

A Study of Multilingual Repertoires and Accumulated Literacies:

Three Karenni Families Living in Arizona

by

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ABSTRACT

This empirical study aims to identify and analyze the accumulated literacies and multilingual repertoires of three Karenni refugee families originally from the highlands of Burma but who had lived in refugee camps in Thailand before arriving in Phoenix, Arizona. Through participant observation in the families' households and neighborhood, artifact collection, and individual and group interviews, I observe, document, and examine the everyday literacy practices of these three families in order to understand how these literacies are used to foster new understandings and social networks while maintaining transnational connections.

The data analysis demonstrates that there are similarities and differences between the literacy practices and language choices of the sixteen individuals who participated and that there are significant differences across generations as well as across the three families. The findings shed light on the complicated relationship between migration and language learning, ideologies of language, literacy practices, and various modes of communication (face-to-face and digital). Building on a long tradition of ethnographic work that examines language learning and literacy in relation to educational access and opportunity, this research is relevant to educational researchers, policy makers, and teachers who are committed to rethinking what counts as literacy, for whom, in what contexts, and with what kinds of consequences. In a time of increased movement of people across borders, and increased use of information and communication

technologies, this investigation has important implications for teacher preparation, theories of language learning and literacy development, and educational research.

For my beloved grandmother, Ngo Suwannamai,
whose life, mastery of two languages, and immeasurable accumulated literacies,
has been my inspiration.

For my mother,
who has always wished that one of her two children
may one day become a doctor.

For my father,
who has always supported me in the pursuit of my education.

And, for my brother,
who imparted these words to me,
“It’s OK to walk slowly at times
but don’t you ever give up.”

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CHAPTER ONE

MULTILINGUALISM IN THE MAKING

Recent increases in the movement of people, cultures, ideas, languages, and goods across national boundaries have contributed to the emergence of “super-diversity” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 6) in a variety of environments worldwide. Such super-diversity has complicated the process of language contact and accelerated the use of information technologies. Multilingualism, or the act of using multiple languages, is now fueled by mobility and distribution of various languages, language variations, and modes of communication. This phenomenon challenges sociolinguists to investigate and explain multilingualism in the making, which first requires identifying the *meanings* and *functions* of language, or what Blommaert (2010) has called the “sociolinguistic reality” of people and their languages moving into new spaces, orally, textually, and virtually.

Often, immigrants and refugees who migrate from what some have called the “zone of poverty” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 3) to more developed zones are viewed as having limited communicative and literacy resources because their spoken codes, written languages, and semiotic systems are unfamiliar to those living in the host country. These views and opinions are influenced by historically-constructed ideologies and dominant linguistic norms (Collins, Slembrouck, & Baynham, 2009, p. 1) and resulting tensions often lead to linguistic, social, and cultural inequalities (Blommaert, 2010; Hymes, 1996) that accompanies, yet also contradicts, mobility and transnational movement. As Appadurai (1996, 2001) proposed, such norms can be plural, not restricted to

unwavering heterogenic stance within national units. Instead of devaluing the newcomers ethnic and linguistic resources, we need to identify their real-life language practices (Blommaert, 2007), what linguistic resources they already have, and what they do with those resources in their daily lives. By exploring the situated *meanings* and *functions* of language in this way, we are able to explore the linkages between language and situated communication (Collins et al, 2009) and between language and mobility.

To explore and understand the complexity of super-diversity and multilingualism, the present study investigates the situated linguistic and social practices of the recently-arrived multilingual Karenni refugees who were originally from the highlands of Burma but who had lived for many years in Thailand before coming to the United States. I investigate the relationship between movement and language learning and the tensions between language ideologies and literacy practices. Aiming to understand and identify the language and literacy practices (including adaptations) of these Karenni refugees, I analyze the ways that they respond to paradoxical constructs of language ideologies after arriving in the United States, and how those responses shape their transnational movements and experiences. I explore how their efforts to participate in the receiving nation *while* also sustaining their language, culture and connection to their homeland, influence what they do with languages. As part of this endeavor, I also examine the role of information and communication technology in facilitating learning, literacy development, and how they call upon community languages to manage everyday challenges.

The questions that guide this qualitative research study grew out of my experiences as a volunteer instructor of English as a second language (ESL) and a family mentor to three recently-arrived Karenni refugee families living in Phoenix, Arizona, from September 2009 to May 2011. I responded and took the role immediately when a Phoenix-based refugee resettlement organization recruited volunteers. At the time, I believed that the refugees were struggling, in need of English language and literacies, and in need of knowledge of American culture and society. In addition, the volunteering team specifically recruited Thai or Burmese speakers, considering that the Karenni refugees are originally from Burma and had lived in Thailand's refugee camps for more than a decade prior to coming to the United States. Due to my linguistic background as a native Thai speaker and my Southeast-Asian cultural background, I believed I could relate my understanding to their experiences of movement from a Southeast Asian country to the United States, where they were facing new and unfamiliar circumstances. I was excited to assist the three families, and I believe I provided useful information and guidance to them.

However, during many casual conversations with the refugees and while accompanying them to do errands, I learned about the many adaptive strategies they used to cope with the difficulties they faced. For example, I was told that they traveled to the U.S. - Mexico border to buy a used car and affordable foods and supplies. I also learned that the fishing and hunting skills they brought with them had been incorporated well in the new context and the state's restrictions and regulations. In the process, they learned how to get the fishing and hunting

licenses, to purchase equipment and a rifle, and to fish and hunt in a permitted area so that they could bring home fresh fish and meat to provide to their families and to reduce the cost of food. In addition, they had established an organization as their ethnic-enclave social and support network within a year of their resettlement. The Karenni children, who were labeled *English Language Learners* at school, enjoyed using multiple previously-acquired and recently-acquired languages for both study and play while they benefitted from a variety of available electronic gadgets. After witnessing the use of these literacy resources in their daily life, households, and neighborhood, I decided to interrogate the assumptions I once had, including the view that most refugees are uneducated, illiterate, and without the linguistic resources required to establish productive lives in the new context.

While questioning the assumptions and expectations I had at the beginning of this study, I found Weinstein-Shr's (1993) study inspiring and instructional. I was particularly captivated by her statement that refugees are extraordinarily adaptive and resourceful: "if they had not been resourceful, they would not be here; they would be dead" (p.272). As a result, I decided to explore the many useful ways that the newly-arrived refugees draw upon both existing and emerging linguistic resources to manage the challenges and obstacles encountered as a consequence of their forced migration. To examine the multilingual repertoires and literacy practices of three recently-arrived Karenni refugee families, I focused on the language learning and literacy practices prominent in home contexts that may be underutilized in schools.

In these ways, this ethnographic study gives analytic priority to the practices that have existed and emerged as a result of recent migration(s) 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 three Karenni refugee families to accomplish basic communication, to navigate logistical hurdles, to achieve strategic goals, and to sustain transnational connections. I examine the Karenni refugees' linguistic strategies, including their multiple languages, modes, and purposes. There are three main goals in conducting this research: 1) to produce an inventory of what I call *accumulated literacies*, or constantly evolving skills, knowledge, and practices acquired through everyday living, that participants use; 2) to examine how these accumulated literacies are used to foster learning and to create new *social networks* while maintaining *transnational connections* (Hannerz, 1996; Warriner, 2009); and 3) to understand the literacy practices of individuals within and across three families, with a focus on *generational differences*. There are four sets of questions that guide this study.

Research Questions

1. What are the literacy practices used by these families?
 - 1.1 What languages and what modes are used? When? By whom? For what purpose?
 - 1.2 What factors seem to influence the choices made?
 - 1.3 What do participants say about their choices?

2. How are family members' accumulated language and literacy practices used to navigate and create new connections, understandings, relationships, or social networks in the new context?
3. How are language and literacy practices used to maintain transnational connections?
4. Is there a difference between the strategies of parents and children? Are there differences between families? If so, what are they? In what context do they appear? What do participants say about these differences?

Contextualizing the Research Historically and Conceptually

To identify and examine how globalization and migration influence the lived experiences of social actors, I identify and analyze how recently-arrived migrants use their accumulated literacies, or constantly evolving skills, knowledge, and practices acquired through experiences and everyday living and their 'multilingual resources' to create productive social networks in the receiving nation. The participants in this study attempt to maintain active connections to people, institutions, ideas, and values from the homeland while establishing and nurturing new relationships, practices, and connections in the receiving context (Khagram & Levitt, 2008).

In order to theorize this complicated set of connections (to more than one place and more than one community), I am informed by the notion of *transnationalism* which provides insights into how the accelerated flow of people, commodities, cultures, and ideas across national boundaries might be accompanied by sustained connections with people, institutions, and practices

from the homeland. Recent research indicates that migrants' 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., Cuero, 2010; Hall, 2002; Medina, 2010; Ong 1999; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007). That is, even while adjusting to fit in the new environment where they live, work, study, and plan for the future, many migrants sustain their heritage language and culture as one way to maintain connections to their "roots" (e.g. MacDonald, 1997; Sarroub, 2010; Weinstein-Shr, 1993). In this study, I attend to what the transnational Karenni migrants do to continue relationships with both the home and host countries, linguistically, culturally, and socially.

To capture the aforementioned *contradictions* and *negotiations* between the existing knowledge and the new norms that may not always coincide, I adopt González's (2001) "borderlands" (p. 10-14) perspective, which draws on both literal and metaphorical meanings of them. In her study of Mexican immigrant families and their language socialization in the Tucson borderland, González explains that the imagery of borderlands are cognitively constructed in the bicultural-bilingual individuals' self while the geographical borderlands help us to see the relationships between local communities and between states (Wilson & Donnan, 1998). With the borderland metaphor, I understand that the migrants may continue to have strong ties with the homeland by 1) maintaining their language, culture, value, and belief and 2) traveling back to their homeland regularly or practicing transnational connections such as calling and sending letters and e-mails to friends and family remaining in the homeland.

To examine the lives and practices of people who have crossed multiple borders (national, linguistic, cultural, social, political, economic), I have been guided by work on transnationalism (or the accelerated flow of people, commodities, cultures, and ideas across national boundaries) and multimodal literacies. I also rely on the notion of *ethnoscape* (Appadurai, 1991) as I try to understand how people are identified linguistically and culturally and not just in terms of nation-state boundaries. All such frameworks help me envision and explore what language and literacy practices might be used by the Karenni families as well as their thoughts on those practices. In addition, I rely on the notion of *technoscape* (Appadurai, 1990), which endeavors to explain how technology moves at high speed across borders, to explore how information technology has influenced the Karenni families' methods of learning and communication. Many of the concepts outlined here have been theorized and utilized in studies of migrants' multimodal literacies (e.g. Black, 2009; Lam, 2000, 2009a, 2009b; Yi 2009) which show that digital technologies have opened up opportunities for migrant learners of English to engage with both traditional (oral and printed texts) and digital texts (e.g. texts on screen, images, and instant messages) in a greater range of contexts than ever before. Such opportunities are believed to facilitate and establish learning, academic achievement, transnational social connections, bilingual and biliterate competence, and transnational identities (Black, 2009; Lam, 2000; McGinnis et al, 2007; Yi, 2009).

Because little is known about the literacy levels, multilingual repertoires, and academic abilities of this particular group of immigrants, research on the

relationship between their accumulated literacies (acquired over the course of a life time through the many migrations they have experienced), their linguistic repertoires, and their efforts to learn and participate in the host country while *also* maintaining connections to the homeland (Basch et al, 1994; Levitt & Schiller, 2004; Turcotte & Silka, 2007) is critically important at this point in time. Below, I present the historical information and circumstances of the Karenni refugees in this study and their multiple movements across national and linguistic borders.



Figure 1. Administrative map of Burma (Vidiani, 2012)

Karenni refugees in Burma and Thailand

Refugees, by definition, live in places and communities that are adopted and that differ in significant ways from the places and communities they have left. As a result, refugees are influenced by multiple borderland experiences, both psychologically and physically. They move between the familiar and the unknown, between looking back and moving forward, between home and host countries, and between danger and safety. The latter borderland metaphor of *danger and safety* is important in understanding refugees' experiences. Unlike immigrants, refugees are created when they are forced to move from their homeland and cannot return due to the awaiting life-threatening risk. According to the United Nation's 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.

The Karenni refugees' borderland experiences, in particular, have been constructed by many factors (historical, political, linguistic, and cultural) since their flight from their own territory in Burma. Historically and politically, ethnic diversity in Burma, or officially named Myanmar by its military government, has been the cause of tensions between groups since before the colonial period and

has helped to shape the nation's political boundaries. The Karenni nation, also known as Kaya or Kayah¹, is one of the seven ethnically-based states on Burma's east and west sides (See Figure 1), where more than 130 distinctive subgroups (Ranard & Barron, 2007) reside. Among all of them, the Karen, Karenni, Mon, Kachin and Shan peoples are the biggest ethnic groups and rule their ethnic-based states along the 2,000-kilometer-long Thailand-Burma borders from the North to the South, where the fertile rain forests and high mountains cover. Meanwhile, the largest group, the Burmans or Proper Burma, forms 68% of the estimated population of 55 million, who mainly live on the central plains, where seven "divisions" are located.

