However, while answering in Karenni, Boy 1 called out 'six' in English according to what the spinner indicated. Then, he grabbed his marker on the board, and traveled on the squares by counting in English. His utterance in two languages, Karenni and English, occurred intrasententially. This pattern, in which each boy called out the number and counted in English, recurred throughout their play as shown in the following examples.

Gu-Gu: (spins the spinner) **Three. One. Two. Three**.
Ngee-Ngee: *Let's do in a circle. Then, it's your turn.*
Gu-Gu: *No. I will just be here. It is here. This is just* **three**.
Ngee-Ngee: (spins) **One. Two. Three. Four.**
Gu-Gu: (spins) **Six! One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.**
Boy 1: *Hey! There's one in my home. I have the same like this. Do you want to see?*
Ngee Ngee: *I will see it tomorrow.*
Boy 1: (spins the spinner) **One. Two. Three. Four.** *And, it's your turn*.
Boy 2: **One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.**
Gu-Gu: *Yep. Me and You. OK?*
Boy 2: (spins the spinner) **One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.**
Boy 1: (spins the spinner) **One. Two. Three. Four. Five. Six.**
Boy 2: (spins the spinner) **One. Two. Three. Four. Five.**

As presented, a local socialization norm among these transnational Karenni children had been created. The Karenni children used English numerical words when number and counting were involved despite the fact that their chat was primarily in Karenni during the course of their play. Depending on the number resulting from using the spinner, they then spoke out loud when counting the squares on the board and walking their marker to place it on the appropriate square. Their practices of calling out numbers and counting in English led me to ask Teh Reh, the father of Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, for more details. Teh Reh was not surprised about the matter. Teh Reh, explained that 'they (the children) were very very young when they were in Thailand … they did not go to school in Thailand, so they did not learn the numbers there.' He added that even though Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee have learned some numerical words in Karenni, they still have limited knowledge of the Karenni words needed for communicating numbers and their meaning. Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's age (around 5 years old in 2009), the time of their movement to the USA, and the formal education they received are factors that influence their ability and comfort with counting in English.

See Meh, the older sister of Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, said that her brothers used only 'one' (ter) and 'two' (ŋi) in Karenni, for example, when they asked for money. Other than that, she had not heard them using the Karenni words to articulate numbers. Immediately after arriving in Phoenix, they enrolled in a kindergarten, where they learned the concept of numbers delivered in English. Therefore, they were more comfortable counting in English than they were in Karenni, even though English was their second language.

According to Wynn (1992, 1997), children do not possess an innate knowledge of numbers and the words for those numbers. They have to be taught through their language and culture. At the very early stage of learning how to count, children as young as two to six have numerical ideas well before understanding the meanings of the words. Based on Wynn's longitudinal study of 2 and 3 year olds, children know very early that counting words each refer to a distinct, unique numerosity, though they do not yet know to *which* quantity each word refers. It is possible that children learn this in part from the morphology and syntax of the number words in a phrase or a sentence, their surroundings,

and the caregivers' both implicit and explicit teaching. Despite this early knowledge, however, it takes children longer (on the order of a year) to learn how the counting system represents numerosity as it requires memory of number order, which word goes with which tag, and what number represents more or fewer quantity. Therefore, developing the knowledge of number words is the first part of learning to count. This suggests that it takes some years for the initial concept of numbers to develop, and a little longer for mapping the sequence of numbers and the counting system.

In this case, the Karenni children's language learning experiences and educational trajectories produce unique ways of bilingual socialization in their own local community. When they moved across national and linguistic borders around preschool to kindergarten age, they may have informally learned some number concepts in their first language, but still had limited knowledge of the first language words needed for communicating numbers. Formal education was a crucial influence on their learning of numbers and counting that leads to mathematics. After arriving in Phoenix the children were quickly enrolled in kindergarten. There they learned the concept of numbers and counting delivered in English; therefore counting in English was more intuitive than in Karenni for them, even though English was their second language.

In addition, the young children's bilingual practices demonstrate a holistic view of bilingualism as proposed by Baker (1992). Their two acquired languages, Karenni and English, are 'blended, harmonized, and combined [uniquely]' (p. 78) in order to perform maximum communicative potentiality among bilinguals (García 2009). Here, the two languages, English and Karenni, are not used as two distinctive languages but they are joined for these children to create meaning and to communicate efficiently in a given setting. While some might argue that their language production shows incomplete language development in both languages, Karenni and English, I argue that their purposeful language use demonstrates an effective use of available resources. While 'one,' for example, is being said in English, 'ter' (pronounced /tə/) can be said in Karenni, 'ein' in German, or 'uno' in Spanish, the concept of these three words, ter, ein, and uno, are similar to 'one,' which means 'amounting to a single unit' no matter which one of these words is produced. However, the speaker may use the code whether or not it is

comprehensible or incomprehensible to the hearers because the code used to represent the concept here in this situation is cognitively understood by the speakers themselves. When we move away from the codes that we call English, Karenni, German, and Spanish, what is firm and unchangeable here is that the concept of 'a single unit' is being conveyed. The data show that the English codes for numbers are produced in the stream of Karenni conversation because, to these children, meaning, comprehension, and communicative goals of what they say and what is being said are prioritized rather than the symbolic system (e.g., English, Karenni, German, or Spanish) being used.

The presented case among younger Karenni children is distinctive due to their disrupted life and education trajectories. In contrast, the older Karenni children, who went to school in the refugee camp prior to coming to the USA, had clearer concepts of numbers in Karenni and Burmese, which was taught formally at the refugee camp's school. Toh Reh, 9, said that he used 'Burmese. And, English, too' to communicate numbers whereas his brother, Sha Reh, 12, said that he counted and calculated in 'Burmese. Burmese is easy for me. Karenni is difficult.' This is different from the four children presented earlier, who had not received formal schooling in the refugee camp prior to coming to the USA.

Doing Homework

Although See Meh spoke Karenni as her native language, Thai had been See Meh's strongest written and academic language. Her Thai proficiency ranged from teenage slang to the highest social dialect used in Thai society. In her free time in the USA, Thai served as See Meh's language of entertainment, the language she used for reading comic books and magazines, for listening to songs, and for watching Thai soap operas and music videos. See Meh knew a lot about current Thai news that ranged from celebrity gossip and fashion to Thailand's politics. On numerous occasions, her literacy practices showed native-like Thai proficiency. For example, she watched and understood a Thai series in which the characters used the Thai Royal variety that is composed of numerous special vocabularies, complicated pronoun systems, and extra politeness markers. To my surprise,

See Meh could touch-type Thai on computer, used Facebook in Thai and English, and wrote her diary in Thai.

See Meh explained that for her 'English is used the most at school' in the USA because it was the language of instruction in the classroom in addition to the language of socialization with US and international friends. However, the academic context and socialization with friends demanded different types of English proficiency. It was more challenging for See Meh to understand the academic content required for her class. I had observed such challenges while tutoring See Meh and listening to her reflect on those challenges,

> ยากค่ะ แต่ว่าตามเพื่อนไม่ค่อยได้ (ขำ) ตามไม่ค่อยได้ อยู่ที่ประเทศไทยนี่ ตามเพื่อนได้ค่ะ เพราะยังไงยังไงก็ตามเพื่อนได้ แต่อยู่ที่นี่นี่ตามเพื่อนไม่ได้ ครูพูดอะไรนี่บางครั้งก็รู้บางครั้งก็งง ไม่รู้ ใช้ภาษาไทยสอนค่ะ ก็ง่ายกว่า ภาษาไทย คือพูดกับครูรู้เรื่อง แล้วครูก็พูดก็แบบอธิบาย ครูอธิบาย แล้วก็แบบสอนอะไรแบบนี้เข้าใจมากกว่า เวลาครูบอก อธิบายครั้งเดียวเราก็เข้าใจได้ปั๊บเลย อยู่ที่นี่นี่เค้าพูดภาษาอังกฤษค่ะ นี่ถ้าเราไม่รู้เรื่องนี่ยังไงยังไง เราก็ไม่รู้ค่ะ เพราะเราไม่เข้าใจ
>
> [Difficult, indeed. I can't catch up with my friends' level (laughing*). I hardly catch up. When I was in Thailand, I was able to catch up because … anyway I could catch up. But, here, I can't. When the teacher teaches, sometimes I get it, sometimes I am confused or don't know it. When it's Thai, it's a lot easier. It's in Thai. That is, I could speak and ask my teacher in Thai. And then, the teacher explained, explained to me, and taught me. It's easier to comprehend for me. When the teacher explained (in Thai), just once, I got it right away. But, here, the teacher speaks English. If I don't get it, no matter how the teacher explains, I don't get it because I don't understand it.]
>
> *Laughing here is used as a way to cope with problems and being optimistic.

Here, See Meh explained that the language of instruction influenced how well she understood the content of the lesson. When she was in Thailand, she understood academic concepts used in content-area classes and their meanings right away when they were delivered in Thai. See Meh also complained about how studying in the class delivered in English was difficult for her in the USA. She said the major obstacle was that 'เพราะว่าไม่รู้คำศัพท์ [I don't know the English vocabulary].' See Meh said that she would understand her classes better if she knew the meaning of the English words. I asked

her if she discussed her difficulty with her teacher. See Meh said that she asked the teacher when she did not understand the content but there was always something unclear. See Meh added that the teacher 'could explain it in Spanish to Spanish-speaking students.'

Keeping this in mind while realizing that See Meh and I always used Thai with each other with ease, we intentionally used Thai while explaining the academic content in English that See Meh had problems with. On one occasion, her response demonstrated that she had already understood the scientific concept being taught when I used Thai vocabulary to explain the meaning of the concept to her as shown in the excerpt:

Me: OK. Next … 'Read the information about photosynthesis … (I read aloud the question)' เข้าใจคำว่า photosynthesis ไหมคะ [Do you know the term photosynthesis?]
SM: …
CSD: Photosynthesis ก็คือ การสังเคราะห์แสง เข้าใจการสังเคราะห์แสงเปล่า [Photosynthesis is garn-sung-kroh-saeng. Do you know the term garn-sung-kroh-saeng?]
SM: ค่ะ [Yes, I do.]
CSD: ต้นไม้มีสีเขียวเนียมันสังเคราะห์แสงได้เมื่อมีแสงมากระทบ มีการสังเคราะห์แสง เพื่อทำอะไร [Green plants can do 'garn-sung-kroh-saeng' when there's light. What do they need garn-sung-kroh-saeng for?]
SM: เพื่อการเจริญเติบโต [for its development and growth]
CSD: ใช่ เพื่อสร้างอาหารและการเจริญเติบโต เรียนใช่ไหมคะเนียที่เมืองไทย [Yes! To make food and to grow. You have learned it in Thailand, haven't you?]
SM: ค่ะ [Yes, I have]
CSD: การสังเคราะห์แสงเนีย ภาษาฝรั่งเค้าเรียกว่า photosynthesis [garn-sung-kroh-saeng is called 'photosynthesis' in English]

In these instances, we were jointly engaged in the phenomenon, again, of what García (2009) has called translanguaging, or the process of using one's holistic linguistic understanding to make sense of things in intentional ways. I intended to use Thai and English as translanguaging practices with See Meh in tutoring sessions. The goal was for See Meh to conceptualize 'photosynthesis' not only as a word but also a scientific phenomenon. When See Meh's prior knowledge was activated in the lan-

guage that she understood, she could transfer the comprehension she had already had to English and completed the assignment in this session, which was about photosynthesis. In the excerpt, I use the Thai word 'การสังเคราะห์แสง' [garn-sung-kroh-saeng]' and asked See Meh if she understood the meaning. Then, I received the response from her. She defined photosynthesis as a natural process in a plant 'เพื่อการเจริญเติบโต [for its development and growth],' which showed that she had some prior understanding of the concept. What she needed was the activation of what she already knew and the connection to what she was required to comprehend in this specific situation. At this level of her English proficiency and in this particular context, a reminder of the meaning of the Thai word 'การสังเคราะห์แสง' and the linking of the concept in two languages, 'การสังเคราะห์แสง' in Thai and 'photosynthesis' in English, had to be emphasized so that it made sense to her. The same thing can be said about her ability to understand the content of her other classes. The textbooks and worksheets written in English often discouraged her and reduced her efforts to comprehend the content because she did not see the connection of those words with her prior knowledge, which was usually represented by the Thai (or Karenni) language in her repertoires.

A similar use of two languages to accomplish sophisticated meaning making occurred when she was assigned a specific task for her science class on 'five things you know about the respiratory or circulatory systems.' Because she did not understand the meaning of words like 'respiratory' and 'circulatory,' she was unable to finish the task at hand. While she had a basic understanding of how human organs worked as she learned in her biology class, she could not link her prior knowledge to these two challenging words. I myself had to call and ask a native English speaker to briefly explain to me what respiratory and circulatory systems meant to make sure I understood them correctly. Then, I shared with See Meh my understanding of the respiratory system in Thai by using the term 'ระบบทางเดินหายใจ' (literally translated in English as the system of breathing pathway), and the circulatory system by using the term 'ระบบทางเดินโลหิต' (literally translated to English as the system of blood circulation). With the scientific terms and their literal meanings in Thai, she could link 'lung,' 'larynx,' and 'nasal cavity' to the respiratory system and 'heart' and 'vein' to the circulatory system and was later able to finish the task.

Additional evidence from multiple tutoring sessions show that using the language that both See Meh and I were competent in helped scaffold the meaning to the English language. Another subject she struggled with was math. She often brought math worksheets back home in frustration. When the math exercise was in the form of multiple-choice question, she would guess and circle an answer without solving the math problems. She explained that she did not understand the instructor's explanation in English of how to solve them. From the worksheets about calculating 'negative numbers,' for instance, See Meh told me that she understood the concept of '−2,' but she did not understand how '−2−3' was equal to '−5' as she was lost when her math instructor directed how to solve math problems with negative numbers in class. I explained to her how '−2−3' becomes '−5' in Thai. Then, I found that she did not get the right answer because she orally repeated 'negative two negative three' a few times in English while she did not understand its whole concept. Therefore, she did not know what to do with it. I changed the way the language was produced for this math problem and orally rephrased '−2−3' in Thai 'ลบสอง ลบสาม,' which meant 'negative two minus three' not 'negative two negative three' and the answer of the math problem had to be a smaller number because it had gone through a 'minus' process. She, then, understood it how the answer becomes '−5' because the word 'ลบ' [minus] guided her. I created more math problems similar to this one for See Meh to solve until she became more competent in this topic.

The process that See Meh and I were involved in included the act of translanguaging that supported us in the tutoring endeavors. That is, she was struggling with reading the words in English, or trying to understand the explanation of the math problem delivered in English, because she had limited knowledge of the meaning of those words and explanations. Here, See Meh did not only have a difficulty with getting the meaning of English vocabulary, but she also had difficulty connecting the words with her acquired prior knowledge. In this case, using only English prevented her from looking for the connection between the meaning of those words with her prior knowledge because English is not the language she intuitively uses as her meaning representation code. Frequently, after the explanation in Thai, her strongest academic language, she was able to link her existing knowledge to 'new' information in the academic

texts and complete her assignments. After each tutoring session, she felt encouraged that the content was not so difficult that she was not able to overcome the problems. In fact, when she understands the concept of words and terms used for her class in one representational language, her understanding can be connected to the English words.

The above discussion about translanguaging reveals that the monolingual view, especially the English-only ideology that places English at the top of the linguistic hierarchical order, is not sufficient to facilitate learning for the recently arrived Karenni children in the study. The first sets of data that present the young children counting in English while interacting in Karenni show that their local communicative needs are fulfilled by using both their previously and recently acquired languages. While we sort the languages out as Karenni and English, both languages are equally and simultaneously required to fulfill the meaning-making process, cognition, and socialization for these children. In See Meh's case, her strongest academic language was used to bridge an academic term and its meaning in one language to its representational term in the target language. The evidence is also applicable to linking the conceptual meaning in learners' primary language to a second language in reading and other context-area classes. In all of the examples described here, the children's acquired languages were utilized to obtain the optimal outcomes in understanding their multilingual worlds and communicating and processing their thoughts.