In modern-day Burma, ethnic conflicts have been intensified and expanded since the national independence granted by Britain in 1948 (Hyndman, 1998). After that, Burma's military regime, the State Law and Order Restoration Council (SLORC), took over in 1962 (Trichote, 2005) and proposed "the Burmese Way to Socialism" (Trichote, 2005, p.1). The national government has worked to unite the country by ruling all of the ethnic-based states and by trying to maintain political and economic control over the production and distribution of the many rich natural resources in the region. Conversely, the ethnic-based states, including the Karenni state, have attempted to preserve their independence,

¹ Karenni, which means the Red Karen (ni means red in the Karenni language), has been used to differentiate the group from the Karen people, who may be called the White Karen. There are variations of the term "Karenni." In the Karenni language, the Karenni people often use Kaya or Kayah to call themselves, their language, and their culture. White and red are used here to also differentiate the two distinct groups by color of their tribal clothing.

politically and economically, by resisting the imposition of government control over local laws, educational policies, and economic resources.

In spite of the Burmese military's limited access to these mountainous ethnic states, there have been many decades of civil war in the highland regions. In the aftermath of this ethnic cleansing campaign, thousands of the ethnic minorities, including the Karenni people, have fled to Thailand for a secure and safe haven. Humanitarian policies accompanied the temporary asylum provided by the 1969 protocol (*Human Right Watch*, 2004, p. 10) even though Thailand did not adhere to the 1951 Refugee Convention (Trichote, 2005; UNHCR, 2009). According to Trichote (2005), most of these refugees fled to Thailand because of push factors²: running away from fighting, fear of being killed, following their families, or searching for their relatives. They have been one of the most protracted groups in the world as the majority of Burmese refugees have lived in Thai refugee camps for more than 20 years (Brees, 2008; UNHCR, 2009).

As of January 2011, Thailand hosts some 92,000 registered refugees as well as an estimated 54,000 unregistered asylum-seekers from Burma in nine refugee camps (UNHCR-Thailand, 2012) that are physically located along the border between Thailand and Burma. Among the nine camps, the Karenni group is mainly sheltered in the refugee camp called Ban Mai Nai Soi because of its closest location to the Karenni State. The camp was first established in a different

² People's decision on migration is due to 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).

location in 1989 and moved to this location in 1996. It is now home to approximately 19,000 refugees (Thailand-Burma Border Consortium, 2012).

According to Thai immigration law, the refugees found outside the camps are often subject to arrest and deportation back to Burma (UNHCR-Thailand, 2012). The Thai Government refuses to legalize the refugees' access to reside and work outside the camps in order to avoid creating "a pull factor" (Rubenstein, 2005, p. 85). However, many Burmese people settle in Thailand to escape fear and human rights abuses in their country (Brees, 2008). According to Thai government, Thailand would like to maintain a relationship with Burma because they share natural resources from the Andaman Sea, but Thailand's support for the Burmese/Karenni refugees is viewed as a challenge to the Burmese military government. Since these refugees are not allowed to live outside the camps and they cannot return to Burma, their frustration is very high (UNHCR, 2009). Therefore, the 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 the camps was brought down by more than 10,800 people in 2010. Some 10,000 refugees per year were expected to depart in 2011 and 2012. Major resettlement countries that accept refugees from Thailand are Australia, Canada, and the U.S., followed by Finland, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, and Sweden.

Linguistically, the Karenni language is one of the minority languages while Burmese is the official and national language of Burma. The ethnic minority groups learn Burmese in school and from interethnic communication. In

addition, life in the camp influences the refugees' language competence, multilingualism, and learning opportunities, where they have the freedom to use, teach, and learn their native languages. After having stayed in the camps in Thailand for a number of years, school-age and adult refugees have taken Thai, Burmese (the official language of Burma), and English language courses in the camp's school (Ranard & Barron, 2007; UNHCR, 2009). Additionally, inter-ethnic communication commonly found in the camps gives them an opportunity to learn other ethnic languages. Children born and educated in the camps usually become bilingual in their native language and Burmese or Thai.

Karenni Refugees in the United States

As of January 2010, there were 275,461 refugees and 63,803 asylum seekers residing in the United States (UNHCR, 2010) and the number is rising. Since 2005, 55,000 ethnically diverse refugees from Burma have come directly from nine of Thailand's refugee camps (UNHCR, 2010) to resettle in a number of major U.S. cities (e.g., Fort Wayne, IN; Houston, TX; Phoenix, AZ; San Diego, CA). During my data collection, there were more than 100 Karenni families, among other groups such as the Karen, the Shan, and the Kachin, residing in Phoenix, Arizona, and this number continues to increase.

My research site, La Frontera Apartment Complex (pseudonym) in Phoenix, Arizona, was home to more than 20 Karenni families and other immigrant groups, originally from Burma, Thailand, and Mexico, among others. The complex is surrounded by a residential area and other apartments. An elementary school, where most of the K-8 refugee children from this complex

went, is located nearby (within walking distance). A grocery store, called Food City, is three blocks away from the complex.

La Frontera consists of ten 2-story apartment buildings. There are roofed parking lots in front of each building. The residents can walk throughout the complex using the sidewalk paved along the apartment building lines. There are two swimming pools. One pool is in the front of all the buildings where the property manager's office, laundry room, and mailroom are located. The other swimming pool is in the back corner of the complex near a sand playground, swings and slides. The empty space on the playground is about 10 ft. x 15 ft. Whenever I visited the site, this space was regularly used by children for playing soccer or flying kites.

Many Karenni refugees have told me that the way they live at La Frontera is uncannily similar to how they lived in the refugee camp, where adults and children comfortably and freely spend time with each other in the fenced area. One might turn on the radio very loud, while elsewhere a group of teenagers play instruments and sang, or a group of children play noisily but no one feels compelled to intervene. I learned that 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, lent and borrowed things, 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.

Review of Relevant Literatures and Empirical Studies

This section reviews influential studies in the field of educational anthropology, bilingualism and multilingualism, and transnational literacies that inform this study. I begin by reviewing representational studies in language socialization, especially those of multilingual families and communities, where language choice tends to shape and to be shaped by generational differences and strategic goals. Next, I present research studies that emphasize the social turn in literacy study—where home-based and community-based practices are viewed as intellectual and linguistic resources. Finally, I examine the ways that information and communication technologies (ICTs) have influenced the literacy practices of immigrants and refugees in recent years. Digital literacies are viewed throughout the literature reviewed here as resources for learning, for facilitating transnational connections among immigrants, and for creating educational and social opportunities.

Studies in Families' Language Socialization

Fishman (1991) emphasizes that it is within the family where a person's relationship "with language and language activities is fostered, shared, and fashioned" (p. 409). Families' language socialization has been studied in both monolingual and multilingual communities where the focus has been on the language and socio-cultural development of children across-cultures (e.g. Schieffelin & Ochs, 1986), language acquisition and literacy practices, and

language choice, maintenance, and shift among bi/multilinguals. Schecter and Bayley's (1997, 2002) longitudinal ethnographic study of bilingual family socialization involving Spanish-speaking Mexican-American families in California and Texas represents communication in the home that can foster Spanish maintenance, revival, and use. In each family, there was a school-aged child in grade 4, 5, or 6. The study examined language choice, talk, literacy events, and code switching. Home visits and observations, including interviews with parents and each child were conducted. Books establishing bilingualism and the children's writing samples in Spanish and in English were observed. The findings demonstrate that most families were committed to preserving Spanish but had differences in their strategies.

Language socialization scholarship has shown how parents influence their children's language development and the role of societal language ideologies (Heath, 1989; Ochs, 1988) on that influence. Nevertheless, much research shows that children are not always passive receptors in socialization. They can take on authority when adults in their lives need the children to use their language skills in order to manage a challenge or solve a problem. In the U.S. context, Orellana's (2009) *Translating Childhood* illuminates the perspectives of children who serve as family translators as a result of their skillful bilingual (Spanish and English) literacies and repertoires. Although these children were empowered as effective socio-cultural brokers in both their families and public spaces, they were also constrained by various social and economic factors in their surroundings. Parents played an important role in assigning the children's translation responsibilities in

the households, at the banks, hospitals, teacher-parent conferences, stores, and other public space, so that often a role reversal occurred. The responsibilities brought about these young bilinguals' linguistic and socio-cultural skills and their maturity reflected their "adultification" and "parentification" (p.10). In addition, while children are often expected "to loosen ties" (p. 113) with parents in North American mainstream culture and become independent, translating experiences and responsibilities teach these immigrant children the lessons of interdependence. As Orellana (2009) observes, the pride they gain from helping their families leads to their willingness to offer their skills in and beyond their own social networks.

The role of siblings and peers

According to Weisner (1989), "siblings always matter" (cited in Maynard & Tovote, 2010, p. 183) as they provide a context for interactions between children, especially in cultures where parents have a large number of offspring. Almost universally, children's interactions begin at birth when the older children care for the younger/infant. Several cross-cultural studies suggest that siblings are influential at giving verbal and nonverbal instructive help for both work and play purposes, such as guiding each other in doing everyday chores, playing sports, playing store, caring for baby dolls, socializing with each other, and teaching the young ones in a variety of contexts (Maynard & Tovote, 2010, p. 184).

De la Piedra & Romo's (2003) study of five siblings in a Mexican-American household focuses on the way in which older siblings can be mediators of literacy and help younger children partake in the literacy events. The older

siblings creatively adapted school literacy (vocabulary games, pedagogy) to play in the household. Other research shows that the practices are collective activities incorporated in the family's funds of knowledge (Veléz-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992) that are transmittable and exchangeable among family members. Likewise, young immigrant bilinguals in Orellana's (2009) study present the same tasks among siblings. She adds that their contacts in the household in a variety of activities allow shared knowledge, culture, and language to flow.

Observing young Mayan craft sellers in a small town of Mexico, Tovote (2006) found that siblings gradually learned from and with each other, and they became active members in large part because they knew and understood the role of ritual and teamwork in that particular community of practice. In the study, 4-year-old Maria held a bunch of handmade jewelry in her hand while observing and staying close to her older sisters Ana and Rosa, who walked, carried bigger hand-made items (scarves, belts), and initiated the talking to both domestic and foreign customers. The older sisters repeatedly shouted, "Cómprale! (Buy it!)" and often touched their potential buyers' arm to seek connections. During this time, Maria was at her sisters' side, stretching her little hand to show the handmade bracelets, making eye contact with the potential buyers, and gently inquiring about the price. Because she did not fully understand the meaning of what her sisters taught her to say (e.g. "5 for 20 pesos"), the older sisters assisted her in selling, counting money, and making change. According to Tovote (2006), the whole selling process (approaching, offering, negotiating, and calculating) that

repeated all day became Maria's accumulated skills while practicing and socializing with her sisters and the potential buyers.

Apart from siblings, the makeup of their peer group also influences the children's language and literacy practices. Because cultures often set boundaries where children are allowed to go (Maynard & Tovote, 2010), this often limits who they communicate with in a fixed setting (e.g., home, neighborhood, school). Studies of children and their learning (Barry et al, 1967; Best, 2004; Chick, 2010; Whiting & Edwards, 1988) show that children create their groups depending on divisions in gender, age, and activities. That is, grouping with same-age groups and mixed-age groups may differ from culture to culture and cross-gender activities are rare. Children as young as three years old are often found playing with children of their own sex (Barry et al, 1967; Maynard & Tovote, 2010). This fundamental background on children's learning and preferences is emphasized because the present study investigated the socialization among participant families that were made up by all age groups. Their networks and activities as a result of this kind of grouping are examined in this study.

Studies on language choice and linguistic strategies in multilingual communities

Language choice is often a focus in studies of multilingual families and communities. Li Wei (1994) studied the patterns of language choices among three generations (grandparent, parent, and children) of Chinese families living in the UK and found that in addition to age, a number of factors influenced language choice, including gender of both speaker and audience, employment, emigration

background, duration of residence in the country, language ability, and social networks. Wei also found that language choice also depended on life-cycle changes—and whether there were opportunities to use particular languages. The findings show that the grandparents in general remain Chinese monolingual because they spent most of the time in the Chinese community even after moving to a new country. Wei's (1994) study presents generational differences in language choice in families where members of multiple age groups participate in different kinds of activities and social networks both inside and outside the homes.

Cruickshank (2006) worked with bilingual Muslim families in New South Wales, Australia. He found that many children claimed (on school forms) that English was the language of communication in the home even when it was not. Many of them, especially girls, creatively used their own version of code-mixing (English and Arabic) at home. One of the girls always used Arabic with her mother because she believed that the mother would understand her better. In addition, Arabic was predominantly read and used in their religious practices as it was believed to be the language of Allah. Cruickshank's study shows a wide variation in the uses made of reading and writing between and among family members depending on their role in the family, interests, involvements, and their fluency in different spoken and written languages.