Karenni Youth's Multilingual Practices

During the Dee Ku celebration on April 14, 2011 in Phoenix, Arizona, the song *We Are Karenni*,[1] written by a recently resettled Karenni artist, was sung by a group of fifteen Karenni teenagers. The local school within walking distance of the participants' apartment complex provided its cafeteria and stage for this event. Hla Meh and Daw, two of my teenage participants, were among the singers. All of the teenage singers wore similar outfits—Karenni traditional clothes that included a pink cotton top and a red sarong that had some small white and green stripes.

[1] It was sung in Karenni.

Listening to the song sung by these young singers, I was touched by their clear, loud, and proud voices. However, it brought about the question of what it means to them to be a Karenni. In this section, I focus on the multilingual repertoires and practices of four Karenni teenagers in my study: Saw Reh (15), See Meh (15), Hla Meh (18), and Daw (14). Among these four teenagers, only Hla Meh was born in the Karenni State in Burma and crossed the border with her parents to Thailand when she was only 3 years old. The other three teenagers were born in Thailand's refugee camp. Living in Thailand most of their lives as refugees prior to coming to the USA, the Karenni teenagers were interesting to me in terms of their sense of belonging. They are unlike their parents who were born in Burma and had experiences of living in their home country, and who could tell us about their happy lives on a fertile land before the war and their difficult experiences of border crossing. The Karenni teenagers only received those stories in Thailand's refugee camp, where they lived in a fenced compound in the country that was not their own. They heard the stories about their parents' and grandparents' homeland while growing up with their native culture and language, but on the opposite side of the Thailand-Burma border. This experience and their subsequent migration to the USA raises questions about how they see themselves while living in the USA. I approach the subject matter by analyzing their comments about language, observation, and artefact evidence.

Saw Reh and See Meh: Learning a Language Other than English

Saw Reh, similar to other newly arrived immigrant children, was learning English in the USA as he told me that English would help him 'get a good job to help family.' After 2 years of residing in the USA, he had advanced to Basic level in the ELD program. Talking about living here in the USA, apart from his school life, Saw Reh told me that '[it's] NOT fun to have an American friend.' He shared with me that he had a lot of friends in Thailand and he dearly missed them as well as his life in the refugee camp. On a daily basis, he spent his free time after school playing soccer with Asian friends originally from Burma, Thailand, Korea, and

Vietnam. At home, he enjoyed watching movies and music videos in the form of CDs, DVDs, and VHS tapes that he and other family members brought from Thailand or purchased from an Asian market and from other refugees who made copies and sold them. Frequently, I entered his apartment where the music videos were turned on loud with very energizing hip-hop style music in a language I did not understand and found Saw Reh there in front of the screen. Frequently Saw Reh sang out loud along with the non-English karaoke script running on the screen. Later, I found out that the music videos he played were not always Karenni.

Saw Reh explained that the Karenni language has several dialects that are mutually intelligible. He explained in detail that the Karenni written language has three forms: (1) Karenni written in the Karenni alphabetical system; (2) Karenni written in the Burmese alphabetical system; and (3) Karenni written in a romanized (English alphabetical) system. Saw Reh, who could read and write the Karenni alphabetical system very well, told me that he had limited knowledge of the Burmese language, both in oral and written modes, but he had been learning it from friends and family, and, interestingly, from the karaoke script as well. The songs he listened to and the music videos he watched included both Karenni and Burmese songs and the karaoke script running on the screen was sometimes in Karenni written system and sometimes in Burmese written system, which gradually became familiar to him.

Saw Reh expressed that he was interested in Burmese language learning for two reasons. First, because of his strong ties to Thailand's refugee camps, and in order to maintain connections with people he met in the past, he wanted to pursue something in the current setting that would be related to his memory and experiences. In the USA, apart from using Karenni with his Karenni friends and family members, Saw Reh was commonly seen hanging out with Karen teenagers, both male and female, in the apartment complex though he did not know the Karen language and the Karen friends did not know the Karenni language. When I asked Saw Reh what language he spoke with his Karen friends, he responded that he used Burmese with them, even though he didn't consider himself proficient in Burmese. He explained:

> I never talked Burmese before, I never talked Burmese. I don't know how to speak Burmese, I don't understand. Before, I knew only a little Burmese. Because of living here, now, I know more [Burmese] because I talk to Mu Yo and Hed Tho (Karen friends).

The Karen friends, Mu Yo and Hed Tho, who were Saw Reh's regular guests, confirmed that they used Burmese with Saw Reh and his family. Here, Saw Reh found a way to connect with people who shared similar experiences of refugee-ness, refugee camp, movement, and resettlement. Along with learning English and using English every day at school, learning Burmese has helped Saw Reh socialize with other ethnic groups from Burma.

Second, Saw Reh's interest presents a new genre of foreign language learning that is commonly found in other language learners around the world, whose motivation for learning a foreign language is driven by pop culture (e.g., a Japanese student learning English because of his interest in US movies and hip-hop music, a Thai student learning Japanese because of his interest in Japanese manga (comic books for adults) and games). In Saw Reh's case, the language he is learning is Burmese, which is relatively unexpected in the area of language learning and pop culture. In fact, he learned it to fulfill his interest in his valuable past as well as his favorite entertainment genre. In addition, Hla Meh, Saw Reh's older sister, who could speak and read Burmese, was fond of watching Burmese movies and listening to Burmese music. She also liked to play Burmese DVD movies at home and always joined Saw Reh when Saw Reh played his music and movies. Her practice reinforced Saw Reh's Burmese language learning. As Saw Reh explained, 'Before, I didn't see Burmese movies in Thailand. Here, I watched them because my sister likes to watch them.' Watching Burmese and Karenni movies had helped Saw Reh develop his multilingual repertoires. Saw Reh made use of available resources in his new context that consisted of family, friends, and available materials to serve his goal, which is to reestablish the idea of community taken from his experiences in his country of origin and his previous country of residence. It is important to note that language learning takes place not only when the learner needs it, as in the case of looking for a job or for

academic advancement, but also when the learner wants to learn it to fulfill his personal interest and growth.

Saw Reh's consumption of the cultural products from the rural parts of Southeast Asia and his efforts to learn more about the people and the culture of his homeland have contributed to and strengthened his cultural awareness and identity. In addition to his interest in his Karenni roots and those cultures and languages close to them such as Karen and Burmese, I paid particular attention to how Saw Reh characterized and connected himself to the world and his current location in the USA, especially when the tattoo on his right forearm caught my eye. The 3 × 3 inch tattoo appeared to resemble a geometric symbol with a pointed triangle superimposed on a spherical shape. I asked him what it was and to my surprise he pointed out that there was more to it than a triangle and a circle. He explained, 'It's an A,' while he was using his finger to draw on that tattoo to guide me how to read the symbol, and 'It's the world,' while he drew on the spherical shape in the background. I asked him what it represented and received the answer that 'A' on the tattoo meant 'Asian' and he added, 'I am Asian boy' (see Fig. 5.2)

I connect the meaning of the tattoo, a symbol of his identity—'I am Asian boy'—to all of Saw Reh's everyday practices that include learn-

Fig. 5.2 Saw Reh's tattoo

ing Burmese, watching Burmese and Karenni movies, and listening to and singing Burmese and Karenni songs. Talking with Saw Reh about those practices, I have learned that Saw Reh had a strong idea of what an Asian boy should be. Having Asian friends, consuming Asian media, and learning another Asian language had become his way of living in the USA. This shows that Saw Reh is very competent in adapting available resources to fulfill his desire for being Asian.

Saw Reh's language and literacy practices not only reveal his perspectives on how to be an Asian boy in the USA, but also indicate his motivation to learn another language and the value he places on multilingualism. While English is believed to be the most commonly used lingua franca in the world (Graddol 1996), other languages, for instance Burmese in this case, also have important functions. Here in the USA, Saw Reh was interested in meeting and socializing with people who had similar experiences. In the process, Saw Reh created an imagined community (Anderson 1996), where he utilized Burmese with friends originally from Burma and with cultural products. In the meantime, he also recreated a community similar to that that he had in his previous country.

See Meh had learned (or relearned) a language other than English in the new host country as well. In addition to acquiring Karenni as her primary language and using Karenni at home with her family, See Meh had been learning the Burmese language at the refugee camp's school and the Karen language from friends since she was 5 years old. Nevertheless, the two languages, Burmese and Karen, were acquired differently in different contexts. She considered Burmese an extremely difficult language but she had to learn it for academic purpose in the refugee camp. Conversely, she admitted that Karen, or what she called 'the White Karen' to be distinct from her 'Red Karen (Karenni)' origin, was very easy because, as she explained, she had a lot of Karen friends to communicate with. Although See Meh admitted that her ability to speak Karen had declined because she had been in a Thai school and lost in contact with the Karen people for 4 years from age 9 to 13, she had been trying to learn the Karen language again while living in the USA:

พอไปเรียนภาษาไทยไม่มีคนคาเรนค่ะ หนูก็เริมลืมๆ มันไป แล้วหนูก็ไม่เคยพูดคาเรนอีก พอหนูมาถึงทีนี เวลาเพื่อนหนูคุยกับหนู หนูเข้าใจแต่หนูพูดไม่ได้ พอหนูมาถึงแล้วประมาณห้าเดือนหนูก็เริมพูดออกมา แล้วตอนนี้ก็พูดออกได้ง่ายแล้ว

[When I learned Thai in the Thai school, there were no Karen people, so I kind of forgot it and did not speak it. When I arrived in the USA, Karen friends talked to me, I understood what they said but I could not talk back in Karen. After 5 months in the USA, I started speaking Karen again. Now, I speak it. And now, it comes out so easily] (Duran 2014, p. 84).

The reasons for See Meh to relearn Karen in the USA are threefold. First of all, she explained that her Karen friends did not want to learn Karenni because 'they believed that learning and using Burmese, an official language of Burma used by a larger group, would be more useful. In addition, Burmese continues to hold a powerful and symbolic status among the refugees from Burma' (Duran 2014, p. 84). See Meh, on the other hand, thought that it was a better solution for her to learn her friends' Karen language to strengthen the friendship instead of using another second language such as Burmese and English (see also Duran 2014). The second reason for learning and using Karen with her Karen friends is due to her limited Burmese proficiency, a result of her timidity in using it. See Meh claimed that she had good Burmese listening skills but was uncomfortable speaking it still because her Burmese pronunciation was 'ไม่ชัด [not quite right]' and would bring her embarrassment when speaking to 'เพื่อนหนูที่เค้าพูดชัดกว่า [those friends, who could speak Burmese more correctly].' However, she argued, 'I will be able to speak it (Burmese) soon because I'm good at learning languages.' The final reason she chose to speak Karen, one of her second languages, to her Karen friends was that she had acquired Karen when she was young and she believed that it was easy for her to recall it.

See Meh told me that she intended to maintain and expand her own multilingualism because she wanted to keep all of the languages she has acquired for community support, as which she explained, 'เพื่อพวกเขาต้องการความช่วยเหลือ [it is for them (refugees), when they need help].' Her goal was derived from her appreciation of her father's, Teh

Reh, intention to strengthen the community support network among the Karenni and other ethnic groups from Burma. In addition, she believed that learning multiple languages might help her gain more international friends. While working with See Meh on one of her take-home writing assignments, I noticed that she emphasized that US schools should provide more language programs. In her paragraph about the language program she suggested her school offer she used the term 'program for different languages' and 'many languages.' For See Meh, English is among those languages, not the only language that she wants to learn and wants her school to offer. She told me that she was interested in learning languages such as Korean because of its popularity in pop culture, and French because it would be new and exciting for her.

In addition to her own personal interest in learning multiple languages, See Meh hoped that she could utilize her multilingual ability for her work in the future. She had a future plan to travel the world and, as she put it, 'ทำงานบนเครื่องบิน [to work on the plane]' as a flight attendant, her dream job since she was in Thailand. Her understanding of being a flight attendant, especially for international airlines, requires bi/multilingualism. See Meh demonstrated her strong desire and had researched the flight attendant job and asked me several questions about it such as, 'I checked on the internet that it required 5′2″ height,' 'Where do I apply?,' 'Can I apply for Thai Airways?'

Similar to Saw Reh, See Meh prioritized multilingualism because it allows her to fulfill both personal and professional goals and she considered being multilingual advantageous. Her language learning endeavors presented here realize the picture of her future self (Norton 1995, 2000; West 1992)—a person who can help her community while traveling the world and enjoying what multiple languages have to offer. While English is prioritized in the current setting as she experiences it firsthand at school and as demonstrated in her homework session, See Meh (as well as Saw Reh) did not narrow her language learning goals to learning only English. English, in fact, is just one among those languages in her linguistic toolkit as a result of her migration and complex living condition in an immigrant neighborhood, which Blommaert (2010) called

super diversity. Such a living condition provides an opportunity for See Meh to see the positive outcomes of learning languages such as Karen and Burmese even though she has moved far away from Thailand and the refugee camp.

Hla Meh: The Oldest Sister's Role

Hla Meh's linguistic repertoires include Burmese, English, and the Karenni that she uses daily in the USA for herself and her family. Her language and literacy practices—including how she manages language use in the current settings while negotiating her identities—indicates that a multilingual individual can decide on language choice that is context embedded. Hla Meh's primary language is Karenni and she uses it with family members and Karenni friends. However, she has also acquired and maintained Burmese for two main reasons. First, Burmese is her strongest written and academic language because she had been in school (in the refugee camp) where Burmese was the language of instruction since she was 6 years old. When doing school assignments, Burmese helped her with academic comprehension because, for Hla Meh, Burmese is 'a meaning-making and representational tool' (Soltero-Gonzalez and Reyes 2011, p. 39). For instance, while she was catching up on work for her class in the evening, she always used a Burmese-English dictionary to decode the English words she needed to comprehend. She made a list in her folder, word for word, English and Burmese, so that she could use it as a reference (see Fig. 5.3).

In addition, because Burmese has remained an official language for the Karenni people as well as for other ethnic communities from Burma, Hla Meh was very interested in actively maintaining the language even though her family had moved across national borders and none of her family members used Burmese as their primary language. According to conversations I had with the participants in this study, technology played an integral role in stimulating them to continue using Burmese as an official language. For example, a letter from the Karenni association in Phoenix, meeting agendas, and invitations sent

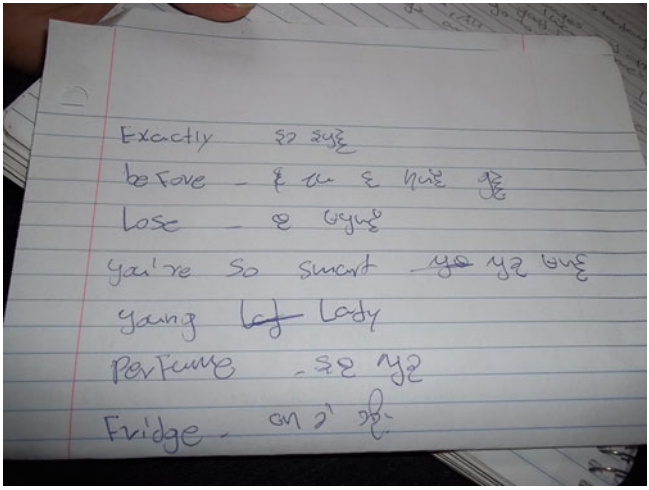


Fig. 5.3 Hla Meh's note

to Karenni families were written or typed in Burmese. This is because Burmese fonts are available while the Karenni language and fonts were extremely rare. For this reason, limited Burmese literacy may cause communicative challenges among the refugees from Burma. At the Dee Ku celebration that took place on April 14, 2011 in Phoenix, Arizona, both Burmese and Karenni were used and translated back and forth as the languages of communication and announcements on the stage throughout the event. Karenni was used because it was the language of the Karenni people, and Burmese was used because of its passed-on official status from their previous country. The use of Burmese accommodated and served as a welcoming code for the interethnic guests such as the Karen and the Burmese, who attended the party. As a result of her high Burmese proficiency, Hla Meh served as her family's interpreter, reading and translating Burmese to Karenni when there was an important message she wanted to share with her mother and grandmother, who had limited reading and writing skills in both Karenni, their native language, and Burmese.