Dicker (2006) examined bilingual Dominican youth using English and Spanish in New York and found that they were strongly committed to using both languages but for different purposes and domains. Their successful bilingualism

was the motivation to keep connections in both home and host countries. Likewise, studying Japanese students in the U.S., Haneda & Monobe (2009) discovered that these students were competent English-Japanese bilinguals, who found time to use both languages. The findings show that they used the two languages for similar purposes (e.g., surfing the internet can be done in either Japanese or English) as well as for different purposes (e.g., doing homework for American school and Japanese school, or writing letters/e-mails to American friends and Japanese friends). These studies of literacy practices in multilingual communities show how contexts, ideologies of language, spoken and written language abilities, purposes, and person goals collectively influence what choices are made in particular moments.

Linguistic creativity in everyday contexts

According to Swann & Maybin (2007), linguistic creativity in everyday contexts is defined as “a property of all language use in that language users do not simply reproduce but recreate, refashion, and recontextualize linguistic and cultural resources in the act of communicating” (p. 492). As Pennycook (2007) suggests, we need to consider a way of conceptualizing language and creativity where intertextuality, flow, mimesis, performativity, and difference, not deficit perspective, are valued. This alternative model will contribute an optimistic way to view “language diversity and language learning” (Pennycook, 2007, p. 579) among the language-minority speakers, who are bilingual or multilingual. In this framework, multilingual individuals are seen as those who can produce varied forms (Pomerantz & Bell, 2007) of oral and written communications, based on

their multiple language modalities and properties. The forms are grounded in the actual linguistic and socio-cultural practices in which they engage and can be investigated through the patterns of everyday interaction.

The notion of linguistic creativity has been utilized to study bilingual children's playful use of combined elements of two languages. González (2001) illustrated the artful feature of language in the form of a song sung by her bilingual daughter in the 1990s to show the bilingual and life experiences combined in the child's world,

Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
You look like a chupacabras³
and you smell like one, too.

The song, even though sounds interesting to an outsider, may not be fully understood by non-Spanish speakers and those who have not grown up in the same speech community with the child. The notion of linguistic creativity captures the way that the user can blend words in his/her language repertoire to express and make sense of his/her world.

Studies in home-based and community-based literacies

Many literacy scholars have examined language learning and literacy practices in relation to educational access and opportunity in an effort to interrupt the assumption that the non-mainstream groups are illiterate, uneducated, and lack

³ The chupacabras, the goat bloodsucker that is said to leave a trail of carcasses in its wake, received a good deal of media coverage on Spanish-language television stations and was a popular image among children for a time (Gonzalez, 2001, *Notes*).

important and valuable resources. A new literacy studies view assumes that people have acquired language and literacy naturally before the formal requirements of education are created to marginalize literacy and illiteracy (Street, 1997). Documenting the literate lives at home in the low-income neighborhood, Taylor and Dorsey-Gaines (1988) visited and watched young children to elicit children's literacy practices and landscape. Their study supports the claim that writing and drawing are closely connected. During or after drawing, children often put names (their names or the names of the person they drew), dates, or words to describe their drawing (e.g., house, tree). The findings also demonstrate that family's poverty, difficulties, and "broken-home" (p.200) issues do not prevent these individuals from literacy acquisition and development. "No one can deny that these [homes] were literate homes" (p. 200). Cards, markers, newspaper, notebook paper, and pens around the house were used at their best while family members, friends, and neighbors were resources along the way of their learning.

Heath's (1982, 1983) ethnographic study of three communities in the U.S. Carolinas has drawn attention to the complicated relationship between orality and literacy, and the relationship between home/family-based language socialization processes and experiences of learning and schooling. Although the children of Trackton, Roadville, and the Maintown were prepared differently in making and negotiating meaning in social activities (e.g., gender-segregated playing, telling stories, talking about prints and written texts), all of them were richly socialized as talkers, readers, and writers. The daily practices in their homes and

communities were far more complex than what counted as academic success at school. In addition, Heath's analysis demonstrated that both teachers and students in her study brought their home habits with them to school (p.265-266). The findings of this study suggested that bridging home and school's languages and cultures for a better understanding and discovering similarities and differences between both sites should be employed rather than separating them.

Studies in the context of transnationalism, literacies, and digital world

Informed by the aforementioned empirical studies, the present study examines the multilingual abilities and transnational features of the Karenni refugee community. With a focus on the processes and practices that emerge out of transnational flows, I examine the "web of social relationships" (Haines, 1996, p. 32) that develop within the same ethnic group and extended family network and the ways that shared experiences might lead to the current shared information, goods, and services through these individuals and communities (Milardo, 1988). Strong ethnic ties and supports are believed to improve the socio-economic security of many groups (Kim & McKenry, 1998). Haines (1996) collected information about refugees living in the U.S. and emphasized that the refugees' desire to rebuild meanings of families and ethnic ties in the new land was influenced by their experiences of loss from persecution and flight. "Not only are families important and meaningful, but they are also capable of easing many of the problems of adjustment to the United States" (Haines, 1996, p. 45). In addition, ethnic communities also create jobs and improve relationships between

service providers and clients. For these reasons, many immigrants and refugees choose to remain in their community's ethnic enclave.

The findings of many studies on immigrant family and kinship (e.g. Kim & McKenry, 1998) have encouraged me to see families and kin networks as resources among the newly-arrived Karenni and how they navigate in the new land by using the accumulated support networks available to them. Calling her work immigration research, Hyndeman (1998) employed the discourse of transnationalism to investigate Burmese refugees' experiences in Vancouver. Her study demonstrates the influence of movement and transnational relationships on existing and emerging networks and communications. All of her fifty participants had transnational connections with family members and friends living in Australia, Burma, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, and the U.S. Mode of communications included fax, e-mail, phone call, and postal. She also found that these networks exert pressure on the Burmese military government and that such networks sometimes become a method of liberation among the refugees fleeing from oppression or persecution. In 1997, for instance, the voice of Burmese expatriates living overseas influenced the policies of the U.S. and Canadian governments and restricted trade with Burma because of the Burmese government's activities violating human rights.

Identity plays an important role in this transnational process. While refugees and immigrants hold a state-imposed identity, their self-perceived and context-based identities that are constructed by transnational experiences and the dilemma of maintaining the old values and adjusting to fit in the new environment

draw a great attention to anthropologists. In *Cultural Identity and Diaspora*, Hall (2003) proposes two ways to define cultural identity. The first position defines identity as “being,” a collective “one true self” (p. 234) that is unchangeable and shared by commonality among a people of the same history and ancestry. The second position of identity is the “becoming” identity, which is made within discourses of history, society, and culture. This identity is always in contextualized and positioned (p. 234). I understand that the latter stance of identity is akin to the notion of multiple identities and multiple literacies as studied by language and literacy scholars. That is, identities (like literacies) are not just plural, they are socially constructed and constructing, situated, and context-dependent (Gee, 1999, 2000; Zimmerman, 1998).

The studies above examine how language, literacies, and personal connections travel across contexts. Rubinstein-Ávila’s (2007) case study on a teenage Dominican immigrant indicates that her Dominican Republic affiliation influenced her choice of books and media (TV series) that come from or speak about the Dominican Republic, her homeland. The study suggests that immigrants’ linguistic and cultural roots are often commonly found in the receiving nation. While working with the recently-arrived Karenni families that have brought with them their interests and favorite hobbies from their homeland, it became crucial for me to investigate how they daily incorporate activities, routines, and institutions located in and related to both the receiving country and home country (Levitt & Shiller, 2004).

According to Cruickshank (2006), although literacy is an integral part of the transnational experience, it has been changed a great deal in recent years because of the influence of media technology. He recommends that literacy research should include both traditional and digital modes as they are always found together. While examining notes and messages written by parents to children, notes on the fridge door, box of business cards, letters from school, and coupons, he found that digital literacy was common and multifaceted in these families. Every Arabic-speaking household that he worked with owned a mobile telephone, which was often found in the living room. All the parents in this study reported that mobile telephones were the best way to keep in contact with friends and relatives both living nearby and overseas. Many parents used mobile telephones to keep in touch with their children when the children were outside the house. The younger generation, on the other hand, used computers more than the older generation. Their activities on the computer included visiting chat rooms, surfing the internet, and playing games. Cruickshank's (2006) study of technology use and change implies a need to attend to both traditional (paper and pencil) and new modes of communication in the immigrants' households and how the two modes shape or alter their lifestyles, language use, and literacy strategies.

Other literacy scholars have also found that immigrants' literacy practices in their homeland can be either maintained or modified in the receiving country depending on available resources. Rosolová (2007), for instance, explored the ways two Cuban immigrants in the U.S. utilized their new and available electronic devices to continue engaging in activities that they used to do in their homeland.

For instance, if the participants had been fond of watching TV and listening to the radio in Cuba, they found a way to continue doing so after relocating in the U.S. Even though their personal interests and routines remained largely the same after they moved, the participants became familiar with VCRs, American TV channels, music CDs, and American books and magazines that fulfilled their interest. This case study shows that while some literacy practices are maintained, others are new or transformed as a result of moving from one linguistic and cultural environment to another.

In addition to bringing with them familiar literacy practices from their homeland, new information and communication technologies are also utilized by immigrants and refugees as sources for learning and social networking within and across borders. In the remainder of this section, I discuss three areas of inquiry in digital literacies scholarship that inform the present study: online social networking, texting, and video game playing.

Online social networking

Case studies of digital literacies are growing rapidly in large part because of the accelerated use of computers and internet (Duff, 2008, p. 91) among immigrants for communicating, networking, and maintaining connections within and across borders (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2003; Leander & Lewis, 2008). As Bartlett et al (2011) indicate, the movements and flows of people, ideas, and goods are not new but the role of technology in that movement is distinct and noteworthy. Prensky (2001) points out that nowadays youth are *digital natives* who are native speakers of digital language of Internet, videogames, and

computer. He uses the term digital natives to explain that the younger generation, or generation X, grows up with technology. They comfortably use digital device to connect with friends and to perform research while feeling at home. Adults and teachers, on the other hand, are digital immigrants, who were born before the high rise of technology. The digital immigrants may become digital avoiders, reluctant adopters, or enthusiastic adopters (Zur & Zur, 2011).

While many internet users are online only for seeking information (Cruikshank, 2004; Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009), for example, to read news and to read content on *Wikipedia*, many others create personal learning networks through making new friends and having conversations with them on social media websites (Pegrum, 2010). Much of teenagers' literacy on the social media website is strongly established as the teens share similar hobbies and interests such as the type of entertainment, sports, and fashion (Cruikshank, 2004). Alternatively, many migrant teenagers seek friends who share the similar linguistic and cultural background online to create their transnational networks.

Lam (2009a) investigated how Chinese teenagers living in the United States used online social media, games, and instant messaging to connect with those who shared the same experiences of being multilingual but living in the English-dominant society (p. 385). Lam found that most online friends of Kaiyee, her female participant, were from China and Asian countries. The online practices with these friends allowed her to express her linguistic and cultural affiliations while maintaining strong ties to her country of national origin. Lam (2004) also examined a bilingual Cantonese-English chat room and investigated language

socialization among immigrant youth. Two girls in the study felt out of place among their English speaking peers in the United States and sought comfort online. They found a Hong Kong chat room where the majority of the users were English and Cantonese bilinguals, who were also immigrants living in other places. In the virtual world, the two girls gained confidence in using the mixture of two languages freely with creative emoticons and Romanized Cantonese. The experiences allowed them to express their language abilities and hybrid identities comfortably with the other immigrants. Both studies imply that the new genre of communication—web-based social media-- constitutes a field of literacy practices that both facilitates and maintains transnational connections (and that contributes to the formation of transnational social identities).

North (2007) also studied language creativity among young internet users in chat rooms and online discussion boards. She found that these users created and used emoticons to express feelings with words typed. Nicknames (e.g. Boxer, Castaway) were used to construct the users' identities, and unique spellings of commonly-used words helped users capture particular accents, pronunciations, and language varieties (e.g. "darlin", "Ooooh"). The discussion had both humorous and serious values (depending on the topic), and the type of word and spelling plays appeared throughout the conversation. North's research demonstrates that multilingual immigrant users had acquired enough communicative competence and cohesion to interact in the virtual groups even when the outsiders did not consider the language structures used to be well-formed. Her findings show the co-constructed nature of online participation and

the ways that social relations are created and maintained in and through language creativity. They also show that the complexities of language use are “under control, conforming to the norms, values, and expectations of the group” (p. 553) although they seem disorderly or chaotic to the outsiders.

Similarly, Yi (2009) observed Korean-American adolescents creating their transnational identity by using instant messaging online with their transnational peers. The virtual space allowed these youth to express, exchange, and share their native languages and transnational experiences in ways that outsiders of the immigrant communities rarely understand. Both Lam’s and Yi’s studies shed light on the innovative ways that recent immigrants use technology to create linkages with other immigrants, both locally and globally through multiple social languages, print-based English, and other available semiotic system.