In addition to the need to serve her family as a Burmese-Karenni interpreter at times, Hla Meh used Burmese daily with Karen friends

and for her personal interests. She collected Burmese actors and singers' posters and rotated them on her wall because she was fond of watching Burmese movies and listening to Burmese music featuring these actors and singers. Hla Meh's multilingual ability allowed her to fulfill personal interests, meet her family's needs, and address academic needs. Hla Meh also used her native language, Karenni, to maintain relationships while serving as an interpreter for her family. Because she understood both languages, she was able to participate in and foster an exchange of complex information.

In addition, having family members of different ages living together allows them to interact within everyday contexts. This provides meaningful authentic experiences with the native language as well as reasons to continue learning and using it for particular functions and purposes. Hla Meh's family consisted of seven members and three generations, and Karenni was used and maintained as a home language because it was the only language Nway Meh, the mother, and Boe Meh, the grandmother knew. Four younger school-aged children learned other languages, including English, which they used with people outside their family, but they were also engaged in interactions with the elderly and their siblings at home on a daily basis. Every day after school, Sha Reh (12), Toh Reh (9), and Eh Reh (5) spent some time with their 70-year-old grandmother talking with her and watching the television together. Sha Reh and Toh Reh once told me that they liked to talk to their grandmother about their daily experiences at school. Being the oldest sister of the family, Hla Meh often helped her mother with taking care of the young boys and their grandmother. In these ways, the Karenni language was maintained through active use by all members of the family.

Similar to other caregivers, Hla Meh also relied on her multilingualism to mediate her younger siblings' understanding of language and culture. Eh Reh, the youngest member of the family and the youngest participant in my study, was allowed to go outside the house only when he was accompanied with an older sibling. However, the older brothers often refused to take him out because that meant they had to watch over him, and this decreased the amount of time they had for

fun with their friends. As a result, Eh Reh spent a lot of time at home after school, and he often helped Boe Meh, his grandmother, prepare meals. A couple of times during my visit, Hla Meh or Boe Meh spoke in Karenni to Eh Reh before he ran to the kitchen and came back with a bottle of water or a can of juice and some snacks to offer to me. Through this practice, Eh Reh continues using his home language while also learning that it is his family's custom to offer food and drinks to a guest.

During one of my visits, I noticed another way their native language was practiced and maintained in the family. On this occasion, I had brought a box of donuts and offered them to the family:

> Eh Reh looked at all the donuts in the box before he grabbed one of them. He stood by my side but his eyes were staring at the donut in his hand, thinking what to do. Hla Meh, his oldest sister, who was in the scene, spoke to him in Karenni. Then, the little Eh Reh turned his face to look at me and mumbled with his little lips, 'Te Bui' before biting his donut. Hla Meh, then, said to me, 'He said, "Thank you."' I smiled back to Eh Reh and he climbed up to another couch next to the one Hla Meh and I were sitting on (May, 2011).

'Te Bui' is a Karenni phrase used for thanking. Though it is a short phrase, it holds a lot of cultural meaning. In this situation, Hla Meh simultaneously gave instruction in language and culture to her 5-year-old brother. She encouraged him to thank me with verbal words for giving him the donut. Though thanking is universal, the use of the phrase 'Te Bui' here was in a real context where the boy learned to comprehend the phrase associated with the situation directly through the direction given by his older sister. In addition, Hla Meh guided him by using Karenni and he produced the phrase in Karenni, instead of English. Hla Meh did not correct him. Instead, she allowed the young boy to thank me in Karenni and then interpreted the phrase to me in English. The situation emphasizes the value of the native language in the household, and the process of passing on the language in this space where three generations resided.

As an experienced language learner, Hla Meh's practices show her understanding that the native language is a bridge to make meaning of English for her younger brother on several occasions. When I showed English vocabulary cards with pictures (e.g., fish, elephant, and pig) and pronounced the word associated with each picture, Eh Reh repeated the word. Hla Meh sat beside her brother. Without my or Eh Reh's request, Hla Meh whispered each word in Karenni for her brother when he looked at each picture or after I introduced the word in English. Apart from guiding her brother to understand English vocabulary better, this practice demonstrates that Hla Meh maintained her position as a Karenni speaker for her brother. Eh Reh, then, felt assisted as Hla Meh was able to connect her brother's Karenni repertoires with the pictures and English words while I served as Eh Reh's tutor of English even though I lacked Karenni proficiency.

In addition, as a multilingual person, Hla Meh chose to use Burmese, English, or Karenni depending on the context. Hla Meh used Burmese daily for entertainment and beneficial purposes, including accessing information and academic comprehension. Nevertheless, her native language, Karenni, holds cultural and family value as it is the language used among family members. As demonstrated in the interactions above, Hla Meh uses Karenni in teaching and cultural transmission. In addition, the language strengthens the family's communication and bonds across three generations. Hla Meh's practice demonstrates the nature of language choice made among multilingual individuals. Often, multilingual individuals automatically select a language in their linguistic toolkit to use in a given context and domain. The language choices in these instances capture dominant ideologies of language as well as strategic responses to those ideologies. In this case, while producing language, which is context dependent, she practices and negotiates her multiple identities. To me, she presents herself as a user of English as a lingua franca. To her brother, she maintains her Karenni identity by communicating with and instructing her brother in Karenni. In addition, when Burmese involved in her family's activity such as reading a letter written in Burmese and watching

a Burmese movie, she serves as her family's language broker of Karenni and Burmese.

Daw: 'Praying in Burmese and Karenni is Better for Us to Understand'

In one evening during my visit, Daw (14) was doing her homework. One of the assignments was from her English writing class. She was to fill out a white piece of paper entitled 'My Hometown.' Daw told me that she had to write a paragraph on this topic, and she had tried to look up the meaning of hometown in her English-Burmese electronic dictionary. I was not sure if she understood the meaning of the word from the dictionary, so I explained more to her that 'hometown' meant the place where a person was born and/or grew up in. She kept silent to think about what she was going to write down for a little bit, then, she started her paragraph with the sentence, 'My hometown is Thailand, Karenni refugee camp.' The phrase caught my attention as it emphasizes that the nation-state's physical geography does not necessarily align with the linguistic repertoires and literacy practices of the residents. Although my home country is also Thailand and I speak Thai, I suddenly realized that the ability to speak Thai is not a fixed characteristic of all the residents on Thailand's soil, especially, those, as Daw stated in her writing, who are living in the 'Karenni refugee camp.' It is also quite unusual to consider a temporary housing situation (e.g., a refugee camp) to be anyone's hometown. After this exchange, I decided to try to learn more about Daw's language and literacy practices and how she saw those practices in relation to notions of nation-state boundaries and in relation to her experiences living in a new host country.

Daw grew up with diverse languages within her own family because her parents use both their primary languages, Kayan and Burmese, to communicate with each other and with friends and neighbors. In the USA, however, Daw has spent more time with her Karenni friends and increasingly spoken Karenni to her younger brother, who has been raised in multiple languages as well. Nevertheless, her Burmese has been maintained because her father has limited Karenni proficiency, so Daw and her

younger brother used only Burmese with him. Since each family member has a different proficiency level in the various languages used within the family (Burmese, Karenni, and Kayan), the family has developed interesting linguistic strategies, especially when it comes to their religious practices (they are devout Catholics). That is, languages that convey religious messages and practices are multiple depending on each family member's language repertoires and literacy level. For example, Sherry, the mother, though highly competent (proficient and literate) in Burmese, loved to sing what she called 'God's songs' and to pray and read the Bible written in both Kayan,[2] her native language, and Karenni. She added that she read the Bible written in Burmese as well when it was available. Daw, on the other hand, read the Bible and prayed in Karenni because she had limited Kayan proficiency. She read and prayed with the books *Catechism in Kaya*[3] [Catholicism in Karenni] written in Romanized Karenni or Kayah, volumes 1 to 4, that the family brought with them from Thailand (Fig. 5.4 and 5.5). In contrast, the youngest boy in the family, Je Ru (9), started learning to read the Bible and pray in the USA in English because at the time when the family moved, his Karenni and Burmese literacy were both limited. While he was learning English he joined the Saturday Bible class for children where the instructor from the Shan State of Burma used materials written in English so that the young children from a variety of ethnic groups could start to comprehend the same things and use the same texts. Nevertheless, Ka Paw, the father, went to church but he admitted that he did not have time to pray (in Burmese) because of his irregular work shifts.

Daw's religious practice had become part of her routine in the USA. She liked 'to go to church' on the weekends and prayed before she went to bed every night, sometimes in Karenni and sometime in Burmese, but not in English. At the church located in the downtown area of Phoenix, Daw prayed in Karenni or Burmese depending on the majority of the church goers in attendance at the mass. In addition, the church encouraged written materials to be translated for the refugees from Burma as they recognized the influx of these people in the area. Apart from the available materi-

[2] Kayan (pronounced /kəjəŋ/) is a distinct language from Karenni.

[3] Karenni and Kaya, or also known as Kayah, refer to the same language, Karenni.

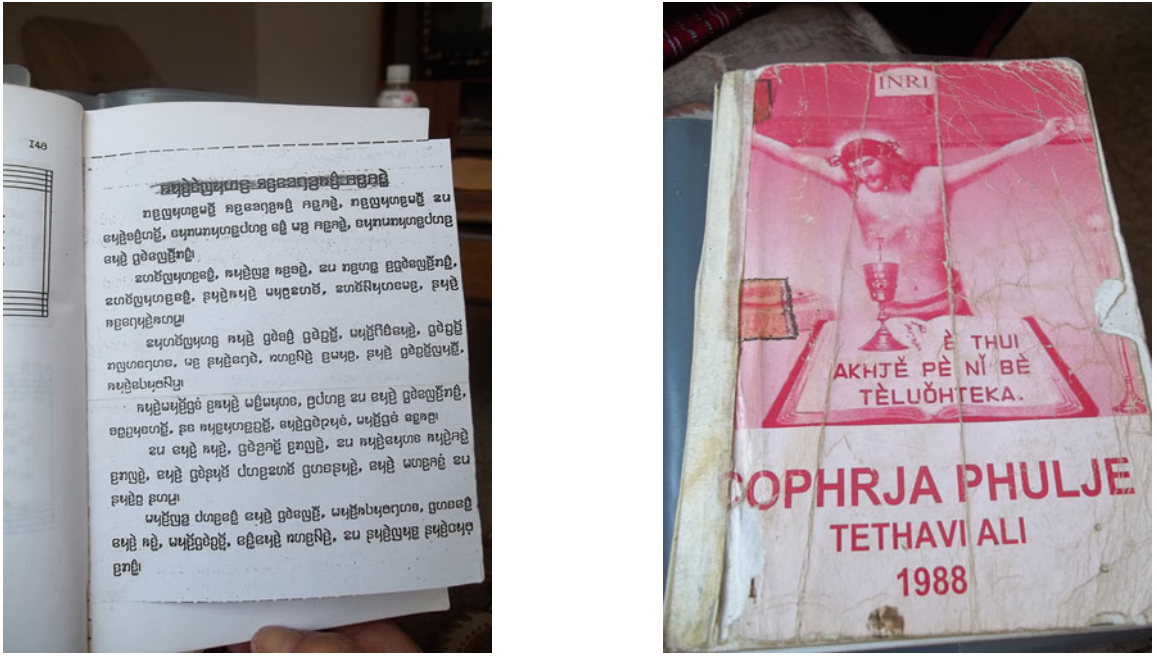
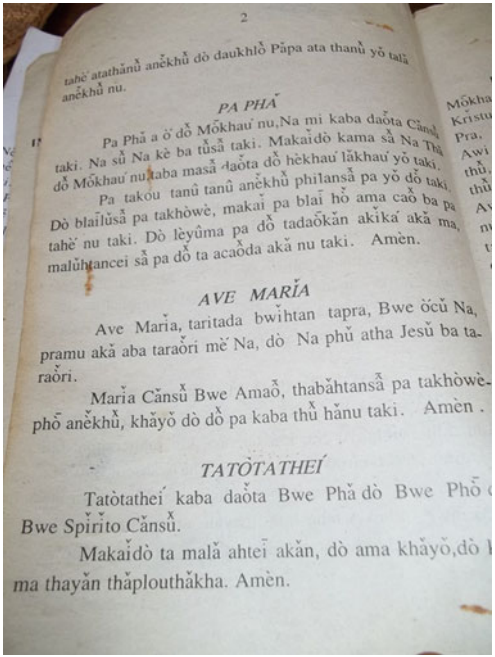


Fig. 5.4 Sample of religious book in Karenni/Kayah Li that Daw's family brought from Thailand



2

tahè atathănŭ anĕkhŭ dò daukhlŏ Pāpa ata thanŭ yŏ tală anĕkhŭ nu.

PA PHĂ

Pa Phă a ŏ dŏ Mŏkhaư nu;Na mi kaba daŏta Cănsŭ taki. Na sŭ Na kè ba tŭsă taki. Makaĭdò kama să Na Thù dŏ Mŏkhaư nu taba masă daŏta dŏ hèkhaư lăkhaư yŏ taki.

Pa takòu tanŭ tanŭ anĕkhŭ phĭlansă pa yŏ dŏ taki. Dò blaĭlŭsă pa takhòwè, makaĭ pa blaĭ hŏ ama caŏ ba pa tahè nu taki. Dò lèyûma pa dŏ tadaŏkăn akĭkaˇ akă ma, malŭhtancei să pa dŏ ta acaŏda akă nu taki. Amèn.

AVE MARĬA

Ave Marĭa, taritada bwĭhtan tapra, Bwe ŏcŭ Na, pramu akă aba taraŏri mè Na, dò Na phŭ atha Jesù ba taraŏri.

Marĭa Cănsŭ Bwe Amaŏ, thabăhtansă pa takhòwè-phŏ anĕkhŭ, khăyŏ dò dŏ pa kaba thŭ hănu taki. Amèn .

TATÒTATHEĬ

Tatòtatheĭ kaba daŏta Bwe Phă dò Bwe Phŏ Bwe Spĭrĭto Cănsŭ.

Makaĭdò ta mală ahteĭ akăn, dò ama khăyŏ,dò ma thayăn thăplouthăkha. Amèn.

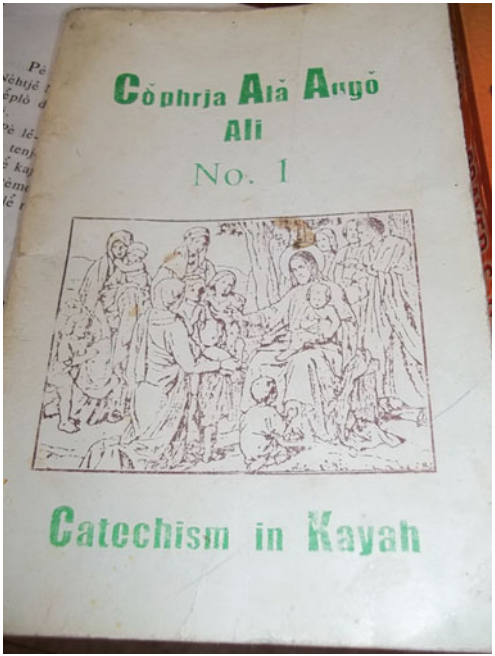


Fig. 5.5 Sample of religious book in Romanized Karenni

als, Daw prayed in Burmese and Karenni. She once told me, 'We don't pray in English because we are Karenni people. Praying in Burmese and Karenni is better for us to understand.' Here, she uses particular languages to understand the meaning of texts but different languages to pray. Her statements indicate how the performance of her Karenni identity is related to the languages she uses. To be a Karenni (and to understand certain religious texts), she needs to understand and use both Karenni and Burmese, but not English. Unlike in many English read-aloud sessions that I had done with Daw for many weeks, she only read aloud to prove her English phonic knowledge and the relationship of letters and sounds. However, she did not fully gain the relationship of letters, sounds, and meanings of the words she read when I asked for her comprehension. Daw's practice reinforces the belief that students who can make meaning of, and connect to, the text are better engaged in the texts they are reading. In this case, Daw's English literacy level is still limited and it takes some time for her to connect a word, its pronunciation, and its meaning. However, she chooses to read and pray in Burmese and Karenni because she is more comfortable, familiar, and has achieved a better understanding with them.