Black’s (2009) work also illustrates the ways that immigrants use technology in new and purposeful ways to accomplish strategic ends. In her study, three Asian youth, who were also English language learners, not only constructed their virtual communities, but made use of their creativity and imagination to write fiction. The language of the fiction was influenced by their first language, code-mixing and other translanguaging practices but the final product was recognizable because it resembled familiar creative writing genres. Drawing on the notion of “network society” (Castells, 2010), Black’s work shows how local practices might be used in creative ways to challenge traditional modes of communication and language forms. While seeking the way to express their transnational identities, these immigrant youth developed their skills to use other

representational resources, popular culture, and their own imagination to reflect various dimensions of immigrant youth's literate life and social development.

Texting on mobile phone

In addition to online networking, texting via mobile phones has flourished in the 21st century as a new way of communication (Crystal, 2008). As mobile phones have been recently and increasingly accessible to social actors of all age groups, texting has influenced the way in which new and distinct linguistic forms are created to maintain relationship among texters and to express ideas, emotions, and membership. While many sociolinguists see the practices as innovations, the language use in texting (also known as textese or textism) among school-age children concerns educators, teachers, and purist linguists because of its non-standard characteristics—full of distinct graphics, acronyms and abbreviations (Plester *et al*, 2008), and misspellings.

According to Crystal (2006), people use texting for several reasons. First, similar to other communicative modes, texting maintains social relationship among people. In addition to daily usage, texting is greatly utilized for sending support, sympathy, and greetings on special occasions such as birthdays and holidays. Among youth, texting is often employed to overcome spatial boundaries because this practice is not controlled by parents or classroom teachers (Crystal, 2008, p. 174). Many youth use texting to communicate with friends and the outside world and to avoid waiting for the time they can meet face-to-face or call each other. In addition, texting is utilized as a pastime (p. 175), a mode to request for a call, a way to express desire to be friends, and a substitution for saying 'I

miss you' (p. 105). Also, according to Crystal (2006) texting is used among people sharing the same codes to emphasize their existence and belonging to the same group (p. 56). In this case, as Plester et al (2008) state, text messages present regional dialects, accents, and distinct forms of phoneme-grapheme conversion used among group members, who share similar linguistic and cultural background. Finally, texting has information functions. It helps people plan their lives (e.g. flight delay alert, meeting time update) and access information (e.g. news, emergency alert, neighborhood watch).

In response to negative accounts of texting [e.g., as “bleak, bald, sad shorthand” (Sutherland, 2002), “slanguage,” or a “digital virus” (Crystal, 2006, p.13)], recent research shows that texting does not cause harmful outcomes in children’s reading and writing. In fact, many literacy scholars agree that texting can promote literacy development (Bell, 2003; Crystal, 2006, 2008, 2009; Helderman, 2003) because it helps “get children writing” (Plester et al, 2008, p. 138). Although it is evident that texting features deviant spellings, the spellings created by texters, as scholars argue, demonstrate phonological awareness. That is, instead of using standard abbreviations in a given language, texters create their messages, which also have variations, based on the oral pronunciation and the full form of words. These abbreviations present texters’ knowledge of the relationship between phonology and written languages. Textese in English commonly shows such relationship. For example, night may be modified to “nght, nyt, ny, or nit” (Plester *et al*, 2008, p. 138), you to “u”, and speak to “spk” (Crystal, 2008). In addition, in Plester et al’s (2008) study, where texters were given a variety of

writing tasks, there was evidence that texters presented their metalinguistic awareness. They could also switch back and forth between texting and another language variety to fit its register and appropriateness (p. 143).

Video games, literacy, and learning

Within the field of digital literacies, a large and growing amount of research focuses on video gaming as a resource for learning and literacy development (Aldrich, 2003; Gee 2003, Johnson, 2005; Prensky, 2001, 2006; Van Eck, 2006). According to Gee (2003), playing a *good* video game, which is usually long, complex, and difficult, fosters learning in many ways. First, a video gamer has to participate actively, not passively, to play a multi-layered game design. This contributes the gamer's hands-on activity. Second, each game requires the gamer's critical thinking to overcome a challenge to win the game. This characteristic enhances gamers' cognitive growth. Finally, through playing a video game and being involved in the virtual world, the gamer is engaged in the interrelation of multiple sign systems (i.e. multimodal texts) such as images, words, actions, and symbols (p. 49). These multimodal texts have meanings that are specific to particular semiotic domains (p. 24). According to Gee (2003), these texts foster meaning-making and metalevel thinking (p. 50) in ways that are similar to what is required in content-area classrooms. That is, the two situations, playing a video game and taking science class, for example, need learner's real inquiry and "willing to take on an identity as a thinker, problem solver, and doer" (p. 51). In addition, the techniques that many good video games employ to promote gamers' engagement and learning are the combination of overt

information (e.g., a voice command) and designed situation that only tells the story bit by bit depending on the player's choice of action (p. 113-114). The combination provides learners just enough information and allows learners to explore more. Through playing and exploring, learners participate in an adventure where they can experience the results (e.g., winning, losing, scoring, facing a challenge after a challenge) of their hands-on experiment.

Research shows that playing video games often enhances the video gamers' hand-eye coordination and manual dexterity (Griffith et al, 1983; Rosser *et al*, 2007). According to Gee (2003), the actions the game player carries out in the virtual world require skills in using keys on the computer keyboard (when playing by using a computer) or buttons on a video game controller (when playing by using a video game console). The player learns how to use each key and its functions by 1) reading manual 2) guessing from playing other games similar to the current one and 3) pressing all the keys until he gets the right result and thereby find the right key. Because most children learn to use the buttons and navigate the game by employing the third strategy, they learn to sort and solve problems using hand-eye coordination and cognitive skills simultaneously.

Scholars in the field of video gaming and learning (e.g., Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010; Oliver & Carr, 2009; Steinkuehler, 2007a, 2007b) also investigate how multi-player games can contribute to communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999). In their study, Martin & Steinkuehler (2010) found that online game played by multiple players created their gamer community. Through social interaction, they simultaneously seek, disseminate,

refer, and exchange information. They argue that the gamers' practices do not only help each other to navigate in games, but also pave their way to "cultural capital" (p. 363). This is because members in the community develop values and competencies while investing these shared cultural objects, or artifacts (p. 363, see also Malaby, 2006, p. 146). Martin and Steinkuehler (2010) also point out that this gamer community presents an active, fluid, and non-linear "collective information literacy" (p. 364) out of school.

Summary

The present study is informed by a number of empirical studies but it is distinct for several reasons. First, this research focuses on the 'new' immigrant group, the Karenni group from Burma, which is unusual to the United States and the western hemisphere. Second, unlike other transnational literacy studies that predominantly investigated only one aspect of literacies such as digital literacies, or only among a certain age group, the present study explores both oral interaction and literacy practices among participants of all age groups in the participant families.

With the belief that the multilingual immigrants' 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 in to account as a result of globalization and its counterparts—movement and accelerated information technology. All of these language and literacy practices are culminated in what I call accumulated literacies. Finally, the present study captures language learning

experiences during the first years of the refugee participants' resettlement that, to a great extent, present a mixture of fluctuating, contesting, and contradictory ideologies of language. The dynamic and conflicting ideologies of language are carried out through the participants' language socialization and multilingual strategies in the particular circumstances as a result of movement across national and linguistic borders. This is because their previously acquired languages and literacy practices in the sending country and the language dominant in the receiving country hold and are held by different values. All in all, the present study values the participants' existing and emerging multilingual repertoires and literacies as resources to navigate in the new context and to create new understandings in order for educational access and socio-economic opportunities.

Organization and Overview

To structure this study, I draw from Rossman & Rallis' (2003) discussion of the three components of qualitative research: previous research, experience in practice, and theoretical frameworks. In this chapter, I have provided an overview of key contributions from *previous research* or relevant literatures that inform the questions that motivate this study. I have also described what personal and professional *experiences* have influenced my decision to pursue this project. In Chapter 2, I discuss the *theoretical frameworks* that I use to analyze the complicated issues of language learning and literacy practices among the recently-arrived refugee families: language socialization, ideologies of language, multilingualism as social capital, translanguaging, and literacy as a social practice.

In Chapter 3, I describe processes involved in selecting the research site, how I have approached the research participants, and how relationships between the participants and me were established and maintained. I also discuss my research commitment, followed by the research design of the present study. Next, the challenges I encountered and the limitations of the study are described. Finally, I explain the strategies I used to code and analyze the data. In Chapter 4, I introduce the sixteen refugees from three families who participated in the study. I provide their biographical information, including their circumstances during the data collection period.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 are data analysis chapters. In Chapter 5, I explain how ideologies of English are evident in the way my participants “talk” about English, in the way in which they “deal” with situations that requires English proficiency, and how they use English. The data analysis shows that children and adults *do things* with English differently due to the perceived hierarchy of Englishes and English literacies (e.g. oral vs. written, home vs. school). Such perceptions are shaped by a number of different ideological factors in the receiving context. As a result, the children, who had formal schooling in the United States, became a mediator of *good* English in the Karenni households while the Karenni parents viewed themselves as having problems because of their lack of English proficiency.

In Chapter 6, I focus on the participants’ multilingual repertoires and how they utilize both previously and recently acquired languages in a variety of ways and contexts. The data analysis demonstrates how language socialization among

the multilingual participants was shaped by their linguistic repertoires, strategic goals, and construction of identity. While English is valued among the Karenni participants, the data analysis demonstrates that multilingualism in the Karenni community challenges the English-only ideology of the receiving context.

In Chapter 7, I identify and examine emerging and evolving literacy practices among the participants of all age groups in the receiving nation, with a focus on the emergence and use of different digital and multimodal literacy practices. The Karenni adults used a cell phone daily to communicate with friends and families living in the United States and elsewhere. The young children, on the other hand, were so attracted to playing video games that they had established a gamer community in their neighborhood, while the teenagers were engaged in social media and texting. The data analysis presents the participants' digital literacies to create new learning, understanding, and transnational connections.

Finally, in Chapter 8, I review key findings and discuss how those findings inform each other. I also consider the potential contributions of this work for research in education, applied linguistics, and literacy studies. I reflect on the study's theoretical, methodological, and pedagogical implications. I also present the questions that remain unanswered and propose directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In this chapter, I describe the theoretical lenses that guided this ethnographic study. I draw on five interrelated theoretical frameworks to approach and explore the influence of transnational movement (as discussed in Chapter 1) on the recently-arrived Karenni participants' language learning experiences and literacy practices, with a particular focus on their thoughts, beliefs and perspectives on those experiences and practices. The frameworks include language socialization, language ideologies, multilingualism as social capital, translanguaging, and literacy as a social practice. Collectively, the five frameworks are driven by sociocultural theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978, Wenger, 1999), or the notion that our knowledge and perceptions are constructed by social interaction and sociocultural norms generated in a given community.

Language Socialization

The first theoretical framework grows out of studies in language socialization, or the study of language acquisition and the development of socio-cultural and communicative competence (Goodwin, 1990; Ochs & Schieffelin, 1995; Schieffelin, 1990). Many language socialization studies have focused on how children learn to become fully competent members (Cook-Gumperz, 1987; Schiffelin & 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, Bock, & Gaskins, 2010). In such processes of socialization,

members 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) from community to community.

Language socialization research has been used to examine all age groups in various speech and literacy events (Bayley & Schecter, 2003) and assumes that socialization occurs in all contexts throughout our lifespan (Bourdieu, 1977; Giddens, 1979). This work has documented cross-cultural patterns of caretaker-children interactions (Mead, 1928; Schieffelin, 1990); differences across cultural contexts that influence the way people “learn” (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 2003; Vygotsky, 1978; Wenger, 1999); the range of linguistic codes available to immigrants in multilingual settings (Baquedano-López, & Kattan, 2007; Bayley & Schecter, 2003; Weldeyesus, 2009); and how these individuals learn to choose among these resources to achieve certain strategic goals (e.g., Lamarre, 2003; Pease-Avarez, 2003; Schecter & Bayley, 2002; Wei, 1994). Several recent studies of language socialization have added another dimension to language socialization research and show that it is not a one-way receptive process. In fact, it is a dynamic exchange of knowledge in which learners of all ages, including young children (Sterponi, 2010) are an object *and* an agent of socialization simultaneously (e.g., de la Piedra & Romo, 2003; Luykx, 2003; Orellana, 2009; Paugh, 2005; Pontecorvo et al, 2001; Watson-Grego, 2001). In addition, a number of language socialization studies suggest that language competencies, choices, and attitudes transform over time. Building on and extending the contributions of such scholarship, I explore the situated practices of Karenni families that include

both children and adults, with a focus on processes of cross-generation language socialization and how they are shaped by discursive and material influences alike.

Ideologies of Language

The second framework I draw on is ideologies of language. According to Woolard (1998), ideologies of language are not only the values and beliefs attached to languages, but they also involve the situated ways that languages (and their speakers) are positioned in and through talk. Language ideologies, thus, serve as a bridge between language and society (p. 27) and are useful for understanding the ingredients and factors that generate those values. 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 & Pennycook, 2007; Woolard, 1998) that are shaped by societal-level institutions, such as the legal system, the education system, and the social welfare system (Norton, 2000; Ricento, 2005). During my data collection process in a multilingual refugee community, I was able to observe beliefs about language by examining participants' talk, their "talk about talk," and their practices. By analyzing data from observations, interviews, and artifacts, the current study investigates the beliefs on language among Karenni refugees living in the United States and sheds light on the experiences of an increasing number of immigrants and refugees around the globe.

Language is one of the key tools that a more-privileged and dominant social group uses to seek a way to control others (Fairclough, 1989; Tollefson, 1991). As Fairclough (1989) emphasizes, the ideological aspects of language have

an impact on language teaching and learning. Therefore, the dominant groups exercise their power through either coercion, forcing others to follow them, or consent, convincing others, especially the subordinates (Herman & Chomsky, 1988) that it is the best thing to do so. Foucault (1991) points out that language practices in a higher institutional level generate the norm of how a language is used and establish language hierarchies (García, 2009) in which some languages or forms of use, such as standardized language used in school and by news reporters, among others, are more valued than others.

In the United States, where English is spoken by a majority of the population, English is used as a medium language of instruction in schools as well as a language of wider communication (e.g., in official contexts and institutional encounters). Although English is not an official language of the nation, it is believed to be the language of opportunity (Tollefson, 1991; Pennycook, 1995). At the same time, it also serves a number of gate-keeping functions. The contradiction is constructed by complex sociolinguistic and socio-political factors. That is, English is spoken among the majority group in the United States—the Anglos (Sonntag, 1995), who have been perceived as idealized America (Ricento, 2005) and mainly hold the position in the “mainstream-oriented American middle class life” (Fishman, 1989, p. 647). This construct shapes the way in which the English language is used and valued by this mainstream group. Therefore, acquiring English is valued yet creates socio-economic inequalities in a multilingual society, where speakers of other languages and non-standard

varieties of English are marginalized (Labov, 2001; Lippi-Green, 1997, 2011; Preston, 1996; Ricento, 1996).

In addition, it is widely believed that those who have and perform an adequate competence in the language variation that is accepted as standard, especially its written form, have a higher chance to be successful academically and socio-economically. Though many persist to use their own regional English variety or their native language other than standard English to notify their social and ethnic identity, inevitably, teachers and learners are fond of a particular variety of English (Lippi-Green, 2011) because of “the social capital, economic capital, and cultural capital” (Bourdieu, 1986) believed to be delivered to the learners. Consequently, newly-arrived immigrants often study and learn English with a desire for recognition, affiliation, security and safety (West, 1992), as well as a desire to own the identities they yearn for—the identity that indicates what they can do (Norton, 1995, 2000; West, 1992) in the English-dominant society.

Working with multilingual participants who are also learning English, I explore how linguistic hierarchies are constructed in and through participants’ locally situated language and literacy practices, and how those practices might be influenced by the relative dominance of English. That is, I am interested in the relationship between the status of English (and its speakers) relative to other languages (and their speakers) (Phillipson, 1992). Woolard (1989) points out that:

Authority is established and inculcated most thoroughly not in schools and formal institutions, but in personal relations, face-to-face encounters, and

the invidious distinctions of the workplace and residential neighborhood (p. 121).

In this study, I pay attention to the participants' perspectives on their acquired *multiple* languages and their actual interactions and face-to-face encounters to elicit and 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 and how they talked about languages.

In addition to addressing beliefs about language and factors that reinforce the beliefs, the present study also explores how various artifacts are produced and used by participants. For example in the American society, using English, especially for 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) means that English knowledge and understanding among the residents is required. This reinforces the need for English among speakers of other languages in the country while emphasizing the ideologies of English. The present study examines artifacts as evidence of ideologies of language. In the households, observable artifacts include but not limited to books and documents that the participants read and use, texts on display such as calendars, notes, and posters, and texts written by the participants either on paper or on electronic gadgets.

It is also crucial to understand that in a multilingual community, like the Karenni refugee community in Phoenix, language ideologies are often 'contested'

(Blackledge, 2009) or contradictory. This is because of their reoccurring movements across several national spaces where values on languages are “invented” (Makoni & Pennycook, 2007) differently from space to space. Settling in an English-speaking nation, for example, it is strongly believed that “the only route to succeed” (Blackledge, 2009, p. 84) is to acquire English as quickly as possible and leave one’s native language behind. This, to some extent, may oppose the immigrants’ own intention to maintain their language of the home. I identify and analyze such contested or contradictory language ideologies and assume that language ideologies vary over time at the individual level, in the local community, and across contexts (Blommaert, 1999, p. 11). While I highlight the flows of those language practices and changes in practices, it is vital to understand individuals’ own point of view on their activities along with their socio-historical factors and experiences (Wortham, 2001). As Wortham (2005) points out, individuals’ thoughts and practices are collectively and gradually produced, I examine those thoughts and practices regarding their specific sociohistorical context (p.6) and “history in person” (Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991) that can be carried out through discussion about their lived experiences and household observations.

Multilingualism as Social Capital

In addition to observing language ideologies in action, I draw on two frameworks that explicitly value the multilingualism of immigrants and refugees as important *resources* (Blommaert, 2010). The first approach highlights linguistic resources, including linguistic funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 1992;

Veléz-Ibáñez & Greenberg, 1992), of the individual and the individual's immediate community and institution level such as family, kin, and ethnic-based community. These funds of knowledge are used to build and maintain social networks within the receiving context and to sustain connections (with people, institutions, ideas, events) across national boundaries.

While Moje (2008) and Moll & González (1994) have used the funds of knowledge framework to study linguistically and culturally diverse households where plentiful social and intellectual resources are contained and can be bridged to school discourses, others have used it to disrupt the misconception that minority groups are deficient (e.g. Cuero, 2010, González & Moll, 2002; Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). Weinstein-Shr (1993), for instance, analyzed the linguistic modifications made by two Hmong men to fulfill their clan-related responsibilities in the U.S. One acquired English literacy to help his kin navigate in the new environment, while the other one utilized his traditional Hmong philosophy to advise his kin. In the present study, calling the existing and emerging knowledge, activities, and skills that multilingual immigrants use their *accumulated literacies*, I investigated which refugee participants' literacies were used for what purposes across a range of contexts and situations, especially in their households and neighborhood. My goal was to identify what kind of linguistic funds of knowledge the participants have already had, how they used those resources, and what happened as a result.

According to Dagenais (2003), it is useful to consider such linguistic resources to be a form of "multilingual capital" (p. 269; see also Bourdieu, 1977)

that might be used to connect to the past while pursuing goals in the present or the future. Having acquired language and literacy knowledge and expanded their multilingual repertoires, recent migrants draw on what they know to create social networks and “read” current ideological discourses in the host country. Simultaneously, with the multilingual repertoires, the immigrants can secure their socio-economic opportunities in different communities and locations.

Looking at multilingual repertoires through the lens of social practice, Canagarajah (2009) describes how speakers develop “plurilingual competence,” intuitively and through social practice more than through schools or formal means (p. 6). With this kind of competence, equal or advanced proficiency is not expected in all the languages (Kramsch, 2009) and there are some languages the multilingual individuals used to know but have forgotten (p. 17). In this study, I use the term *multilingual repertoires* to capture the multilingual practices and strategies of the participants outside the academically institutional settings. In this framework, language choices 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 (Schechter & Bayley; 2003, p. 6).

The second view of multilingualism as resources draws on the flows of languages at a larger community level (e.g. inter-ethnic community) and international level. Blommaert (2010) approaches multilingual repertoires from the perspective of migration and globalization that co-occurs 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 English has been prominent and widely used as a lingua franca among people from linguistically different background (Crystal, 2003; Gladdol 1999), Blommaert (2010) points out that immigrant neighborhoods usually represent complex multilingual sites where multiple lingua francas are mingled (p.7). Often, as Blommaert mentions, the immigrants in these neighborhoods tend to competently create multiple sociocultural organizations and communities where they are allowed to follow news, consume media, and cultural products related to their roots. And, their multilingual repertoires and literacy are developed, yet differently from person to person depending on the level of literacy at the time of migration (p.9). It is also important to note that to the outsiders, some new, small, and minority languages in migrant communities remain mostly invisible in the public space while the older immigrant communities have settled publicly and the literate aspects of their languages have been recognized (e.g. through print materials, newspapers, signs).

Here, I have presented two views of multilingual repertoire: 1) multilingual repertoire as constructed within a person and 2) multilingual repertoire as constructed in a community made up of linguistically diverse residents. Each of these notions of multilingual repertoires is useful for investigating the flow of people, languages, and practices across borders, communities, and contexts. Each of these constructs helps me identify language profiles in a community and theorize the consequences of globalization and the

flows of people that shape the way of how languages are used and viewed. Combined with the notion of language ideologies described earlier (as beliefs and practices), an understanding of multilingualism as social capital provides a framework for analyzing the specific ways that languages become resources in local contexts.

Translanguaging

Another concept that informs and influences my efforts to document the Karenni's multilingual repertoires is what García (2008) calls *translanguaging*. She defines translanguaging as the bilinguals' expansive practices that go beyond code-switching strategies. The view is based on the positive and holistic view of bilingualism (Cook, 1991; Grosjean, 1985, 1989) as opposed to the fractional view—a bilingual is the sum of two monolinguals or two separated language systems in one mind. In fact, a bilingual does not acquire two discrete systems, but evolving linguistic features drawn upon two systems. The features include grammatical structures (morphology, phonology, syntax) as well as the socio-cultural norms and conventions around how and when to combine them. That is, bilingual individuals have developed collective translanguaging to use in a specific circumstance. As García (2008) concludes, the two languages are context-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 socio-cultural resources (Gort & Bauer, 2012). All of these factors enhance sense-making process (Gutiérrez *et al*, 2001) of their bilingual

worlds. 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).

Literacy as a Social Practice

The fifth theoretical framework I draw on conceptualizes literacy as a social-historical-cultural practice and emphasizes the social nature of literacy, the social contexts of literacy events and practices, and the socially constructed aspects of learning (Barton & Hamilton, 2000; Barton & Ivanič, 1991; Baynham, 1995; Cherland & Harper, 2007; Gee, 2000; New London Group, 1996; Pahl & Rowsell, 2006; Street, 1984, 1993). This view focuses on meaning-making process and acquiring the meaning of texts through everyday living and social interaction. With the belief that literacy practices are ideologically context-specific, this view assumes that there is no uni-directional form of literacy that is the same everywhere (Street, 1995, 1997). In fact, because literacies are understood to be plural (New London Group; 1996), the term “multiliteracies” has often been used to describe “the literate abilities to navigate and negotiate across diverse social practices and text forms” (Lam, 2009a, p. 378). In this framework, literacies are understood as practices that are influenced by a complex array of socio-cultural norms, people’s interactions and purposes, in dynamic and changing societal contexts.

In this study, I rely on this view of literacy as multiple, social, context-bound, and dynamic rather than the autonomous model of literacy (Street, 1984),

which conceives of literacy as an individual, cognitive skill. The autonomous model, which is derived from the great divide approach (Goody, 1977) to literacy, values only a limited range of reading and writing practices in alphabetical and institutional texts. The view of literacies taken in the present study—which has been greatly influenced by the “social turn” in the social sciences—considers all types of reading and writing to be valuable skills as well as important manifestations of human’s learning (Kress & Jewitt, 2003; Mazak, 2007; Prinsloo & Breier, 1996). More importantly, an individual has to experience and understand the culture, values, beliefs, and “ways of being” (Gee, 1996) in his world when participating in his community before he can fully understand the meaning of a written word. To identify and analyze the wide range of literacy practices that were utilized by three Karenni families, all forms of literacy are viewed as situated social practices that influence (and are influenced by) one’s lived experiences, strategic goals, and imagined futures (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

Representing anthropological and sociocultural perspectives, David Barton and Mary Hamilton (2000, 2012) have theorized ‘literacy as social practice’ and its six propositions to cover the aforementioned characteristics. They are 1) literacy is best understood as a set of social practices 2) there are different literacies associated with different domains of life 3) literacy practices are patterned by social institutions and power relationships, and some literacies are more dominant, visible, and influential than others 4) literacy practices are embedded in broader social goals and cultural practices 5) literacy is historically

situated and 6) literacy practices change and new ones are frequently acquired through processes of informal learning and sense making (p. 8).

I draw on the concept of literacy as social practice as described here to identify and examine literacy practices that three Karenni families develop and use to access particular communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991), make meaning (Vygotsky, 1978), establish connections, acquire information and resources, and learn by doing (Dewey, 1897). As part of this endeavor, I investigate diverse representations of symbolic system in multimodal literacies (Kress & Lewitt, 2003; Pahl, 2003)—speech, writing, image, gestures, signs, sound, “oral performance, artistic, linguistic, digital, electronic, graphic, and artifact-related” (Pahl & Rowsell, 2006, p. 6). As with recent studies of transnational literacies that celebrate the technology advancement and digital literacies as social practices (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 in a variety of modalities. This approach allowed me to identify what literacy practices the refugee participants have acquired, adapted, and developed in the new contexts, what resources were used in doing so, and how individuals and communities used literacy practices to maintain and transform transnational social relations (Warriner, 2009).