Daw's practice of praying and reading the Bible in Burmese and Karenni reemphasizes that the place of residence and the language its residents use are not a one-to-one correspondence (see also Appadurai 1996). While she claims that Thailand's refugee camp is her hometown, she does not speak Thai or have literacy practices related to Thai, the language used by the majority of Thai people. In the USA, where she is learning English, Daw chooses to read and pray in Burmese and Karenni, the languages that communicate her faith, her understanding, and her identity. Here, we see as well that Daw's family has subscribed to multilingualism as one way of maintaining their family's religious practices.

In this section, I have identified the multilingual repertoires, linguistic strategies, and literacy practices among the Karenni youth. Despite the fact that they have shared Karenni refugee-ness and experiences of movements, their language repertoires and literacy practices reveal their distinct interests and purposes as well as the influence of several factors. Their previous schooling, family's religious background, personal interests, available resources, and future plans stimulate how they use and learn a language.

Summary

In this chapter, I described how the recently resettled Karenni youth's transnational experiences affect their beliefs about language, language learning endeavors, and literacy practices in a variety of settings. Movement across linguistic and national borders emphasizes the simultaneity of learning English and maintaining other languages and practices. The data analysis yields insight into the complicated relationship between accumulated literacies, multilingual repertoires, and linguistic funds of knowledge (Moll et al. 1992; Veléz-IbáÑez and Greenberg 1992). In many communities, multilingualism appears to compete with the language ideology that privileges English. However, in the life of the Karenni youth I observed and talked with, their default practice is multilingualism. English and other linguistic resources live side-by-side. In spite of the fact that the participants have challenging tasks, the analysis emphasized and demonstrated the valuable, hard-earned skills of the participants which should not be disregarded.

This chapter has implications for school-based and community-based pedagogy. Language and literacy practices among the recently arrived refugee children are influenced by the literacy competencies present at the time of movement. According to Gort and Bauer (2012), the primary language plays an important role in meaning making and representation (Soltero-Gonzalez and Reyes 2012, p. 39). A person's primary language should be taken into account when examining the process of language acquisition, teaching an additional language and content-based subjects, and exploring the sociocultural factors that shape children's understanding and language and literacy practices.

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6

Digital Literacy in the Karenni Families

In this chapter, I highlight the literacy practices that emerged among the recently arrived Karenni refugees in Phoenix with a particular focus on their use of digital devices. With increasing access to affordable, inventive electronic gadgets that the Karenni families never or hardly had when they were in the remote refugee camp in Thailand, crossing national borders also means crossing a digital divide. Consequently, technology added another hurdle for them in their new host country. They encountered and learned to use digital devices to fulfill multiple daily goals: to work, to communicate, and to play. This chapter reveals how and what kind of digital or electronic devices the Karenni participants utilized, as well as the many different purposes of their use of computers, mobile phones, online social media, and video game consoles. I describe and analyze the ways in which digital technology and literacy has shaped and transformed their lifestyle, daily activities, and how they developed literacy skills that accommodate their unique experiences and desires.

Throughout the chapter, another theme that appears intermittently is equal access to digital technology. While I believe that technology produces communicative convenience and educational opportunities to its users, it is worth noting that a digital divide exists, not only

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geographically (developing countries versus developed countries and rural versus urban) but also socioeconomically. The key component here is financial resources. The latest and newest technology is the least affordable for underprivileged populations such as the Karenni participants in this study; their access to technology is not the same as that experienced by the majority of middle-class US Americans. Nevertheless, the Karenni are aware of the benefits they gain from digital technology. They are still resourceful and make the best of what they have.

With variables such as peer groups, interests, and linguistic repertoires, I classify digital literacy in the participants in terms of age. In the first section, I discuss the experiences of younger children using electronic devices (e.g., a video game console, a video game controller) and explore how the children's multimodal socialization and literacy skills were impacted by playing video games. The next section examines how and why the Karenni teenagers used digital literacies, social media, and texting. And, in the third section, I discuss the Karenni adults' use of digital technology. Although the technology devices were used differently by the three age groups, their practices indicate a strong desire to connect and reconnect with the people from their homeland or with those who shared similar refugee experiences. Collectively, I underline the newly arrived Karenni's emerging literacy practices as shaped by the available resources and digital advancement.

Video Game Play Among Young Children

Among the many activities that required an electronic device (e.g., watching TV, viewing video clips on YouTube.com, and playing video games), playing video games was one of the young Karenni participants' favorite and most time-consuming activities at home. It is important to point out that video games were not played when I started aiding Teh Reh's and Ka Paw's families in 2009 when they lived at Villa Bonita, a place where the residents rarely interacted. In December 2010, when the two families moved to La Frontera Apartment Homes to be close to other refugee families originally from different Burmese states, it was like the families moved to another world. The refugee parents at La

Frontera became good neighbors and friends immediately after the families moved in. Children became both classmates at school and neighbor friends in the apartment complex. In addition, they established their play community as the parents here were comfortable letting their children play with other children, both inside their living units and around the apartment complex.

At La Frontera, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee from Teh Reh's family and Je Ru from Ka Paw's family were introduced to video games by the children who were already living in the complex. Teamed up with other boys from different ethnicities such as from Burma and Somalia including Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh from Nway Meh's family, they participated in digital literacy on a daily basis alongside playing soccer, playing tag, playing board games, and flying kites, among many other activities. Each boy spent at least two hours a day after school playing video games, either individually or with friends and siblings. Sometimes they played for longer: from 3:00 to 4:00 pm until their bed time with some interruptions when their parents asked them to do homework, to study, or to have dinner. Playing video games became a part of these young boys' daily lives at La Frontera.[1] As reported by Nway Meh's family, which consisted of Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh, their video game console that I saw in 2011 was their fourth one in 2 years. They had already had three game consoles that they used until each one was damaged beyond repair.

When I asked the boys how they learned to play video games, the answers mostly were 'I don't know (how I learn to play video games)' or 'I just know it.' However, observing their play, by employing the communities of practice framework, I found that the children learned to play video games from peers as well as from the video game genre and design. It is crucial to emphasize that the participant families' apartment units did not have internet installed at the time I was collecting data. Therefore, offline games were played. This is different from playing an online game (on the internet), where gamers meet virtually. This means that in this community the gamers met in the same physical space and had face-to-face

[1] The young children participants in this study consisted of boys only. However, as I had observed, the Karenni children in this neighborhood tended to play with friends from the same gender group. Young girls were often found playing tire jump, tag, and jackstones. However, playing video games seemed to be more male oriented here.

interactions. As a result, they formed a play community in the apartment complex and the video games worked as their shared interest. Apart from playing alone, they frequently went to another gamer's apartment to play as a group. Also often, the group moved from one apartment to another or more in one evening. In addition, they often lent and borrowed games. They talked about the games they played and their favorite characters. When a new video game was purchased, it normally became the greatest attraction and these gamers would crowd at the apartment where the new game was featured.

I wondered how they 'just knew' how to play video games, what video games contained, and how video games might facilitate learning. Scholars in video games and literacy have done a wide range of research on how playing good video games may help children learn (Gee 2003) alongside other social and psychological effects. The following data analysis sections gained from this Karenni children's community emphasize the usefulness of digital literacy and multimodality, especially for young learners living in a nonaffluent neighborhood. In addition, they either had no formal education or interrupted education before and during the resettlement. Nevertheless, they found their way to play with affordable and available resources. I pay attention to this multimodal activity because the gamers in this study were also English language learners, who had, as many educators labeled it, limited English proficiency. With meaning-making processes through multiple modes, they also found the way to interpret what they saw and heard. First, I present how playing video games influenced the children's learning process and cognitive and literacy development through the connection between the hands-on operation using the controller and the complex semiotic system situated in the virtual environment. Second, situated learning guided by video-game design and the benefits of exposure to multimodality in learning is discussed.

The Art of Using a Video Game Controller as an Expression Device

Playing a video game requires equipment and skills that enhance younger children's literacy development in this study. The equipment includes a

Fig. 6.1 A video game controller

video game console, or a machine to operate a game; a TV; a video game controller; and a game cartridge. With the parents' limited income, many gamers in this neighborhood played with cheap and older versions of video game consoles that cost from $60 to $200.[2] Each console came with one or two video game controllers. I learned from watching the children and from playing with them that the video game controller is the key element for operating, responding to, and communicating with the game challenges. A gamer must become familiar with this particular tool because it is the device the gamer uses to operate and give a command to his avatar or his virtual self on the screen to do all the actions such as drive (a car), walk, jump, run, punch, or kick depending on the video game character's designed capability. The controller is a hand-held device of approximately 2 × 4 inches that has two protruding pointed handles sticking out at the lower portion so that it can be held comfortably (see Fig. 6.1). Horizontally, on the right hand side, there are four rounded buttons lined up clockwise with the topmost button has the symbol Δ, followed by the button for O, ×, and Δ symbols, respectively. On the

[2] When a Karenni father bought an expensive one that cost $300 or more, his neighbors or friends introduced him to a store where a game console was sold for a bargain price and recommended that he return the more expensive one with a receipt.

left hand side, there are four arrow-like buttons as the representations of ↑, →, ↓, and ←. The lower-middle part of the controller has two big round buttons where the gamer's two thumbs can reach when he holds the controller's handles with his two hands. The upper-middle part of the controller has three small buttons labeled from left to right, SELECT, ANALOG, and START.

To operate the controller, a gamer requires skill and familiarity with these buttons, their locations, and their functions while the gamer pays most attention to the screen. The controller that my participants used had a wire to plug into the video game console. The console could be plugged in by a maximum of seven controllers depending on the console's design. This means that one game can be played by multiple gamers up to seven gamers, each using a controller. In a fighting game, a gamer can select his avatar to play with the avatar operated by the game software when there is no other accompanying player. Or, he can play with the avatar operated by another gamer. In a racing game, multiple gamers can choose a car to race in the same round by plugging in their controller to the same video-game console. During my observations, there were many competitions between two gamers.

In the virtual world (or on screen), the character that a gamer chooses to be his avatar can perform a wide range of actions such as running, jumping, punching, and somersaulting, depending on the capability of the character according to the game plot. In reality, the gamer uses their hands and fingers to operate all of the buttons on the controller to bring about those actions. Each button has a distinct function that may be different from game to game. The gamer may come to know each button's function by (1) reading the game manual, (2) guessing from his experiences of playing a game similar to the current game, or (3) pressing all the keys to experiment with how each button works until he[3] receives the result he wants (Gee 2003). All of my participants used the third strategy to operate their controller. When a new game was purchased, they quickly opened and inserted the brand-new game cartridge, took risks,

[3] 'Video gamer' is an inclusive term to refer to both male and female. However, I use 'he' and 'him' to refer to a video gamer, or player, because all of the video gamers in the present study were male.

and learned to play it through trial and error. They explored the game immediately without reading the manual's instructions.

Using the controller not only requires the knowledge of each button's function but also great hand–eye coordination. If the player has little experience with operating the buttons or does so slowly, he will often be defeated by players who operate the opponent avatar more quickly. But gamers quickly become familiar with the buttons' locations, their functions, and speed in operating these buttons, so that they soon do not need to look at the buttons or the controller. This allows them to keep an eye on the screen and see what the opponent is doing and what is happening to his avatar. They also look at the screen to see how many energy bars they have, how much time is left, the score of the game, and what bonuses are available. In all, skill in operating the controller relies on the understanding of linkages between each touch and each symbol to meanings and outcomes.

Multimodality and Learning

The Karenni children in this video-gaming community were also English language learners so I explored how gaming enhanced or was related to language learning. From multiple observations and conversations with the children, I found that they did not necessarily need to fully understand the languages such as English and Japanese featured in the video games to be able to play them. For instance, when Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh of Nway Meh's family were playing *Call of Duty* (a warfare-based game that the children called 'America Game'), they could play the game without understanding the sentences showing up on the screen, for example, 'Press × to pick up health,' 'Press O to shut the door,' and 'Press Δ to stand up.' In fact, the children enjoyed the game because they could rely on the other features such as sound and graphics. Often, the games started with a brief description of the game context or an introduction of a character delivered in spoken or written English and sometimes Japanese that the children did not understand (I asked them for the meaning and they shook their head as an answer that they did not know what it meant). However, they understood that they did not have

to operate the controller during this period because the introductory part went on by itself. During this period of time, when using a controller did not influence anything the screen, the children took a rest from operating the controller. They became alert again when there were a sound signal (e.g., the music changed) and a change of scene or setting on the screen, and started using the controller to play the game.

Exploring how they understood the context without knowing the meaning of languages in the game, I found that the children learned to navigate by engaging not only in a goal-oriented play, but also a semiotic domain (Gee 2003). The children basically knew the genre (adventure, fighting/boxing/wrestling, racing, war) and the aim of the game. For example, when Toh Reh was playing *Call of Duty*, which has warfare as the story line, he learned that he had to shoot his enemies to win the game because his avatar held a rifle and the screen always showed the rifle sight to assist him in aiming his target.[4] During the time when Toh Reh directed his avatar to walk and search for his enemies, the phrase 'Wrong Way' appeared in the middle of the screen. I had observed that Toh Reh was still using his controller to command his avatar to continue advancing in the same direction, which was supposed to be the 'wrong way.' However, when he (and his avatar) faced the dead end represented by a huge brick wall without an exit, he then realized that it was the wrong way. Afterward, he managed to turn his avatar around and to go in the opposite direction and looked for another way. In this situation, the practice was situated according to the game design. Whether or not Toh Reh understood the phrase 'Wrong Way' on the screen, Toh Reh and his avatar walked and faced the dead end which complemented the meaning of 'Wrong Way' on the screen. Then, Toh Reh made use of his visual literacy and the image represented by his avatar, the rifle sight, the war scene, and the brick wall on the screen to navigate his path out of the dead end. Because the practice can be authentically experimented and visualized by the young gamer, he enjoyed exploring and finding a solution as if it were real to him.

In addition to the images, Toh Reh read and responded to the English language used in the game when the other characters operated by the

[4] This game genre is called the first-person shooter game.

game software orally articulated certain phrases, for example, 'This way!' 'Come back!' and 'Over here!' The characters producing these phrases also used hand gestures to guide the direction. For example, the character on the screen waved his hand to his direction while producing 'This way!' and running in a particular direction. Toh Reh followed the direction through these voice commands associated with hand gestures more actively than the solely written command on the screen (e.g., 'Wrong Way'). This suggests that for the young gamer, who is also an English language learner, a mixture of multiple modes may work better in the representation of meanings. Toh Reh was able to choose and read cues that made sense to him from the many cues available on the screen. Toh Reh's performance proves the usefulness of multimodality in technology-mediated literacy practices.

Another instance of learning from multiple modes can be seen in Gu-Gu's problem-solving experience. One afternoon, Gu-Gu faced a technical problem while playing a *Star Wars* game. His activity was interrupted when a black screen appeared instead of the game scene. On the black screen with the white phrases read,

> Controller disconnected.
> Please reconnect the controller
> to controller port1 and press
> START button > to continue.

Gu-Gu did not follow the directions on the screen. Instead, he moved the wires and the video game console around and tried pressing different buttons on the controller but it did not work at all as he expected (see Fig. 6.2). Finally, he touched the wire that connected the controller and the port and tightened it. With this last solution, the screen turned back to the game scene and he continued enjoying and playing his game. With only written phrases on the black screen, no graphics, pictures, gestures, or voice commands, meaning of the phrases above was very limited to him. Gu-Gu only knew that he could not play the game because the screen did not show the game scene. But, he knew that he had to do something about it to get the screen back to the game scene. With only

Fig. 6.2 Gu-Gu operating the controller and wires (for example, photo by Chatwara S. Duran)

little or no clue on the screen, Gu-Gu had to try moving everything in front of him to solve the problem.

This example demonstrates that the young gamers learn through multiple modes, even when they have limited writing and reading competencies in English. The stances suggest that the gamers, who are also English language learners, react better and faster when the combination of texts, touches, and the meaning of each touch make sense to them. That is, when texts are associated with images, movements, symbols, and sounds that provide enough clues for them to draw on, the children read the context and respond to it more effectively. According to Gee (2003), learning to read only written words is not enough (p. 17), especially in the current technology-mediated world. We, in fact, live, work, play, and interpret meanings of things around us by engaging in what he calls contextualized 'semiotic domains' (pp. 11–50) that consist of multimodality, not only print and written texts. Based on the above examples, video games are one of the semiotic domain families that combine several components of symbolic systems to present and create meanings. When the young gamers in the study were exposed to multimodality they were in the process of meaning-making development in relation to linguistic codes used in the game. In addition, as discussed

in Chap. 1, for young children, who rely on a variety of modes around them because of their limited reading and writing competencies (Gort and Bauer 2012), game-based literacy filled with multimodality provides rich and multiple semiotic options to make meaning.

Popular Culture as a Resource

Through their active participation in video gaming, the gamers were engaged in activities that were heavily influenced by popular culture. The video games they played were derived from (and sources for) movies, animations, and comic books, for example, *Dragon Ball Z*, *Fantastic 4*, *Ghost Rider*, *Jak II and Jak III*, *Pokemon*, *SpiderMan*, *Tomb Raider*, and *Naruto: Clash of Ninja.* These games are very popular among gamers around the world and their global popularity has had a notable impact on this recently resettled refugees' neighborhood.

In addition to playing video games that featured characters and storylines from popular culture, the children collected artifacts influenced by popular culture icons. I observed many *Pokémon* posters and cards, backpacks and stationary with superhero labels, and coloring books (e.g., *Spiderman*, *Curious George*). As a group, the younger gamers watched DVDs featuring popular movies and characters, for example, *Ice Age*, *Winnie the Pooh*, and *the Simpsons*. Often, they played with the colorful matching cards with the features of *Pokémon* characters by opening each card and calling out the name of the colorful character on the card. The children also frequently produced artifacts by drawing and coloring popular characters such as *Spiderman*, *Superman*, and a penguin (from *Happy Feet*). In addition, I witnessed a lot of role-playing where the children portrayed characters they liked or performed a scene they knew from a video game or popular movie. They acted out the popular fighting styles that incorporated somersaults, kicks, or punches with one or both hands performed by their favorite characters (Fig. 6.3).

According to Gort and Bauer (2012), young learners try to learn the meaning of objects and information around them in their immediate contexts (e.g., from interactions with peers and family members) and from 'the integration of different modes' (Gort and Bauer 2012, p. viii).

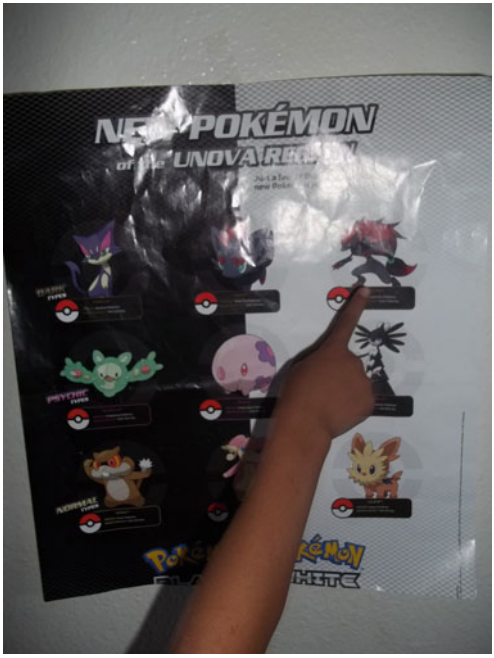

Fig. 6.3 A Karenni video gamer identifying characters of Pokémon game

As their reading, writing, and interpreting competencies are still limited (Bauer and Mkhize 2012), the young children, who were still learning both Karenni and English, were attracted to multimodal texts in a variety of activities because they provided options for the young learners to choose from in developing their understanding and meaning-making process. In return, as a way to express their knowledge, thoughts, and understanding of the stories and ideas they perceived, they utilized a variety of modes (e.g., drawing, acting out, and using a video game controller to respond to the game), and were not limited to only reading and writing print texts.

As presented in this section, video games and popular culture produced in a variety of modes (e.g., virtual games, posters, animation, coloring books, cards, video clips, DVDs) have the power to educate, inform, and entertain young recently arrived refugee children. It is evident that they were engaged in the communities of practice in their local area. They not only played video games and consumed popular cultural products,

but they also learned about and responded to those cultural products in many ways. Both video games and products of popular culture shape these young children's values, attitudes, perspectives, and opinions.

Parents' Opinions on their Children's Video Game Playing

The Karenni refugee parents of these young video gamers had mixed feelings about the practice of playing video games, especially when the children were involved with what they considered 'excessive' playing or what Teh Reh said to me in Thai 'เล่นมากเกินไป [playing too much].' Teh Reh and Loh Meh considered the activity as 'playing' and they told me that they did not like their sons playing video games too much because it took away from their time for doing homework and school assignments. Teh Reh and Loh Meh had to force the boys to do their homework every day after school. This was not always feasible because as soon as the boys came back from school, they immediately started playing video games. As mentioned earlier, the Karenni participants felt at ease living at La Frontera where the children were allowed to play with friends and neighbors in the complex. The children often took the opportunity to play video games by moving from one apartment to another or more in one evening. These gamers might stay up late (until 11:00 p.m.) before they went back to their own respective apartments, which meant that they had to stay up even later if they had not finished their school assignments. Teh Reh and Loh Meh admitted that they bought the video game console and several video games for their sons to help with socialization with others without realizing the potential negative consequences;

> Oh, he asks, he CRIES, he asks, 'My friends, they have a game, me … NO … I don't like to go to school…' Yes. He calls the father to go pick up a game [at a store]. Before, I think there when we live on the 28th Street, my children better. But, um, no, not a lot of friends. Good! Yeah, yeah, here, friends. A LOT of friends, playing game … Oh … (sighs).

Loh Meh seemed happy about the fact that living here in the apartment complex provided the children so many friends, but she worried about

how much time her boys and his friends spent playing video games. She added, 'I'm worried when my children play too much. I'm worried when they not home.' In contrast, Nway Meh's and Ka Paw's families liked to have their children playing video games. Because Nway Meh had three young sons, she believed that allowing her children and their friends to play video games would help keep the children at home and out of trouble. If there was nothing interesting to do at the house, they tended to leave to play outside. It was hard for her to know where they all were because they tended to be anywhere within the apartment complex. As for Ka Paw's family, Ka Paw liked his son, Je Ru, to play video games because he believed that 'they [would] make the boy smart.'

Even though the parents gave different reasons for allowing their children to play video games, they had the same strategy when it came to the AIMS examination week. I came to the apartment complex (during the third week of April, 2011) and found that no one was playing a video game at all. The parents told me that they did not let the children play the video games because it was the week of the children's AIMS test and they were expected to study. The parents in all three families locked their video game console in the cabinet and assured the children that they would be able to play to their hearts content when the AIMS test had finished.

Here, we see evidence of the parents' unique perspective on the hierarchy of learning. Learning from school and academic assignments was placed in a higher status than learning from playing, and in this case, learning from playing video games. Since the very beginning of their resettlement in the USA, the parents had high expectations for their children's educational achievements, and these expectations seemed to be shaped by a number of factors. As discussed in Chap. 3, the parents wanted to resettle in the USA because they expected their children to receive 'education.' Although playing video games offers fruitful resources for learning, it was different from the parents' definition of 'education' and from their expectation of what 'formal' schooling in the USA should be. Also, since the very beginning of their resettlement, the parents had been informed that their children's educational progress and academic performance was measured by test scores at school. The parents occasionally showed their children's grade reports and asked me what each grade on the report card meant. With my explanation of each grade on their children's report card,

the parents always responded, 'Not good, not good' when they heard that their children's performance in some classes was below average. For these parents, playing video games was an activity for playtime and should not detract from preparing for tests at school.

Virtual Communities and Texting Among Karenni Teenagers

Like the younger children, the Karenni teenagers engaged in using digital devices daily. They enjoyed viewing music videos and watching Burmese and Karenni DVD movies. In this section, I focus on the multimodal literacy practices of three female teenagers, See Meh, Hla Meh, and Daw.[5] The observational and interview data was obtained by observing these three teenagers and talking with them about their digital usage and opinions about this usage. Daw often used a mobile phone for texting and calling, while See Meh and Hla Meh's regular digital literacy practices included online chat rooms and internet surfing. Their practices presented here indicate their literacy development, their interests, and their identities that were carried out through a variety of social engagements.

Internet Surfing and Social Media

After moving to a digitized society where she had greater access to digital technology, devices, and usage, See Meh told me that she had been amazed by the fact that she had access to a computer both at home and school in Arizona: 'ที่นี่มีเทคโนโลยีเยอะกว่า อย่างเช่น มีคอมพิวเตอร์ แอร์เพลน เซลโฟน [here has more technology, like computer, airplane, and cell phone].' During the data collection period (2009–2011), both See Meh and Hla Meh owned a laptop, which was very new to them as they told me that they had never owned a personal computer before. Based on my observations, See Meh and Hla Meh had spent time on the computer both at school (at the library, in the computer lab) and at home every day. Mostly, they used it

[5] During the data collection period, I did not see Saw Reh using social media and texting.

for internet surfing and participating in online chat rooms. Their practices indicate several features of their emerging digital literacies in their new context while creating a transnational and virtual network.

As I mentioned in the section above, internet access was limited in this neighborhood: the two teenagers admitted that they did not subscribe to an internet service provider at home because they could not afford the monthly subscription. Instead, they knew that they could find a wireless internet signal in Hla Meh's room by appropriating it from their neighbors (without them knowing). With this method of what we might call 'piggybacking,' Hla Meh said that she would sit with her laptop next to the window in her room where she claimed was the right spot to receive the best internet signal. Later in March 2011, after See Meh gained some income from selling Amway products and could help her family pay some bills, she asked her father, Teh Reh, if she could have an internet connection at home. Teh Reh agreed and liked the idea that he and some friends living close to his apartment unit could use it too. After the internet service provider came to set it up at Teh Reh's apartment, Hla Meh and See Meh could use the internet more conveniently at Teh Reh's apartment.

For See Meh and Hla Meh, digital literacy practices expanded the mode and scope of their hobbies and multilingual practices that could be supplemented online (Lam and Rosario-Ramos 2009). For instance, See Meh shared with me that she liked Thai songs, read Thai magazines, and enjoyed comic books because she understood their meaning very well. She liked to collect Thai comic books called ขายหัวเราะ, which means *Laughter for Sale*, and read them in her spare time. In addition, she always talked to me about Thai celebrity gossip, new songs, and TV series. Her interests were due in part to her exposure to Thai pop culture during her 4-year attendance in a Thai local school outside the refugee camp. The experiences had influenced the choice and language of her entertainment preferences as she also stated, 'ชอบดาราไทยมากกว่าดาราชาติอื่น ละครไทยก็สนุกกว่า [I prefer Thai actors to others. Thai soap operas are also more enjoyable than others].' See Meh mostly used the internet to access entertainment, her favorite actors' pictures (mostly Thai), new Thai songs, music videos, soap operas, and TV series. While continuing to read print texts in Thai magazines and books to fulfill interests that she had before mov-

ing to the USA (see also Rosolová 2007; Rubinstein-Ávila 2007), the internet provided another opportunity and served as an additional mode (Cruickshank 2004) for See Meh to continue her interests. Hla Meh, on the other hand, used the internet in addition to a DVD player to fulfill her interests in Burmese and Karenni songs, karaoke, actors, and soap operas.

'Co-ethnic friendships' were established easily and conveniently as a result of information technology (Gilhooley and Lee 2014). For See Meh and Hla Meh, socialization was accomplished in virtual spaces although they had physically moved across borders. They had been able to reconnect with and create a network among old friends by using social media such as Gmail and ooVoo. See Meh said that this communicative mode helped maintain her friendship with these friends. She explained,

> เคยเจอทีเมืองไทยค่ะ ทีแคมพ์นั้นค่ะ แล้วก็หนูรู้จักเขา ยังติดต่อกันอยู่ แล้วหนูก็ขอไว้แล้วก็เล่นด้วยกันเพื่อนทีหนูสนิทที่แคมพ์นีเขามาอยู่อเมริกา another state
>
> [I have met these friends since we were in Thailand's refugee camp … we stay in touch and exchange our username to connect online with each other because these camp friends had resettled in America but in another state (state outside Arizona).]

Hla Meh liked to use ooVoo.com,[6] which is a video-chat website popular with youth, to reconnect with her Karenni friends who were now living in other states. Using her real name helped those friends recognize Hla Meh on the website. In these ways, See Meh and Hla Meh have been able to reunite virtually with their old friends whom they met face-to-face in the past because they and their friends have moved to the USA where information technology is accessible and achievable. Here, we can see two interrelated shifts in See Meh and Hla Meh's literacy practices, the shift in communicative mode and the shift in physical location. Their reconnection with their old friends demonstrates how a transnational community is reconstructed virtually even when participants live in different geographic locations. In this particular case, See Meh and Hla

[6] ooVoo.com is one of the most popular video-conferencing websites among teenagers (*Forbes,* February 1, 2012).

Meh's refugee friends' network has moved across physical borders in a transgeographical way (Lam 2009b), and this phenomenon brings about a shift in modes of communication. The new virtual network here has emerged from their previous, maintained, relationships and is in addition to the physical Karenni community and network they have created at La Frontera in Phoenix.

In addition to reconnecting with old friends, online social media created new connections among the participants in my study in part because they shared similar linguistic and sociohistorical backgrounds as well as interests and purposes for connecting. Unlike Hla Meh, who used ooVoo.com to talk only with old friends, See Meh sought for and met new friends via this online chat room by using its video conferencing and voice calling features. At home (unlike in formal school contexts where restrictions are often applied to computer usage), See Meh could freely use her own laptop that had a built-in web-cam for talking with her online friends, mostly of whom are Karenni friends and other friends originally from Thailand and Burma. From my observations of how See Meh navigated and used this chat room website, the chat room provided several options for users to carry out a conversation. Typing texts on the chat room page was one way to talk. The video conference was another option when the connected persons wanted to see each other through the web-cam and talk to each other by using speakers and microphone (without typing texts). This video conferencing system also had an option to choose whether the users wanted to see each other through the web camera or wanted to use only the voice call. Since See Meh mainly used ooVoo.com to meet random new people that she had never seen she used these options differently depending on how comfortable she felt allowing the person on the other end to see her.

See Meh had customized her privacy protections in a variety of ways. Using ooVoo.com to serve her specific needs, See Meh cautiously did not use her real name and admitted that she always used a new name every time she logged onto the website:

> If they talk to me and I don't like them, I will log off and exit my chat room and log on again with a new name. The ones [person] I don't like won't recognize me and I can choose other people to talk with.