As discussed in the section on Multilingualism as Social Capital, language and literacy practices among immigrants are influenced by the literacy competencies present at the time of movement. According to Gort & Bauer (2012), the primary language plays an important role in meaning-making and

representation (Soltero-Gonzalez & Reyes, 2012, p. 39). Furthermore, one's primary language should be taken into account when examining the process of language acquisition and when exploring the sociocultural factors that shape experiences of multilingualism, multilingual literacies, and multilingual practices.

I am also interested in exploring how multilingual literacies contribute to generational differences. Because young children are different in literacy and biliteracy development from teens and adults and because they may not have developed conventional (i.e. adult-like) writing and reading competencies (Gort & Bauer, 2012, p. 2), it is important to consider varied levels of literacy and proficiency in various languages among children, teenagers, and adults. Keeping in mind that multilingual young children's literacies are "socially" constructed, this study examines how such practices are facilitated and/or supported by a variety of cultural and linguistic experiences with parents, teachers, siblings, peers, home, and school (p. 5). Second, as young children have limited writing and reading competencies, they become bilingual and biliterate by drawing heavily on the distribution of various modes (Bauer & Mkhize, 2012, p. 29; Kenner, 2003). They explore multimodal ways to learn, to "play" (Bauer & Mkhize, 2012, p. 29), and to create communicative strategies. While language and literacy practices can be observed through oral and written texts (e.g. in writing, completing forms), it is important to note that the use of multimodality and play need to be examined when investigating the emerging literacies of the participants, especially the young children.

Summary

The theoretical frameworks that I draw on to approach this study include language socialization, ideologies of language, multilingualism as social capital, translanguaging, and literacy as social practice. While I am guided by traditional notions of language socialization (which focus on how young children learn to be members in their speech community), I also consider language socialization to be a life-long process. That means I also examine processes of language socialization in the domain of the home, among adults, and between adults and children. In addition, because information technology and electronic device has become a major tool in communication, I have included a focus on digital literacy socialization in my study of Karenni refugees and their literacy practices. While documenting and identifying the participants' multilingual strategies, language choices, and literacy practices in their daily life, I investigated how multimodality functioned or was utilized.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter, I describe the research design and methodology of the present study. The background provided in this chapter reveals how my research questions were generated during interactions with a few Karenni families, originally from Burma, living in Phoenix. I describe my experiences with selecting the research site, how I approached the research participants, the processes of data collection and data analysis, the challenges I encountered during data collection and data analysis, and the strategies I used to overcome the challenges. Finally, I describe the limitations of the study.

First Encounters

As discussed in Chapter 1, the central questions that motivate this study grew out of my experiences and interactions with three Karenni refugee families living in Phoenix Arizona since 2009. In this section, I elaborate more on how my first interactions with the families influenced and established my research methods and my researcher role. I initially became involved with volunteer work as an ESL instructor and family mentor, recruited by a Phoenix-based refugee resettlement organization, because of my interest in language learning and teaching combined with my awareness of the current events (e.g. disasters, famine, wars) and an increasing number of refugees in the United States (and worldwide). I was driven by the refugee experiences when I researched more about them from news, books, and articles on refugee studies.

Before embarking on this research study, I knew that refugees from Burma spoke a variety of tribal languages that included Burmese and Thai. I also knew that these Burmese refugee families had lived in refugee camps in Thailand for several years before they were admitted into the United States. In addition to speaking Thai as my primary language, my experience as a teacher of English as a second language helped me to understand that many refugees were struggled with learning English. And, in the case of these families, I learned that even though some teenagers spoke Thai, they had problems with academic content delivered in English.

Informed by another volunteer, I also learned that this volunteer work was different from other teaching and mentoring work that I had experienced before, both in Thailand and the United States. Instead of holding an ESL or mentoring session in a classroom or an office, where students living in different places came to one location, I discovered that I would need to go to their homes. I learned to know from another volunteer that the objectives of the home visits were 1) to reach out to the refugee community 2) to work around the refugee families' schedule and 3) to fulfill the refugees' needs in both English language learning and everyday living. She stated that anything I could do would help, which meant that it was not limited to teaching English. She explained that I might help by being friend with the refugees because they were very lonely or I might need to help them deal with more complicated issues such as holding a workshop on move-in to and move-out from an apartment, which required working on rental agreements and how to clean up the unit. The organization that started this

practice believed that assisting the refugees at their homes to start their lives in the United States was necessary.

In September, 2009, I first began working with one Karenni family that had two parents and three children at their apartment. The family was surprised that I *looked* like them and could speak Thai. They were excited to get to know me and to learn more about my experiences of living in the United States, learning English, and becoming a college student while sharing similar Southeast Asian background with them. In the first conversation, they expressed their desire to know more how to be like me whom they described and perceived as “educated” and “having no problems.” Then, we discussed about my volunteer work and our availability for home visits.

During the first few months of my volunteer work, I visited the family once a week and sometimes every other week depending upon our availability. Each visit, I brought vocabulary cards, children’s books, English worksheets, and sometimes authentic reading materials such as newsletters, magazines, and sometimes examples of real fruit and vegetables found in a typical American grocery store to introduce to them. During each visit, family members often asked for help with translating documents and mail, assisting with their children’s homework, or giving them a ride. Coming from 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 and I always spent time together after a teaching session. During this time, we often dined together and learned to know more about each other’s experiences

and stories, movement, and problems. We also talked about a variety of topics such as our week and work, current events, and fairly complicated issues (e.g. future plans, politics, religion). From these kinds of interaction that included teaching, mentoring, and casual conversation, my complex role was constructed. Both the family members and I learned that I could use my English proficiency to be their ESL instructor to the whole family and a tutor for the children, I could give advice on how to do things in the United States as their mentor, and I spent spare time with them as a friend.

While tutoring members of this family, I learned that English, the dominant language in the host country and the language they were learning, greatly shaped the way my participants viewed and positioned themselves as struggling new immigrants and English language learners. I also witnessed that they used many adaptive strategies to fulfill their survival needs such as navigating skills, support networks, and utilization of digital device. I began to understand more about their lived experiences, language learning, and multiple literacies. Because I wanted to gain a deeper understanding of their experiences and their language and literacy practices, I shared my interests with them and asked if they might like to participate in a research study. I explained that I would be able to continue working with them as an ESL teacher and family mentor, but that I wanted to document their language and literacy practices in order to understand how those were shaped by their movement across borders, their experiences as refugees, and their priorities and goals. Having known me for several months, they agreed to participate in the study. They were also glad that

this project would help the American locals know more about the Karenni people as a new immigrant group in the country.

The Karenni family I spent a lot of time with introduced me to other Karenni families in the area (as well as other refugee groups originally from Burma). I enjoyed learning more about their community and began to observe the children and the adults that this family often visited and spent time with. After that, the other two Karenni families, who shared social networks and spent time with the first family, agreed to participate. I decided to examine the language use, socialization, and literacy practices of all three families.

Choosing Qualitative Research

Although social capital (Bourdieu, 1986; Coleman, 1988, 1990; Portes, 1998) in education has been primarily investigated by using quantitative techniques, Horvat et al (2003) argue that ethnography makes “an important contribution by providing insights into the underlying actions that produce or expend social capital” (p. 320). Drawing on qualitative methods (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000, 2003, 2005; Merriam, 1988, 1998; Silverman, 2000, 2004), I used multiple data-gathering procedures that included observations, formal and informal interviews, interpretations of artifacts, the researcher’s own experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95), and triangulation (Chamaz, 2006). With these methods of data collection, I was able to document the patterns of literacy events and existing and emergent language practices in the participants’ households and neighborhood were carried out. The practices I examined required the creation of a literacy inventory that would explain those practices in detail with thick

description (Geertz, 1973; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and with attention to socio-cultural nuances, beliefs, and values. In addition, to answer the question about the participants' transnational connections (question 3), I examined how the participants' language and literacy practices create and facilitate local and transnational social networks within the Karenni community. In the remainder of the chapter, I describe in detail my role as researcher, each step of my data-gathering processes, and the complexities in working with participants in different families and from different age groups.

Researcher's Role

From the beginning, I hoped this study would become “a collaborative venture” (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, p. 228) between myself and the participants. To this end, I maintained my role as an ESL tutor and family mentor to assist all of the three families throughout the course of data collection. Such relationship established increasing trust and rapport. Throughout the process, the three families welcomed me to their houses, told me their problems during resettlement while asking me for help and advice, and talked about their personal lives, thoughts, and hopes. I listened to their testimonies, I assisted them with tasks they could not do alone (e.g., paying bills and helping children with their homework), and I taught them some English words and expressions when needed. The relationship between me and the three families contributed to and facilitated my dual role, as a researcher and as a “teacher” (the term they preferred to use to describe me, as I discuss in more detail below).

While assisting three Karenni families, I fulfilled multiple tasks depending on each family member's need and purpose. Often, for the whole family, I gave them English lessons and read them children's books (to both parents and children). Sometimes, we watched TV or a DVD (in English, Thai, Karenni, or Burmese) together. For parents, they frequently asked for instruction on how to do errands, how to pay bills, or how to correspond with a service provider. They also requested assistance with translating documents, interpreting material that came through the mail, and completing school forms written in English. Children, on the other hand, needed assistance with many of their academic assignments. Helping out with all of these tasks facilitated my data collection in many ways. Aiming to create an inventory their language and literacy practices, use, and purposes, I kept track of the language and literacy strategies that were employed for purposes of work and play. While assisting the parents to help get the services they needed, or to participate in activities that required English proficiency or literacy, I documented whatever skills and techniques were used to accomplish particular goals. Because I was one of their immigrant friends living in the United States, I was part of their social network. Working with the children while they were at home, I gained insights about the language and literacy practices they utilized in both academic endeavors (e.g. doing homework) and personal interests (e.g. playing, talking to friends). In all of these ways, I had multiple opportunities to witness the challenges they faced as well as the achievements they had in a wide range of activities taking place in their households and neighborhood.

The teacher-researcher role

As previously discussed, the families preferred to call me “teacher.” It is useful to explain the sociocultural meaning of this term in this research context in order to show the relationship established between the participants and myself. The explanation will also demonstrate how my role was shaped, not only from my point of view, but also from the participants’ perspectives. Taking a dual role on the research site and fulfilling in these individuals’ lives and needs, I was called “sa-ra-mo” (or “teacher” in English) by my participants, including their friends and neighbors. They used this term (saramo) when they referred to me and call me “teacher” when they addressed me in person. In American culture, using “teacher” to address someone who conducts teaching and mentoring seems impersonal, distant, or even rude (LeBeau, 2009). However, in this research context (as in many Asian cultures), it is a term that indicates great respect whereas calling a person who takes a role as an instructor and a mentor by addressing only his/her first name is considered rude. According to LeBeau (2009), in Asian cultures, the teacher is considered a position of privilege that is deserving of respect and trust. I believe the Karenni families in my study called me “teacher” in order to convey feelings of respect, comfort, and trust.

Family Language Socialization

Three families that consisted of sixteen individuals total participated in this qualitative research study. I employed the case study genre, one of the qualitative inquiries (Gall et al, 1996), for many reasons. First, the case study genre allowed me to concentrate on a small number of individuals (Duff, 2008, p.

43) and to focus closely and attentively on families' as well as individuals' language and literacy practices, including their generational differences and preferences. The affordances of case study genre also led me to produce *descriptive* study, which demonstrates a description of the participants' socio-cultural and socio-historical contexts. By focusing on a limited number of cases, I was also able to provide *explanatory* outcomes, which examine a nuanced picture of a particular circumstance of how language and literacy events occur in the Karenni participant families' households. These affordances are derived from the characteristics of case study that provide an opportunity to carry out intensive examinations to elicit details and complexities.

Taking into consideration that all three families are multilingual and each family member used multiple languages on a daily basis, I consulted several studies in applied linguistics that utilized and focused on multilingual families. To answer question 1 (language and literacy inventory) and question 4 (similarities and differences across families and generations), I drew from the field of linguistic anthropology and paid closely attention to families' language socialization (Duff, 2008; Duff & Hornberger, 2010). With the framework of language socialization in multilingual families, I focused on language choice and code-switching (e.g. Dagenais & Day, 1999; Wei, 1994), cross-generational interaction, cross-generational language shift and maintenance (e.g. Schecter & Bayley, 1997, 2002), and language socialization across contexts. To gain a deeper understanding of the complexity and dynamic nature of the multilingual families and exploring systematic connections among experiences, behaviors, and relevant

features of the context (Johnson, 1992, p. 84), I conducted cross-case analyses for comparison goals (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Rossman & Rallis, 2003) and to elicit generational differences within a family and across the families.