While avoiding those with whom she did not want to continue chatting, See Meh kept in touch with her favorite new friends on ooVoo.com by adding their usernames to her contact list. When her favorite friends logged on, which meant that they were online, she recognized their usernames on the chat room page. Then, she started chatting with them and explained who she was, where she was at, and that she had chatted with them before. See Meh even gave her phone number to those she wanted to continue being friends with. She only revealed her appearance through the web camera when she felt comfortable with these friends. One of these friends, for example, was a Thai girl born in the USA and living in California. See Meh shared with me that she had talked to this girl, who was a few years older than her, several times and felt safe and comfortable with her. See Meh said 'พีเขาใจดีมากเลยค่ะ [she is very very nice]' and they ended up talking through the video conference every weekend. They shared some knowledge about Thai popular culture, exchanged information about new songs, soap operas, and music videos, and shared their experiences of living in the USA. It seemed to me that See Meh wanted to keep in touch with this girl because of their shared goals (and backgrounds and hobbies), including information seeking (Cruickshank 2004; Lam and Rosario-Ramos 2009) and creating personal learning networks (Pegrum 2010) on the internet.

Even though See Meh liked to meet new friends on ooVoo.com, she had negative attitudes toward Facebook, a popular social media site used by many of her friends living at La Frontera. See Meh said that she did not want to use Facebook even though it was admired among her peers because she was afraid to have her photo cropped, shopped, altered or transformed, especially into a nude girl, by bad people on the Internet. She told me that it happened to a Karenni girl she knew. The Karenni girl's face was cut and pasted onto an image of a nude female body. After that, the nude picture went viral via the Karenni social network online and several Karenni people's multimedia texts on the mobile

phones, including See Meh's father's phone. This incident horrified See Meh. Even though she understood that it was a transformed photo, See Meh did not want her online identity to be compromised in any way. Although See Meh enjoyed meeting new people online, such statements reveal her profound awareness of her privacy and of her right to choose whom she contacts in virtual space. Among strangers online, she created a virtual name and logged onto chat in order to test the waters for security. When she felt safe with a certain person, she revealed more of her true identity in the real world (such as her real name, her national origin) as opposed to the virtual world. Her practices indicate the awareness of her identity as multiple and fluid (Schecter and Bayley 2002) as well as her knowledge that she can choose to perform certain identities for certain purposes.

Both See Meh's and Hla Meh's experiences suggest that their sociohistorical and linguistic backgrounds played an important role in their virtual socialization. In return, virtual socialization provides a space for identity construction through language choice. By looking at their networks with virtual friends, we can see that both Hla Meh and See Meh had 'filtered' their online friends and continued connections only with certain, not all, online users. Hla Meh only talked to old friends, who used Burmese and Karenni and whom she had known since she was in the refugee camp. See Meh, in addition to making new friends (who were also refugees from Burma and Thailand), also gained some new online friends, all of whom were US-born Thais or Thai-speaking immigrants living in the USA. See Meh told me that she liked being able to communicate in Thai and to talk about their similar experiences of living in the USA. In summary, both girls preferred to keep in contact with those who share similar backgrounds, and importantly, linguistic repertoires.

See Meh's multilingual repertoires (she was fluent in English, Karenni, Karen, and Thai, and spoke a little Burmese) shaped and influenced many of the choices she made in the virtual space. For instance, she used her virtual name with small talk typed in English first (e.g., 'hi, how are u?'; 'Are u in the USA?'; 'Where r u?'). When she received some clues that the person at the other end, with whom she wanted to continuing talking, could use one of the linguistic repertoires she possessed (especially

when it was one of the languages she was fluent in, Karenni and Thai), she started calling them on the phone and talking with them as well. In these ways, See Meh transferred the communication and socialization strategies she used in her real life to the virtual world. She said, 'I will use the language they use, whatever language they use … because I know many languages' (Duran 2014, p. 83).

In the virtual world, the users do not see each other if each user does not agree to enable the video feature. However, See Meh takes advantages of her multilingual repertoires while communicating with her virtual friends. Her multilingualism provided her a variety of options from which to select the appropriate language to use (in the virtual world and in real life). In these ways, multilingualism is part of her identity toolkit. In addition, the online chat room fulfilled her entertainment needs to connect with friends from Burma and Thailand.

Although See Meh and Hla Meh had different goals in using ooVoo.com, both attempted to keep in contact with people who shared similar linguistic and cultural roots. In other words, virtual space provided the two newly arrived teenagers ways to maintain their regional linguistic affiliations (Lam 2004, 2009a) and sociocultural affiliations (McGinnis et al. 2007). Their shared refugee-immigrant's experiences were mediated and shaped by a change in geographic location as well as changes in modes of communication. The evidence shows that their literacy practices are shaped by intersections of context and information technology—and shows how they are both used to maintain transnational connections and languages.

The digital divide, or the inequality between those who have access to information communication technologies and those who do not, remains. However, these recently resettled Karenni teenagers were aware of the advantages in creating connections across borders. Hla Meh gained computer literacy and combined this with her strong desire to reconnect with her friends and maintain their transnational relationships, which enabled her to achieve her communicative goals. She liked that the internet and ooVoo.com helped her reconnect with old friends, including her Karenni friends who had formerly lived in the refugee camp. Her communication with friends who stayed in the refugee camp was made possible by a mobile phone, but Hla Meh rarely talked to them using it because the

connection was limited. From Hla Meh's experiences, the digital divide does not only occur within the same society (e.g., different level of affordability), but also between societies (e.g., developed area vs remote area). Those with access have the option to create a virtual network apart from a physical network among people who meet face-to-face on a regular basis.

Texting

While Hla Meh and Daw were English language learners and spoke English minimally both in informal conversation and in class, surprisingly they texted regularly in English to communicate with Karenni and Burmese friends living in the USA. This was because English was the only language and font option they had on their mobile phones. While texting, Hla Meh, who owned a mobile phone and texted me sometimes, used words I never heard her saying orally, for example, 'Hi my love' and 'We miss u so much.' In addition, her texts included abbreviations and colloquial language such as 'Yup' or 'Yep' for 'Yes,' 'Y' for 'Why?,' 'u' for 'you,' 'H r u?' for 'How are you?,' '5n' for 'fine,' and 'k' for 'OK.'

Daw's family did not have a laptop during the data collection period and owned only one mobile phone. While her parents used the mobile phone to call their friends, Daw often used the mobile phone for texting. I asked her if she used English for texting and she said, 'Yes!' but shook her head when I asked if the English she used in texting looked like the English on my paper where I wrote, 'I miss you. I love you.' Then, she showed me the way she texted such as 'R u bz now?' for 'Are you busy now?' 'n u' for 'and you' and 'I <3 u' for 'I love you' or 'I heart you.' I also read some of her texts on the phone (the following messages are not necessarily correspondence used in the same conversation just a random sampling of messages retrieved from Daw's inbox with her permission):

Omg u wright I work many long time
Goooood!n u? (as answer to the friend's message 'How r u?')
R u in home?
Nop i need to wash my cloths.
Nop n u

Her text messages were obviously different from Standard English but the texts show emerging literacy and linguistic creativity in her new context, the impact of electronic/mobile devices on her new method of communication as well as on linguistic production, and her motivation to communicate. Daw told me that she had not had a mobile phone or used text messaging in Thailand before and she found it fun and amazing to be able to text. In addition, Daw shared with me that she learned texting through conversing with her Burmese and Karenni friends by texting alone whereas Hla Meh learned the text codes from friends through texting and online chat rooms. As I observed, both Hla Meh and Daw could use the codes and the mode of text delivery with ease and with high speed because they did not have either to spell words all out, or to pronounce whole words or sentences as in oral communication.

While text messages found in Hla Meh's and Daw's phone are filled with abbreviations, symbols, and misspellings that require an intelligent guess to understand, they demonstrate their literacy development. Learning to use 'Goooood' to emphasize 'very good,' 'Omg' for 'Oh my God,' 'n' for 'and,' 'r' for 'are,' and 'u' for 'you,' for example, these girls learn to convey sounds, concepts, and meanings simultaneously. According to Crystal (2008), sending text messages may improve literacy development, especially for school-aged children, as it provides more opportunities for children to engage with the language through reading and writing. Similar to language as a semiotic system, learning how to read and write text messages exercises literacy skills that predominantly include the connection between the visual and meanings generated in a given context.

According to Crystal (2006, 2008), people do not use abbreviations and acronyms in textese to be quick. They use them in order to represent their existence, belonging, and creativity. North (2007) argues that the coconstructed and textual society is created and maintained while language creativity is the tool. Here, while texting, Hla Meh and Daw used textese (the abbreviated language used in text messages) instead of spelling whole words or sentences out to signal that they belong to the same speech community, or the same gang (Crystal 2006). Importantly, Hla Meh and Daw's texting practices in what they called 'English' were carried out even though English is not their native language. Due to their desire to communicate and a device that offers them only the English

alphabet, the teens began to create their own norm of interaction and to establish unique codes to circulate within their texting community. This process presents how their linguistic creativity and emerging literacy were initiated to suit their current demands derived from the receiving context and from their second language learning.

Digital Literacy Among Karenni Adults

All of the Karenni adult participants had been using mobile phones and they enjoyed operating them to connect with friends and relatives both inside and outside the USA. In Nway Meh's family, Nway Meh enjoyed using her mobile phone with the conference feature (i.e., speaker) on when talking to her husband, Phae, who lived in Iowa, so that all of her five children and Boe Meh, her mother-in law, could join in a group conversation. Each child also took turns talking to Phae in the living room. Such telephone calls usually took place on Sundays (Phae's day off from work) and lasted for more than an hour.

The Karenni adults in the other families, Teh Reh, Loh Meh, Ka Paw, and Sherry, also maintained their relationships with their friends and relatives by using a mobile phone. They all told me that they had a lot of friends living in the USA such as in California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Texas, and Utah, and in other countries such as Canada, Finland, and New Zealand. All of them agreed that a mobile phone was very important for them. Not only was it the key tool for maintaining a good relationship with the Karenni people in the USA and other countries, but also in Thailand, their previous residence, where their friends and relatives remained in the refugee camps or the remote area outside the refugee camps and did not use computer or internet there.

All of the adult Karenni were knowledgeable about using a mobile phone for an international call, which was important for strengthening or maintaining their transnational connections. They usually bought an international phone card from a local store, an Asian market, or from a friend. Although the language on the mobile phone was English, the Karenni adults became familiar with the buttons and texts on the screen after a couple times of usage. By contrast, they believed that using com-

puters and text messaging required a higher level of English proficiency. Therefore, none of them, except Teh Reh, used the mobile phone's text messaging function, which was utilized the most by their teenage children.

Teh Reh made use of the texting function of his mobile phone in addition to e-mail for his work as an interpreter, which required him to contact clients, organizations, and companies. I exchanged text messages with Teh Reh sometimes for greetings or to arrange a home visit. Teh Reh's text messages were very different from the teenagers' text messages. The Karenni teenagers' messages were full of abbreviations as shown above but Teh Reh's messages were relatively long and structured with full sentences as shown in the following (I typed the messages here as they appeared on screen).

01/01/10 10:02 pm
Hi my teacher or best friend happy new year to you.
01/16/11
Hay Reh (10:14pm): My daughter and mom will be at home on monday.if you have for her .message to me for detail please.will let them know to be at home.
Me: Sure. What time is good for them? Thanx!
Hay Reh (10:23 pm): My daughter just let me know.she need ur help on Tuesday for home work.
Me: (10:31 pm): Ok. I can be there tomorrow afternoon or/and Tuesday after 4:30.
04/27/11 1:45 am
Hi teacher.i think you for got your baggages at my home.but I gonna take care it for that.so you may come every time pick them up ok!

Through texting and e-mailing for work, Teh Reh gained a deeper understanding of the etiquette of communication at different levels. For example, Teh Reh texted instead of calling when he was not sure that it was an appropriate time to call his friend, client, or any intended receiver. He said that was afraid that the phone's ring would interrupt the intended receiver's studies, work, business, or important meeting. He explained that he sent text messages to me instead of calling because texting allowed me to check the messages whenever I was available. He added, 'It's impor-

tant. Sometime, you are at your job, you cannot … If I call you, probably you not pick up. It was easy for me and for you. You just check.' Apart from texting, Teh Reh made use of the voicemail function and multimedia messages such as pictures and songs to send greetings to his friends. He also regularly used e-mail to communicate with clients related to his translating job.

Other Karenni adults, Loh Meh, Ka Paw, Sherry, Nway Meh, and Boe Meh, who did not use the texting function or e-mail, wished to connect and reconnect with their family and friends. However, they fulfilled their desire by using other methods. Watching Karenni or Burmese movies, music videos, TV series, and soap operas bought from Thailand or borrowed from friends and neighbors in the USA, for example, was always practiced by the Karenni adults. Boe Meh, for instance, liked to watch Karenni music videos featuring Karenni's scenery over and over during the day. She said that watching the music video was her favorite activity when she missed her homeland. Nevertheless, her grandchildren, Saw Reh and Sha Reh, considered Boe Meh's favorite songs and music videos boring and filled with 'old languages' for 'old people.' Her use of music videos is different from that of the teenagers, who search for new and up-to-date songs, music videos, and soap operas from Burma and Thailand online.

Summary

This chapter highlighted the value of digital technology as a resource in the recently arrived Karenni refugees' everyday lives. I moved away from focusing on the great divide that privileges reading and writing print texts over other kinds of communicative modes. Instead, I emphasized how social interaction and digital literacy exist and transform the experiences of the Karenni refugees. As discussed, the participants' emerging digital literacies include written texts, oral texts, sounds, and other kind of visual elements that consist of images, graphics, symbols, and signs. All of them are fundamental in the semiotic system that supports the recently arrived participants' language and literacy practices to create new understanding, meaning, and connection to people from their homeland or to people who share similar linguistic backgrounds and interests.

The practices among teenagers and adults suggest their desire to maintain strong connections with Karenni friends living in the USA and other parts of the world. The Karenni adults did not use all the functions that their electronic gadgets provided. However, their practices, such as consuming cultural products from their homeland and exchanging information with their friends and family, indicate that their transnational connections are actively maintained. For teenagers, online chat rooms and texting serve as resources for their social and educational development. According to Crystal (2008), technology allows people 'to be linguistically creative and to adapt language to suit the demands of diverse settings' (p. 175). Because a texter is using particular codes and abbreviations, the texter makes use of symbolic systems and a knowledge of sounds and pronunciation. In these ways, the texters (who were English language learners) were learning English in a meaningful way.

There are several potential advantages of having access to technology and popular culture in these recently arrived refugees' lives. As shown in this chapter, practices that involve digital literacy and real-life experiences can be utilized, applied, and adapted as educational resources. Unfortunately, the dynamic literacy practices among the immigrants seem to be overlooked at the institutional level and separated from what school and public discourse count as learning and literacy (such discourses rely heavily on the great divide approach). The belief that education gained through formal schooling is valued over linguistic reality and real-life experiences negatively influences US-American locals and educational policy makers to believe that the refugees are unproductive. In fact, this assumption affects the recently-arrived refugees' perception of education—that it has to be what is approved and standardized institutionally. Consequently, their literacy practices at home and in their neighborhoods are marginalized due to their low value attribution.

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7

Revisiting Transnationalism and Key Resources

As I have observed, hobbies, as strategies that entertain and help recently arrived Karenni refugees cope with hardships and stress in Phoenix, Arizona, are numerous. For example, the teenagers liked to hang out with their coethnic as well as interethnic friends and neighbors. Often, I saw them enjoying making music together in the parking lot. One might play a guitar while others sang along in Karen, Karenni, or Burmese. The Karenni male teens also told me that they formed a soccer team with other students they met at school. As for the younger children, they often played within their gender-based groups. Young girls were often seen playing jumpsies and hopscotch while young boys liked playing soccer in the parking lot. Both genders seemed to like playing tag, Epeakb (blowing rubber bands), and hide-and-seek. The working adult group planning a celebration, such as Christmas, Karenni's New Year, or Dee Ku Day, usually recruited both young children and teenagers for performances such as singing, vocal harmony, and traditional dance. Many Karenni adults habitually talked and socialized with neighbors to exchange information over a meal and hot tea in the evening. Loh Meh and Sherry even extended their Burmese language use to a Nepali family living at La Frontera, who understood Burmese because the family was from the

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borderlands between Nepal and Burma. Altogether, the Karenni families formed a community that became their support network to help and to heal. In this chapter, I present the Karenni community's key approaches to creating a support community and their use of multilingualism to overcome challenges.