In addition, the study employed what Wolcott (1994) calls the “three Es” in qualitative data collection. The first is *experiencing* (e.g., what I gained from observations of activities and interactions within the three households). The second E, *enquiring* (e.g., what was accomplished by conducting individual interviews and group interviews with adults and children). The third E, stands for *examining* (e.g., what I did when I collected and studied a collection of prints and artifacts). Guided by this three-prong approach, multiple data-gathering procedures that included observations, formal and informal interviews, interpretations of artifacts, and reflections on the researcher’s own experiences (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 95) were utilized. Each data collection process, including how it fits in the research context, is described below.

Participant Observation

To produce an inventory of *language repertoires* and *accumulated literacies*, and “to capture” the world (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines 1988, p. 224) of the three refugee families, I conducted observations in the home, a space that is often overlooked even though it serves as a site for language socialization, family language policy, and out-of-school literacy site (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 & Luke, 2009; Taylor &

Dorsey-Gaines 1988) in this out-of-school context. I describe each unit of analysis below.

First, because the participants' language and literacy practices constituted the primary unit of analysis (González, 2001; Pease-Alvarez, 2003; Schecter & Bayley, 2002), I paid particular attention to the participants' use of texts in their daily life. With this focus, I utilized ethnographic observations while taking field notes to identify and document the situations where oral and written texts were used and produced among the participants in order to fulfill their communicative needs. For the oral texts, I paid attention to what language was used in the interactions taking place in the family, between parents and children, between parents, between siblings, and between family members and visitors. The focus of all of these observations was on language in use, the influence of the intended audience on language choices, and goals of the observed event or interaction.

For the written texts, I observed what written language, or linguistic system, they 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 on documents, letters, and 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 more information on what language they read and wrote and for what purpose.

As discussed in Chapter 1 and 2, recent advances in communication and information technologies have changed migrant communities' lifestyles and

methods of communications (Cruickshank, 2004). They have also helped immigrants maintain meaningful connections across time and space (Hull & Nelson, 2005; Kress, 2003; Leander & Lewis, 2008). Therefore, to conduct a careful inventory and analysis of information technologies and how they were used in the participant families, I paid attention to texts delivered multimodally. The multiple modalities here include our complex semiotic system: digital texts and graphics, pictures, signs, sounds, and symbols (Gee, 2003; Jewitt & Kress, 2003) in addition to oral and written.

In this study, there were two stages of participant observation. First, I looked for and identified the electronic devices that were being used in these households. I discovered that participants frequently used cell phones, digital dictionaries, laptops, TVs, DVD players, and videogame consoles. I documented by whom, when, and for what purpose these devices were used with a focus on patterns of literacy practices, generational differences, and preferences. Later, after I began to recognize participants' routines and preferences, I explored how the digital literacies fostered other kinds of language learning and literacy development. I paid attention to how the digital literacies influenced the participants' social networks, what kinds of connections were facilitated, and how participants used digital literacies to access particular goods and resources. I was particularly interested in how language and literacy practices in the new context helped to maintain active connections to people, ideas, institutions, or practices from the homeland. The inventory led to deeper understanding the locally situated ways that this Karenni community maintained existing connections or developed

new ones. The data gained from these observations generated questions that I later explored during interviews.

Though I relied on participant observation during home visits for all three families, I had to adjust how and when to approach each family and what activity to do with them as the research went along. This was because each family was different in their availability and lifestyle (for more on this, see Chapter 4). While I have known the first family since September 2009, the second family since 2010, and the third family since January 2011, I was able to visit all three families equitably between the months of January 2011 to May 2011. During these five months, all of them lived at the same apartment complex, La Frontera. I visited each family three times a week: Tuesdays, Thursdays, and Sundays, unless they were not available. On Tuesday and Thursday afternoons, I spent at least an hour with each family per visit. On Sundays, I spent a longer amount of time with the participant families because all of the family members were usually available and the children participants did not go to school on the weekends. In addition, as the three families were friends and neighbors, family members from one of the three participant families were often found in the other participant family's space. This circumstance allowed me to observe them as a group and to understand more about their social networks in the receiving context.

It is important to note that my observations were not restricted to the home space of the participant families, but also occurred outside the apartment buildings, such as in the parking lot and in the playground where children and adults spent time with their friends and neighbors. I went to observe the children

participants in their classroom for a few days at school to understand more about their all-day language and literacy practices (more below). In addition, I spent time with the participants when I was invited to special events and social gatherings. I also went with them upon their requests to do errands especially when they needed my assistance. Such examples include but are not restricted to buying medicine at the drugstore, giving a ride to a grocery store, and helping the families communicate with the front desk at the medical clinic. I was eager and willing to assist them as needed, and these experiences and interactions also improved my understanding of their language and literacy practices across contexts.

Interviews

Guided by Seidman's (2006) comprehensive interview structure, the goal of my interviews was to "craft a profile" (p. 128) of the participants and to answer the research questions about the participants' language choices and literacy practices. As learning to know the details of people's lives is "a way of knowing and understanding" (Seidman, 2001, p.1), I employed the three-interview series as a framework for formal interview sessions. During the first interview, I endeavored to collect information that would establish a *focused lived history*. During this first interview, participants were encouraged to share information about themselves and tell stories about their lives. While interviewing the participants, I paid special attention to the participants' lived experiences that constructed refugee status that is different from immigrants who voluntarily migrate. This is because refugees are created when they are forced to leave their

homeland (Malkki, 1995; Ong, 1999). Stein (1981) proposes that the refugees' perception of threats, decision to flee, the stage of dangerous flight, camp lives, and processes of resettlement are included as refugee experiences. Therefore, the first interview contained the questions about their movement, reasons for the movement, and challenges in their resettlement 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 the participants' daily activities, literacy practices, and what mode and language used in those practices to answer research question 1. The second interview took place after I had observed the participants for a few weeks and took notes about their activities in the households and neighborhood. The third interview, conducted one month after the second interview, provided an opportunity for *reflection on meaning*. I was able to gain deeper understanding of their thoughts on their language use and literacy practices, in general, and the factors of how and why they used a certain language, performed a certain practice, and chose a certain mode to complete their tasks. For example, I learned from observations and the first two interviews that most of Karenni adult participants used Burmese as a lingua franca in an interethnic communication and as a language choice for written flyers and letters among the Karenni people in Phoenix. In the third interview, I discussed 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, then, gained the supporting details for this language choice. The unexpected factor of Burmese usage in written artifacts was also discovered when they explained that they could not find their primary language, Karenni, to work on their laptop.

During and after participant observation and document collection, I closely examined the *literacy practices* of the participants in this study—or the “values, attitudes, feelings, and social relationships” (Barton & Hamilton, 2000) they had with regard to particular literacy events. With the belief that literacy practices are not always visible to the outsider but can be elicited by using individual and group semi-structured, in-depth interviews, I talked with the participants (informally and during recorded interviews) about the pattern of language and literacy practices (e.g. daily doing homework and reading, watching TV, filling out forms). For each practice, I reminded participants of what I had observed and asked about their thoughts on the practices that I described. I wanted to understand the choices made with regard to language, mode, and function. Through interviews and focus groups, I gained a better understanding of their views about relationship to different languages and literacies at the individual level and across families and generations.

After each interview (which lasted about 30 to 60 minutes), I outlined my participants’ linguistic autobiographies and timelines that began with their experiences of language learning since their childhood and included the most recent circumstances and their reflections on those experiences. This helped me understand the language learning trajectories among the participants from their

own point of view on these experiences. For example, when I learned that one of the participants acquired the Karen language in the refugee camp, I decided to ask her more about how and why she learned it in that setting. I also asked her how she was able to maintain it in the United States and what it meant to her to be able to speak Karen. This piece of information was then added to her language learning trajectory. As a result, my understanding of the factors for language maintenance and what facilitated such maintenance while the participant was resettling in a new country was increased.

Group interviews were conducted more than one-on-one interviews for several reasons. 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 on the site. 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. In addition, interviewing children 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 and informal interactions, I engaged in conversations with family members about the more general topics and discussions of everyday life (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, p. 226). The conversations provided another way to look at 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 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, preferences about food, and the challenges in everyday living. At certain points, our roles reversed when they asked me questions about my life experiences rather than I asked them. I felt that it was perfectly acceptable as this was a natural dialogue, not a scripted scene that contributed to building our “collaborative venture” (Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988, p. 228).

Interpreter

I am thankful that I have been welcomed into the participants’ homes. I have some shared experiences with my participants, who have lived in Thailand for at least fifteen years. However, even though I speak both Thai and English, I could not speak the first languages of all of my participants, and some of them were not able to speak Thai or English. In some cases, I decided to conduct interviews in the refugee’s first language and have an interpreter available in those cases. This was sometimes quite difficult as there were limited numbers of professional interpreters who understood both Karenni and English or Karenni and Thai. When interviewing a Karenni speaker, an interpreter who could do Karenni-Thai or Karenni-English translation was needed. Also, when interviewing a Burmese speaker, an interpreter who could do Burmese-Thai or Burmese-English was employed. As a result of these challenges, my participants

also served as my interpreters. For example, a family member who could communicate with me in English or Thai served as my interpreter for his/her family. In addition, 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 our language broker depending on their availability. With interpreters from inside the community, I was able to gain a deeper understanding of their socio-cultural background, transnational support networks, and how “we” (multilingual individuals) work to overcome language barriers by using linguistic resources in our very own community. The use of an interpreter also explains why I conducted more group interviews than one-on-one interviews in this study.

Collection of Artifacts

According to Levine (1982), literacy materials and print artifacts often serve strategic functions and social resources (p. 263) that should not be neglected in research. This empirical study paid attention to print materials and their functions to gain an in-depth understanding of the ways in which the families used artifacts in their daily lives and how they were utilized and culminated into the families’ *accumulated literacies*. Such literacy resources included multiple channels, various modes of communication, and a variety of semiotic systems (García, Bartlett & Kleifgen, 2006).

Print text and other documents

In addition to examining participants’ use of written texts, I relied on document analysis to complete the accumulated literacy inventory. Documents

collected and analyzed included texts, copies of texts, bills, letters, CDs/DVDs, digital equipment, and electronic devices. The artifacts collected were shown to participants, both the children and the parents, in order to elicit descriptions and explanations and to determine the positions of the literacy materials within the family settings as well as their functionality as social resources.

Collection of photographs

Photographs of literacy artifacts (Taylor & Dorsey-Gains, 1988) gave me an opportunity to record the literacy resources in everyday social and cultural circumstances (p. 226). There were two categories of photographs. First, I took pictures of literacy materials. In these households, multilingual texts were found in the forms of books, decorations, food/product brands, calendars, mails, magazines, reminder notes, and posters. The materials also included digital gadgets (including screens of cell phones, laptop, TV and videogame) that were commonly used in the families. 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, visitations) commonly took place in the living and dining space. The two categories of photographs were added to the literacy inventory.

Working with Young Children

While interviews and multiple translations worked effectively with adult participants (33-70 years old) and teenagers (14-18 years old) who had long attention span, I had to modify the methods of interviewing with six young children (5-12 years old), and who were all male from three participant families.

Even though I understood that “children are not passive receptors of socialization but are active social agents managing their own experiences” (Emond, 2005, p.124), I encountered a number of challenges in collecting and gaining such data and working with these younger children on the research site. The first challenge was related to the household as research site where all family members did not necessarily participate in the same activity at the same time. Multiple activities co-occurred in the household where children were often grouped with each other in a different part of the house to play, to talk, and to socialize among themselves rather than participating in adults’ activities (e.g. the parents were talking with visitors while the children were playing a computer game in the other corner of the room; or the parents were in the living room while the children went outside with friends or stayed in the bedroom). Second, children had difficulties in articulating their world orally during the interviews in the way adults did, and I found it difficult to maintain their attention. Because the children participants and I did not speak the same primary language, I employed an interpreter to work with the younger children, but even this proved to be a challenge. The children did not necessarily understand the process and purpose of employing an interpreter and their attention for collaboration in the whole process of interpretation was not met. Third, I am an adult researcher, whom younger children perceived as someone having different interests; for example, their favorite activity was playing video games and watching cartoons while mine was different. The generational gap increases the possibility that I overlooked issues that matter to them as children and how they perceived the world.

To overcome the first challenge of having participants doing different activities in different spots in the household, I put an audio recorder in one place, where a group of participants located while I was observing or interacting with the other group of the participants in the other place. To solve the other challenges, I used multiple techniques and strategies (Orellana, 2009) to collect data from the younger children as discussed below.

Children as ethnographers

To address the issue of access to the children, I adopted the notion that children should be given an opportunity to share their ideas and questions about the situations they are in or world around them. Based on the supposition that “we know little about how people themselves see the settings and their activities” (Wagner, 1979, p. 286), a camera was given to the children and they were asked to take pictures of the important places in their neighborhood (see also Taylor & Dorsey-Gaines, 1988). I gave a digital camera to the children in each family for a week to document their lives in ways that reflected their personal understandings of what literacy practices were valued in what contexts and for what purposes. I asked them to take pictures of what they did, what they used and saw on a daily basis, and what was interesting to them. After that, I talked with them about the pictures they took and asked them to tell me a brief story about it. For example, a participant took a picture of himself with a laptop, so I asked him what was in the picture, what did he do in the picture, and why. In addition, I used the photographs I took when the children were gathered in the households and around the neighborhood as a topic to talk with them.