Support Network in the Karenni Community

Since I had been introduced to Teh Reh's family in 2009, I learned that Teh Reh had contacted the International Rescue Committee and other agencies to ask them about other refugee families from Burma and where he could locate them in Phoenix, Arizona. Then, Teh Reh kept track of Karenni families in Arizona, their names, their family members, and contact information as part of the established Arizona Karenni Social Community. Later in 2010, Teh Reh explained that Karenni families lived in different apartment complexes in Phoenix. He and other Karenni refugees agreed on a solution to support the Karenni community by electing representatives to listen to Karenni residents' problems and needs for each apartment complex. All of the elected representatives attended a monthly meeting, where a wide range of issues was discussed, for example, concerns about their overall health in the USA, plans for incoming social events, fundraising for families in need, how to find a job, and what to do when a problem arose, such as getting involved in a car accident, a crime, or a fight. During the discussion about finding a job, for instance, the representatives shared and collected the contact information of Asian restaurants, especially Thai restaurants, in their local area that might be hiring. These representatives, who could speak Thai, planned to contact and create a relationship with the restaurants so that newly arrived refugees who needed a job could work there. On the topic of crimes, they updated one another about Karenni people who were victims of crime or even genocide. The meeting demonstrated their strong connection to their ethnic-enclave network and their hope for a better life.

The Karenni participants had support networks with other ethnic groups and the locals, who used other languages and knew how to get

around. For example, when Teh Reh needed to process his Green Card Application in order to gain Permanent Residence status, he showed me a clinic address and contact information. I served as one of his many resources and made an appointment with a medical clinic for his medical record, one of the required documents for the application. I took him to the medical clinic in the southwestern part of Phoenix, far away from the city. Teh Reh's refugee friends recommended this clinic and commented that it offered the most affordable price for medical records for refugees. The location of the clinic, as I observed, was in another immigrant community, where services for immigrants were more available and affordable than they were in downtown Phoenix. This shows strategies that the refugees used in order to find inexpensive and accessible resources to fit their needs.

After I took Teh Reh to the clinic and he successfully received the medical record for only $20,[1] Teh Reh took many refugee friends to this same clinic for the same process and did not have to ask me for guidance again. Teh Reh had learned from this experience how to make an appointment, how to get to the clinic, how to acquire and use an ID and other forms of documentation such as a refugee card, how to converse with the information desk and to fill out forms at the clinic, and how to pay for such services. Those who were new to these processes would later use their experience to help other refugees who needed the same guidance and information.

Another illustration of their efforts to modify their lifestyles in order to accommodate local norms was their calling on Burmese friends who had an experience buying a car to help them shop for a car and auto insurance. When Teh Reh communicated with me that he wanted to purchase a car, I could only think of car dealers I knew. And, buying a car from these dealers in town was difficult for him because he did not have a high enough credit score for a car loan. I was reluctant to take him to a car dealership because of this concern. Nevertheless, a few weeks after Teh Reh told me that he wanted a car, he did purchase one. With some Burmese friends, Teh Reh traveled to the USA-Mexico border for the car purchase. They had also learned where they could find other

[1] This could cost hundreds of dollars plus the cost of required vaccinations.

sources apart from US local stores to purchase affordable food and supplies, such as from private sellers who carried the goods at their houses or who walked around with their goods in a wheeled container in the apartment complex.

The maintenance of transnational relationships was also supported through the Karenni adults' practice of transferring money (see also Blommaert 2010) through Western Union, a local store, or the gas station. Many Karenni adults told me that, while they were far apart from their people, they had cared for their friends and family members, who were in need of financial support, both in the USA and other countries. Their attachment to their roots was extended not only to friends and family, but also to the Karenni people as a whole. At the Karenni Association's monthly meeting, for instance, a male member announced that a retired Karenni military officer, who was known and well-respected among them, had passed away in Thailand's refugee camp. At the meeting, I learned that the Karenni community in Phoenix had been transferring money for the retired officer's medical treatment, which included many months of hospitalization in Thailand. Later, they collected more money from Karenni families in Phoenix to contribute to the funeral in Thailand and for the man's remaining family members. As a result of the incident, the association meeting included a discussion about opening a bank account to collect monthly donations from Karenni families ($10–$20 a family) who already had jobs. The fund was to be distributed to families in need who lived in the USA and in other countries. This indicates the Karenni's desire to continue transnational relationships by using the range of methods available to them in the current setting. So, while, as I mentioned in the previous chapter, the Karenni adults used communication gadgets minimally compared to their children, they created a different way to connect with transnational Karenni communities near and far. In 2013, when I revisited Karenni families in Phoenix, Arizona, the Karenni Social Community had become a branch of the larger community-based organization called Arizona Burma Ethnic Based Community Organization (AZ-BEBCO) that had been established as a joint support network with other ethnic groups from Burma such as the Kachin, the Karen, and the Shan. Elected representatives from every

group met monthly to brainstorm ideas and solutions for improving their lives and well-being.

Maintaining Multilingual Repertoires Across Space and Time

Having been a family mentor and friend to the participants, I was informed about the challenges they faced living in the USA. I helped them with errands, gave them rides, accompanied them to special events (including association meetings), and attended social events and gatherings. Throughout the process, I witnessed that their multilingual repertoires were valued, utilized, and maintained extensively. The Karenni participants completed their tasks by employing the accumulated literacy and multilingual repertoires they had acquired in Burma, Thailand, and the USA to improve their daily lives. Practices included making use of multiple translations. These strategies perpetuate the maintenance of multilingual competence.

As discussed in Chap. 1, multilingual repertoires can be understood as individual and societal assets. While each refugee had a unique language learning trajectory, each individual contributed to their community resources. As described in Chap. 3, multiple translations were vital and had to be practiced while conducting this study because I am not a speaker of Karenni or Burmese. It is important to also note that multiple translations were not only a method in my research but they were also common practice in the apartment complexes utilized to aid life in the new migrant community. Interpreters from inside the Karenni community played a crucial role. Because it was often difficult to find professional interpreters of Karenni and Burmese, which are Less Commonly Taught Languages in the US and elsewhere, I had to find interpreters from within the communities. My research methods yielded interesting findings about the value and role of my participants' multilingual repertoires. Ka Paw told me that he had been engaged in communication that required translation both in Thailand and the USA. When he worked as a security guard in Thailand's refugee camp, he made friends with Thai

visitors and locals. Since he spoke Kayan and Burmese and did not speak Thai and Karenni, he always had a friend who could speak Thai and Burmese in the camp helping him. In Phoenix, Arizona, he explained,

> Some people don't speak Karenni and some people don't speak Burmese. Sometimes if we [and] the agency need the translation and sometimes the Karen only speak Karen, so it's important to translate Karen.

Basically, Ka Paw pointed out that interethnic communication had been a vital part of the Karenni refugees' life since they lived in Burma and Thailand. The need for interethnic communication as well as translation continues to be important. At the present stage of the Karenni refugees' resettlement in the USA, there are very few interpreters who can directly translate Karenni to English. If the agency can find a Karenni who speaks Burmese, and a Burmese who can speak English, translations will be multifaceted, completed by Karenni translated to Burmese and from Burmese to English. Loh Meh from Teh Reh's family explained to me that she often accompanied Karenni refugee women to hospital. Although she was not comfortable with translating Karenni directly to English because she was 'still learning English,' her fluency in Karenni and Burmese could help the patients and their healthcare providers. The translation process is shown in Fig. 7.1.

Multiple translations in interethnic communication were common for trade and communication in the refugee's previous countries and have been brought with them to their new location. This is for two main reasons: (1) they chose to live in similar ethnic communities and environments, and (2) not all of them could communicate in English, so they needed an interpreter. The process of providing (or obtaining) multiple translations has helped the Karenni refugees improve their way of life since arriving in the USA. There are several factors as I have discussed earlier in See Meh's experiences of learning Burmese and Karen because the

Fig. 7.1 Multiple translations

Karenni language is one of the less commonly taught and used languages. According to Blommaert (2010), small or minority languages seem to be invisible whereas a more commonly used language is more recognized in both oral and written communication. People outside the Karenni speech community rarely learn Karenni. Therefore, one or more translations throughout the process of communication are needed if the intended audience does not know Karenni. Other Burmese ethnic languages are similarly affected. The process shown in Fig. 7.1 illustrates how authorities, support agencies, and those who use the mainstream language are in contact with the Karenni refugees, and vice versa.

Experiencing multiple movements and living in the transnational neighborhoods resulted in most Karenni refugees being uncertain about their future. Nevertheless, they believed that acquiring and maintaining multiple languages will help them to secure present and future opportunities (Dagenais 2003). At times, many Karenni parents were exhausted by their day-to-day challenges in the current setting and said something like, 'I don't know. Sometimes I want to be here. Sometimes I want to go back' or 'I'm not sure. Sometimes I want to live here. Sometimes, no.' As many Karenni refugees desire to go back to Thailand or even Burma, they hope that their acquired languages can fulfill both daily strategic goals in the USA and their imagined future (Kanno and Norton 2003). They told me that they wanted their children to maintain their native languages because they might move back. They encouraged their children to read and write Karenni and Burmese texts and prints and sing Karenni and Burmese songs. Their practices present their plan of being transnational, which in turn is filled with contested language ideologies—learning English while maintaining and valuing their native languages.

Print Texts, Language Ideology, and Availability

Print texts are used in the Karenni community in Phoenix, Arizona, for wider communication. These prints also represent a language ideology that can travel across borders. As discussed in the previous chapter, English

was the main language that the Karenni, especially teenagers, used for texting and when using electronic gadgets more generally. Many of the Karenni adult participants, on the other hand, commonly used Burmese as a lingua franca in interethnic communication and in wider communications with refugees from Burma. At social events, such as New Year and Dee Ku, the hosts used both Karenni and Burmese to accommodate

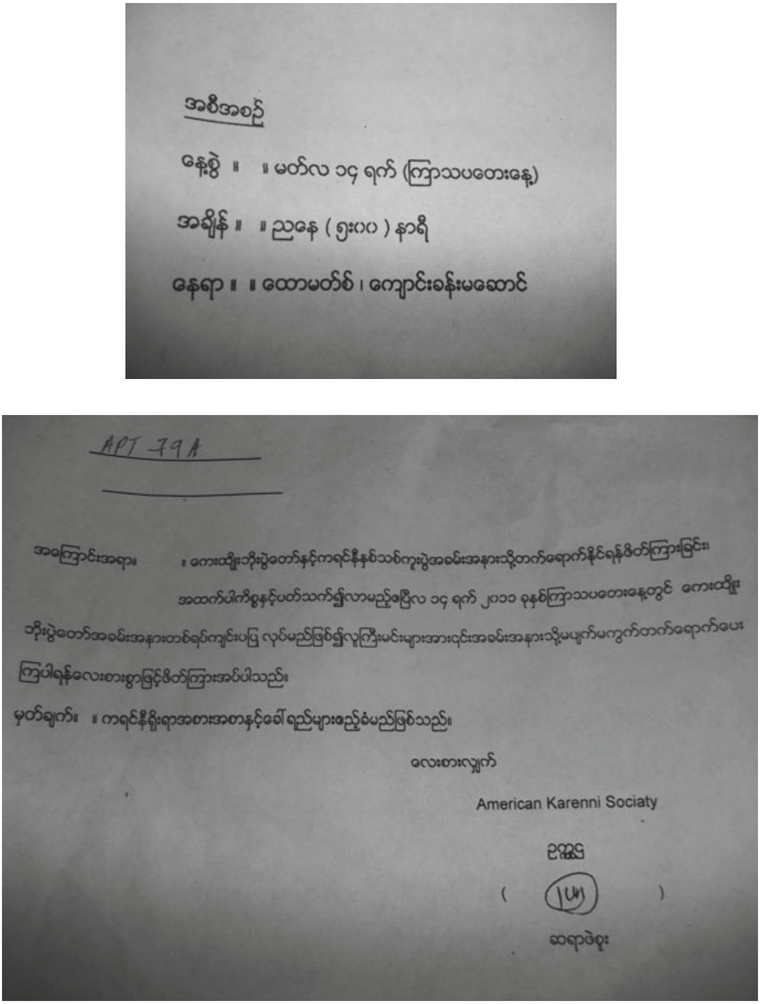
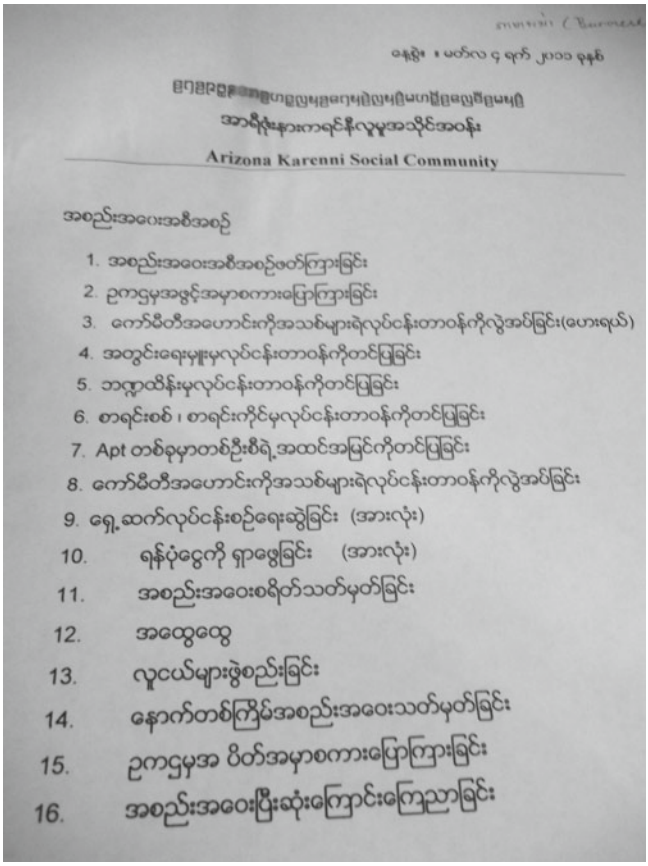


Fig. 7.2 Meeting schedule and meeting agenda in Burmese


အာရီဇုံးနားကာရင်နီလူမှုအသိုင်အဝန်း

Arizona Karenni Social Community

အစည်းအဝေးအစီအစဉ်

1. အစည်းအဝေးအစီအစဉ်ဖတ်ကြားခြင်း
2. ဥကဋ္ဌမှအဖွင့်အမှာစကားပြောကြားခြင်း
3. ကော်မီတီအဟောင်းကိုအသစ်များရဲလုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်ကိုလွှဲအပ်ခြင်း(ဟောရယ်)
4. အတွင်းရေးမှူးမှလုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်ကိုတင်ပြခြင်း
5. ဘဏ္ဍာထိန်းမှလုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်ကိုတင်ပြခြင်း
6. စာရင်းစစ်၊ စာရင်းကိုင်မှလုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်ကိုတင်ပြခြင်း
7. Apt တစ်ခုမှာတစ်ဦးစီရဲ့အထောင်အပြင်ကိုတင်ပြခြင်း
8. ကော်မီတီအဟောင်းကိုအသစ်များရဲလုပ်ငန်းတာဝန်ကိုလွှဲအပ်ခြင်း
9. ရွှေ့ဆက်လုပ်ငန်းစဉ်ရေးဆွဲခြင်း (အားလုံး)
10. ရန်ပုံငွေကို ရှာဖွေခြင်း (အားလုံး)
11. အစည်းအဝေးစရိတ်သတ်မှတ်ခြင်း
12. အထွေထွေ
13. လူငယ်များဖွဲ့စည်းခြင်း
14. နောက်တစ်ကြိမ်အစည်းအဝေးသတ်မှတ်ခြင်း
15. ဥကဋ္ဌမှအ ပိတ်အမှာစကားပြောကြားခြင်း
16. အစည်းအဝေးပြီးဆုံးကြောင်းကြေညာခြင်း

Fig. 7.2 (continued)

the audience. In addition, written flyers and letters among the Karenni, Karen, and other peoples from Burma in Phoenix, Arizona, were also printed or typed in Burmese (see Fig. 7.2). It is vital to note that they used Burmese due to the language ideology brought in from their place of origin in Burma. In addition, after I talked with them about Burmese as their language choice, its role in the Karenni community, and how important it was to continue teaching and learning Burmese, I understood the supporting details for this language choice. The unexpected factor of Burmese usage in written artifacts was also discovered. Adult

refugees from AZ-BEBCO explained that they could not find Karenni fonts to work on their laptop. Meanwhile, Burmese has been created as an available font on computers and therefore can be used as a lingua franca in print among the refugees from Burma. It might be worth noting that print texts can serve as a tool to maintain and preserve a language and its ideology among transnationals.

Summary

The recently arrived Karenni refugees utilized, daily, their hard-earned languages and literacies acquired and accumulated over the course of their lifetimes to navigate in their new environment for both work and play. Although they faced challenges such as dealing with English and multiple unfamiliar tasks, the support network they established proved to be an invaluable resource. Technology can also be used for the preservation and maintenance of Burmese. Creating digital electronic fonts could be used to maintain other languages such as Karenni, a small and minoritized language.

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8

Conclusion and Implications

Refugees, as I have presented, are resourceful transnational individuals, yet often marginalized because their language, culture, and literacy practices are unfamiliar to those of the host community. Local communities and policies in their receiving nations expect newly resettled refugees to become self-sufficient as soon as possible. Such self-sufficiency is often assumed to arise from getting a job, earning money, and knowing how things work in the new country. Refugee children are expected to attend formal education. In all, both host communities and refugees believe that the path to these goals involves acquiring the dominant language and literacy of the host country. These expectations can be met. However, understanding the refugees' existing resources and daily struggles may help local communities, educators, resettlement agencies, and policy makers achieve these expectations more quickly. In writing this book and privileging ethnographic methods, I aimed to provide an inventory of language and literacy practices used by the recently arrived refugees and examine how language and literacy facilitated learning, created new understandings, and maintained transnational connections. I hope to bridge the gap between expectations drawn from the top-down policy and practices and the refugees' real-life experiences. In the remainder of

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this chapter, I provide a key summary followed by implications for pedagogy and practice.

Contested Language Ideologies

Throughout my study of the Karenni families, contested language ideologies, or different kinds of language ideologies, between sending and receiving nations, were constructed and reconstructed because their transnational practices were still in-process and taking shape (Braziel and Mannur 2003; Hall 2003). For instance, the Karenni refugees' ethnic languages have been contested by Burmese dominance since the Karenni (adult) participants were in the Karenni state, and Burmese functioned as most of the Karenni adults' (and some teenagers—Hla Meh, Daw, and Saw Reh) communicative tool, in both oral (e.g., interethnic communication) and written modes (e.g., written language in letters and agenda of the Karenni Social Community). It was also the language of the mainstream media and entertainment transmitted from Burma. In these ways, the superior status of Burmese (as the official language of Burma and as the language of wider communication) shaped the beliefs and practices of these refugees both in Thailand and the USA.

Upon arrival in the USA, tension between English and the participants' previously acquired languages emerged because of the hegemony of English perceived due to its local prominence, prestige, and power directly and indirectly. Nevertheless, the Karenni parents and the children responded to the high status of English differently. The Karenni parents' day-to-day encounters with English in both oral (e.g., communicating with locals and authorities) and written forms reinforced their belief that their lack of English proficiency (and literacy) created problems in living in the USA and challenged their efforts to live comfortably and to access social and economic resources. The young children, however, were influenced by their surroundings, popular culture, and the prevailing notions that have been established and disseminated throughout their community. Unfortunately, misconceptions regarding a person's language proficiency or lack thereof were formed based on the aforementioned influences and their own personal experiences, which were shaped

from a very young age and especially during the time of their resettlement due to the ideologies of language introduced in their new surroundings. For instance, the lack of English proficiency among Karenni adults created a stereotype (such as 'Karenni women don't speak English') among the younger children.

In this particular case, another layer of linguistic hierarchy was constructed, influenced partly by a belief in the high status of Standard English (e.g., the act of language correction). In these Karenni families, English learned from school was considered *good* because it was perceived as a more correct way from a more respectful and reliable source that has been created socially, historically, and politically. This again shows the subscription to the linear theory of learning and great divide perspective (Goody 1977) that still dominates the USA's public discourse, education, policy, and society where language is structured in a vertical hierarchical order. As a result, all adult participants seemed to feel devalued and unrecognized. Given such ideologies, language socialization became a two-way process in this community. While the older generation passed on the native language and culture to the younger ones, the younger generation, who had formal schooling in the USA, became the mediators of good English, the prestigious language in the new context.

Nevertheless, I do not suggest that the Karenni adults are deficient. In fact, there are 'different literacies associated with different domains of life' (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 8) and everyone has some literacy difficulties in some contexts (Street 1995). Based on the data analysis, I argue that the newcomers are now in the process of acquiring new literacies in a variety of new domains through informal learning and sense making (Barton and Hamilton 2000, p. 8). As Teh Reh stated, his Karenni community needs 'to know the American government policies and stuff,' but it becomes more complex when it simultaneously affects how they use their new language in situ. Nevertheless, I have found that my participants are in the process of examining which language and literacy practices work effectively for them and fit their needs during the first years of their resettlement. Trying to overcome their challenges in the receiving nation, the Karenni adults asked for help, experimented, questioned, observed, and made use of resources such as friends and the people they

knew. In these ways, the participants employed survival and literacy skills to solve their problems.

Socialization Using Both Previously and Recently Acquired Languages

Previously acquired and recently acquired linguistic repertoires shape the ways in which language choice, strategies, and language socialization among these multilingual individuals are practiced and performed. I approached the participants' abundant linguistic repertoires and practices by examining those practices in light of their life trajectories, their language and literacy skills at the time of movement (Blommaert 2010), and what additional practices emerged after their resettlement in the USA. I found that variations in linguistic repertoires among the participants were prominent, primarily due to differences across generations (i.e., adults' linguistic repertoires are different from children's), within families (e.g., religions, primary languages), schooling experiences (e.g., language of instruction in previous and current schools), individual preferences, and notably the circumstances after the movement (e.g., languages required at work, for socialization, and for networking).

In each family, family members shared some sociolinguistic, sociocultural, and sociohistorical background aspects but their language and literacy practices and repertoires varied because they had acquired different languages at different levels while living in different countries. In the USA they were engaged in different activities, social networks, academic pursuits, or work-related projects. For instance, in Ka Paw's family, Ka Paw had limited Karenni proficiency as he had learned Kayan and Burmese as his primary languages. However, his children, Daw (14) and Je Ru (10), were more comfortable communicating in Karenni because they spent a considerable amount of time each day with Karenni friends. In addition, Daw read the Bible written in Karenni while Je Ru was learning to read the Bible in English because he had limited Karenni reading and writing proficiency. In Teh Reh's family, See Meh (15) had acquired Karenni as her primary language while learning Thai through formal schooling in

Thailand. Conversely, her brothers, Gu-Gu (7) and Ngee-Ngee (7), had only acquired Karenni at home when they were in the refugee camp in Thailand because they were too young to be enrolled in school before the resettlement move. Therefore, See Meh and her younger brothers utilized different linguistic strategies in the USA. That is, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee learned English as their second language in the USA. As a result, the act of translanguaging (as described in the section on 'counting in English' in Chap. 6) was carried out to create their unique communicative strategy and their own norms of interaction. Conversely, See Meh understood academic content better when I used Thai to explain class materials, such as for math and biology, to her as Thai had been her most-used academic language.

I found that generational differences in linguistic strategies were influenced by the language and literacy levels that refugee participants had before their movement. While living in the USA, the Karenni teenagers and adults utilized their previously acquired languages (e.g., Burmese, Karen) more than English because they were more comfortable and competent in those languages than they were in English. Conversely, for the younger children, who had had limited time to learn other languages in the refugee camp because of their young age, using English, the recently acquired language, for their social and learning opportunities was more common.

The teenagers' language and literacy practices also indicate that certain languages were used for certain circumstances. For example, See Meh (re)learned Karen because she wanted to be accepted among her Karen friends in the USA. Similarly, Hla Meh employed different languages for different purposes—Burmese and Karenni for translating documents for her family, Karenni for instructing her young siblings, and English for texting (because there was no Karenni option). Saw Reh learned Burmese in order to consume cultural products from Burma. And, both See Meh and Hla Meh made use of their strongest academic language other than English to make sense of the English academic language they were expected to comprehend. Finally, Daw's practice of reading the Bible in Karenni and Burmese represents the relationship between meaning-making tools and religious practices. For Daw, when religious texts are

carried out in the language in which she is most proficient they are far more appreciable than those in English, which is the language she is still learning (although this might change as she becomes more comfortable and proficient in English). As shown in these practices, the language that carries the most meaningful concepts, connects to the participant teenagers' experiences, and benefits them directly for socialization and entertainment in the current setting is used as the meaning representational tool. I propose once again that multilingual repertoires should be treated as resources (Canagarajah 2009, p. 19; see also Ruiz 1984). As discussed in these Karenni youth's experiences, a language is maintained and given a place in the speaker's linguistic repertoires when it functions in an authentically meaningful activity.

Language socialization, or how one learns to become a member of a speech community, occurs and changes throughout life (Schecter and Bayley 2002). In this case, migration is a major factor in the participants' new trajectories in the language socialization process. The complexity of their linguistic repertoires and accumulated literacies in their current setting were heavily shaped by their past (or what they had learned in the past, linguistically and culturally) and impacted by their present ideological circumstances. Previously acquired and recently acquired languages were used to fulfill context-dependent strategic goals despite the dominant language in their receiving nation being English. In addition, the participants' practices demonstrate that language and literacy has the capacity to travel (Luke 2004) and reinforce the notion of *ethnoscape* (Appadurai 1996), or what people do according to their language and culture that may not coincide with the dominant norms of the nation-state. The participants' practices and experiences show that language and literacy practices, rather than their geographical/physical residence, are powerful indicators of their identity (Hall 2003; McDonald 1997).

The Construct of Multilingual Capital

The Karenni participants' hard-earned linguistic knowledge (in Burmese, English, Karen, Karenni, Kayan, Shan, and Thai) acquired over the course of a lifetime influenced their use of, and positive attitude toward,

multilingualism. This is because each language functions differently, yet appropriately, in different domains. In spite of the fact that they subscribed to the high status of the languages of the dominant groups, they were determined to maintain their primary languages because those are the languages of their family members and of their heritage and long civilization. Traveling to many places and learning many languages influenced their motivation to maintain their primary language as well as the other acquired languages to secure economic and social opportunities (Dagenais 2003; Kanno and Norton 2003). Such processes were influenced by their movement and by the contested and contradictory language ideologies they encountered along the way.

As demonstrated in instances of translanguaging, learning a language other than English, and using multiple languages and translations for work and play, such practices, indeed, are vital resources for language learning. While the refugees were required to learn English, it is also important to note that these learners 'occupy different points of bilingual continua' (García 2009, p. 145) because both of their primary and second languages are consequentially joined and involved in the meaning-making process (Gutiérrez et al. 2001) in order to fulfill their communicative needs. Practices based on a restricted view of language (such as English-only instruction) do not support their learning in part because these multilingual individuals are daily exposed to and engaged in multilingual surroundings in their families, neighborhood, and communities while also trying to learn English. This finding suggests that transnational trajectories among the participants create imagined multilingual communities (see also Anderson's (1996) 'imagined communities'), which I view as the communities that evolve in places where acquired multiple languages are used.

In addition to distinctively unique skills, practices, and strategies, the refugees' experiences and everyday lives show that what is prioritized more in their lives and community is being multilingual, although they know in the bottom of their heart that English is important. Here, instead of viewing languages in a vertical hierarchy, where English is at the top, the refugees' use of multilingual repertoires in daily life leads us to view languages in the form of a continuum where English is one of many useful and available languages in the participants' repertoires.

Implications for Pedagogy

There are a number of pedagogical implications that come out of this work. First, it demonstrates how valuable it is for teachers to understand and reflect on the resources that students bring to the classroom. Professional training and teachers' education would gain more than they would lose when keeping up with new groups that bring with them different languages, modes, and learning strategies. Also, to help learners succeed academically, pedagogy would benefit from incorporating multiple media, modes, and student-centered approaches (Short 1991) where language is taught simultaneously with content and context. Below, I add more suggestions and emphasize the implications of this study.

Translanguaging: An Alternative for English Language Learners

In Chap. 5, the utilization of translanguaging among the young children and between See Meh and me functioned as a tool to connect meaningful concepts to the learner's repertoires. In addition, as demonstrated in Chaps. 6 and 7, the participants' practice of using a code that makes sense to them is shown to be an effective strategy. These findings suggest that academic language at school may be successfully developed when learners are allowed to use their linguistic resources to make meaning, draw connections, and improve comprehension. This aspect of translanguaging can support both teaching and learning. It helps English language learners in the classroom make sense of their bi/multilingual repertoires and appreciate their primary language. Though teachers may not know the students' primary language, they can activate the learners' prior knowledge by utilizing visual aids, media, and multimodal materials. Alternatively, schools may be able to find or locate those who can speak students' native language in addition to the dominant language such as English in this study and create after-school tutoring sessions for students with Less Commonly Taught Languages.

Digital Literacies in Schools and Curriculum

Problem solving in technology-rich environments and 'using digital technology, communication tools, and networks to acquire and evaluate information, communicate with others, and perform practical tasks' (OECD 2014, p. 26) is in high-demand in our education systems and in society. In the refugees' everyday lives, multimodal literacies have been integrated in their activities, interests, and tasks. As demonstrated in Chap. 7, playing video games and using digital technologies has had a great influence on the children's language and literacy practices. However, many educational authorities and the majority of educators do not approve of this kind of learning because of the assumed negative effects (De Aguilera and Mendiz 2003). The process of learning and literacy development when playing video games and participating in social media is similar to the process of learning and literacy development in other evocative contexts, where the meaning-making mechanism has to be enacted, encouraged, and practical. As shown in the data analysis, multimodality advances children's understanding of content by combining sound, image, text, and contextualized story in ways that make sense to them.

To integrate and take advantage of technology advancement in the twenty-first century for teaching and learning, we need teachers and educators who can apply technology, digital literacies, and pop culture in the classroom. I hope that this study sheds a little bit of light on what might also count as learning and what it means to be literate in the twenty-first century, when technology is advancing at a high speed. There is no unidirectional form of literacy (Street 1995, 1997).

Implications for Practices Among Practitioners and Resettlement Agencies

Becoming self-sufficient at a lightning speed is expected from recently arrived refugees. However, practitioners, resettlement agencies, and organizations that support refugees may have to tailor their model and support plans to fit each group. In the resettlement process, language and literacy

is a key ingredient (Leymarie 2016). There are different forms of English and English literacy in different contexts that refugees yearn to master but seem to have limited guidance in acquiring, for example, academic English, work-related English, and English for different tasks and errands. Learning their specific needs, hardships, and linguistic and cultural backgrounds may help create language and literacy programs that draw upon their life trajectories and experiences (Freire 1998; Tyeklar 2016).

The Karenni families' practices in this book could be used as a model of a self-sufficient community. Although the participants received support from the local school and resettlement agencies, they still needed more sociable and amicable support from family members, friends, neighbors, and volunteers, who understand their unique needs. Their self-established support network and community is an example of how they overcame daily challenges and extended their help to the Karenni community elsewhere. With the people they are familiar with and with the languages they understand best, they feel more comfortable. Practitioners, volunteers, and organizations will benefit from the refugees' community leaders or representatives input and may be able to support the refugees through these individuals, individuals whom the refugees trust and are comfortable with. In these processes, translators and interpreters, especially the ones from within the refugee community, are also in need and will be able to unlock multiple unfamiliar languages and bridge cultural understandings between local service providers and newly arrived refugees.

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