Listening, playing, and blending in

I had experienced firsthand that “one can’t ask children straight questions and expect to get straight answers” because “children know how to read what adults are looking for and give answers adults expect” (Orellana, 2009, p. 135) although the answers are not necessarily from their own thoughts and feelings. After I tried to interview a younger participant with a series of questions, for example, he became quiet and did not want to answer even a direct, yet simple, question such as “What class do you like?” or “Do you like to do homework?” The other issue I found was that a younger participant talked less and was not comfortable when he was interviewed while their parents were being around (conversely, the children wanted to be around and to join in when the parents were the interviewees). To solve the problem and to know more about each child, I asked for more information from people around them such as teachers, parents, siblings, and friends. Even though asking around provided me second-hand 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 to me even though it was not the answer to the questions I asked, and they also responded by reacting to a situation or to other people while I was observing them. I did all of these listening experiments and lessons by hanging out with the children and observing them in “a variety of contexts, situations, activities, and relationships” (p. 135-136). With the careful

listening and observations, I have learned great deal about their experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

To start working with the children and listening to them, I discovered that it was important to observe their language and literacy practices before asking them to talk about them. As I explained earlier, the children and I come from different linguistic backgrounds but using an interpreter did not work well. This is because they did not understand the whole process of formally using an interpreter. They wanted to talk in English to me directly when they could. As a result, we used English, our second language as a lingua franca. My understanding of how to approach them with the English language started with being their teacher of English and helping them with homework by using English as the medium language of instruction. Consequently, they perceived me as an English speaker and that led me to join other activities with them by using English.

As mentioned above, working with children needs careful observation in a variety of contexts, activities, and relationships. My multiple roles as a tutor, a friend, and a researcher allowed me to approach their language and literacy practices associated with both everyday living and academic purpose. To be accepted, I tried to “blend in” their group as one of their friends. From my experiences of working with these younger Karenni children, their concentration on a conversation that had nothing to do with their motivations and interests was short. On the other hand, the conversation led by their interest such as about “playing” (Bauer & Mkhize, 2012) was carried out easily and naturally. As the

process of data collection went along and the children became familiar with me through talking and playing, the children spoke more with me and their voice became louder.

As a tutor/teacher and as a researcher, I learned to both lead and follow them. When tutoring them English, I led them by incorporating a game, such as alphabet cards, hangman, and tic-tac-toe, in which they interacted with me without obstructions. The words and sentences in English came out without hesitation and without fear of saying something wrong. On the other hand, to be accepted, I learned to follow them and let them lead me. For example, I asked them to teach me how to play a videogame or how to play with rubber bands, one of the games they liked to play. In addition, as a researcher who wanted to understand their world and the way they were without my intrusion, I also learned to assimilate in their group. To do so, I participated in their activities, such as drawing and origami (folding paper), as a friend, without taking the lead. Or, at times, I observed their activities quietly as an outsider, not interacting with them while taking field notes. Importantly, interviews with the younger children were often carried out as a group conversation. In each conversation, not all of the children in the group were in the study. However, approaching them this way carried out a more comfortable and authentic interaction.

Classroom observations

While the focus of this study was on home-based language and literacy practices, I conducted classroom observation occasionally to observe children in an institutional context where they spend a great amount of time each week. To

understand the major differences between language and literacy practices in home and school contexts, I spent 1-2 days shadowing each younger participant at the elementary school and each teenager at their high-school in late April 2011. I observed them while attending class, with a focus on what they did at school and how they responded to classmates, teachers, lessons, and overall school setting. I also talked to their teachers about the children's performance at school and used it as background information.

Data Analysis and Interpretation Techniques

My goal for data analysis was to produce systematic narrative description and explanation of the answers to the research questions. After interviewing, the interview data was transcribed. Following Ochs and Schieffelin (1979), I assumed that methods of transcription are different depending on purposes and texts. I created and used a simplified version of transcription (Appendix A) to deliver content, emphasis, and translation (Thai to English) of the interview data. The transcriptions were triangulated (Charmaz, 2006) with field notes taken during observations and artifacts that were cataloged in file. I sorted each file to allocate data for each family. The organized files helped me analyze the case and cross-case studies in addition to the generational differences among the participants. The files also emphasize the values of ethnographic methods that carry out the relationship of family portraits, socio-historical and socio-cultural background, and literacy development among the participants.

To gain an emic understanding and to sustain the inductive, data-driven nature (Duff, 2008) of the research, my theorizing was grounded in (and

influenced by) processes of data analysis and interpretation. Three sets of coding were generated based on the study's questions and conceptual frameworks. With the interview data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008), *open* coding was used to conceptually develop the analysis of the content (Corbin & 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 & Strauss, 1998, p. 102) or names (example of open categories are "future plan", "problems").

After reviewing the data for the *open coding*, I used *focused* coding to build, clarify, and elaborate the concepts (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2006) and to specify particular themes of the interview data that potentially answer my question on literacy practices, language and mode use, and transnational linkages. Finally, *context* coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) were used to identify and analyze the focus of 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. The analysis highlights 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).

For example, when I was observing events in households, I took field notes and recounted routines or actions/interactions that tend to occur more habitually. Documenting such routines allowed me to identify the participants'

daily literacy events, the people involved in the events, and mode and language used in the event. This process helped me answer the questions about accumulated literacy and multilingual repertoires among the Karenni participants and to identify what language and mode is used for what purpose. Observing the younger children while they were playing, for instance, I found that they played video games more frequently than other activities. I understood that these digital literacy practices were part of their daily routine and so I began to look more closely at those practices each time they played video games to find out more about what happened during the activity, what languages were being used, and what literacy practices were emerging. When I discovered that they used both Karenni and English, I counted, recounted, and coded the situation when they used Karenni and when they used English. This allowed me to gain a nuanced understanding of one key way they spent time in the household, the way they used languages, and how their video gaming event was organized.

After each interview, I also looked for patterns and coded the main idea of the content within individual's interview. When there was a repetition of talking about problems, for instance, I used "problem" as an open coding, then I identified those problems and used a more specific code, such as "problem with filling out forms" and "problem with reading document." Using the coding allowed me to see similarities as well as differences among family members within one family, across generations, and across three families.

The patterns of contexts, events, and stories were then analyzed in relation to my artifacts and notes recorded from each field visit (Pahl, 2004, p. 343). As

“our eyes are a research tool” (Silverman, 2001, p. 193), collections of photographs and other visual data (signs, symbols) also provided me a vital tool for “the analysis of texts—both verbal and visual” (Silverman, 2001, p. 200). Afterwards, I triangulated the interview data and examined the connections between these visual artifacts with the analysis of field notes and documentation. The multiple types of data brought forth strongly and clearly connected “chains of evidence” (Gall, et al, 2005; Krathwohl, 1993; Yin, 1994) or what some have called an “audit trail” (Duff, 2008, p. 109).

It is also useful to note that not all of the data gained from interviews, even with one individual but at a different time, observations, and artifacts correspondingly go toward the same direction. Sometimes, they are dynamic and contradictory. In this case, I interpret the data by paying attention to the participants’ experiences of movement across national, linguistic, and sociopolitical borders which are the participants’ distinctive characteristics of early period of resettlement in the new country. For instance, as discussed in Chapter 2, ideologies of language are observable through what the participants say and do. However, “contested” language ideologies occur within the multilingual Karenni community. On one occasion, a participant said, “I speak Karenni to my children every time, everyday” to state his intention to maintain his home language. However, later, he expressed satisfaction when his children, who learned English from school, corrected his mispronounced English word. In this instance, we can see that even though he values the Karenni language, he also recognizes the value of learning and speaking English. In this case, I rely on the

participant's point of view on "each" activity while considering his socio-historical factors and experiences (Wortham, 2001) through his reoccurring movements. With strong ties to his roots, he was determined to maintain Karenni. At the same time, the language dominant in the receiving nation also influenced the way in which he treated and valued English and learning English. In such ways, I consider contradictory in data as illuminating resources that help to explain the in-process transnational experiences that are filled with alterations and hesitancies.

Ethical Considerations

The research questions for this study emerged out of my experiences working with the three focal families for a couple of years as a volunteer. In order to conduct participant observation and interviews, I needed to spend time with members of the three families in their home space which involved minors, or participants who were under 18 years old. To provide information about my research and goals, and to secure their informed consent that I proceed, I provided all participants with consent forms and explained the purposes of my study to all of the participants at the beginning of the study. Keeping in mind that the participants' (both adults and children) comfort were of the utmost importance, every effort was made to inform them, to allow them to participate on their terms, and to choose for themselves what parts of the study they wanted to participate in.

During the course of data collection, I also informed my participants from time to time that they had a right to refuse their participation in the research and to withdraw themselves from the research at any time without negative

consequences. That is, I emphasized to them that I was willing to continue working with them as their tutor and family mentor whether or not they withdrew themselves from the study. In our formal interviews, I also let them know that they had a right to refuse any questions they did not want to answer. In addition, I reminded all participants that their identity and confidentiality, including the apartment complex they lived, the school they attended, and the people involved in their daily life (such as school teachers) would be protected by using pseudonyms.

Limitations

There are certain limitations to this study as a result of the research methods. First, due to my focus on home-based language and literacy practices in a limited number of families, I cannot make any generalizations about how common those practices are in the participants' neighborhood or community. Even though I had shadowed the children when they were attending classes and had some conversations with their teachers, I feel that the time spent in school was very limited and only provides a snapshot of what's going on in that context. As a result, I decided to use the data gained from class visits and discussion with the teachers as background information only because of the insufficient time I spent in the school context.

Next, I used the case study framework to elicit qualitative results from a small number of Karenni participants who lived in Phoenix, Arizona. The limitations of this research lead to understanding of this particular group that cannot be generalized (Merriam, 1998) to a newly arrived refugee population in

the United States as a whole. Instead, “transferability,” or sometimes called “comparability” of the researcher’s hypothesis, principles, or findings (Duff, 2008, p. 51; Lincoln & Guba, 1985), assigns the responsibility to readers to determine similarities, fits, or connections between one study’s contexts to others (Duff, 2008, p. 51). Alternatively, to gain more understanding of the in-process transnational language and literacy practices among the participants, longitudinal research may better afford more details of the flows, alterations, and factors influencing the alterations in those language and literacy practices.

Summary

In this chapter, I described methods, techniques, and procedures that I used to collect and analyze data for this study. I highlighted the value of qualitative methodologies that include participant observations and interviews, field notes, and collection of artifacts for understanding and representing the role of language and literacy practices in the lived experiences of the participants. These methods were employed in order to construct an inventory of the participants’ language and literacy practices and to examine practices that have emerged as a result of movement across linguistic, national, and sociopolitical borders. In the process, I faced challenges due to their distinct linguistic background and diverse age groups. In response, I adjusted the way I approached each family and each age group, especially the younger children. I also modified the way I interviewed the children in order to create a more flexible and dynamic process. I drew on the resources of multiple language brokers, many of whom were from the interviewee’s own family or community. In addition, I gained a

more successful collaboration when interviewing the children as a group than asking one child a direct question. Using grounded theory, or the theorization of data itself, which I gained from multiple data-collecting methods and techniques, I triangulated (Charmaz, 2006) data obtained from different sources to capture the participants' language and literacy practices and their thoughts on those practices at the beginning of their resettlement and at a particular historical moment in time.

CHAPTER FOUR

PARTICIPANTS

In this chapter, I introduce the sixteen individuals (from three different Karenni families in Phoenix Arizona) that agreed to participate in this study. I present their biographical information collected during participant observation, interviews, and informal conversations. The descriptive vignettes serve as the background of the participants' lived experiences that grant useful information to the data analysis in chapters 5, 6 and 7, where I explore their language and literacy practices in the United States as well as what they say about those practices. In addition to the three families' histories, I have gained additional biographical information from classroom observations at the children's schools. I had the opportunity to spend time with the children in their classrooms, as well as talk with some of their teachers about the children's all-day language and literacy experiences.

Name Use

As stated in Chapter 3, names of the participants, their friends and teachers, and the apartment complex they lived in are pseudonyms. In this section, I clarify how each family's name is created and used in the study so that their Karenni tradition is preserved and clearly understood. A last name or a family name is not commonly used among the minority ethnic groups from Burma. The Karenni people are no exception. 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 a family name. This phenomenon contrasts with the Western system of first and last names because many Westerners may assume that the second portion of the name is the person’s last name. With the name Toh Reh, a Westerner may assume that Toh is the boy’s first name and Reh is the last name. In fact, many Karenni males have “Reh” as the last syllable of their names as in Teh Reh, Saw Reh, and Eh Reh. This is because the morpheme “Reh” indicates that the person is male. On the other hand, many Karenni female names have “Meh”, as in Boe Meh, Hla Meh, and See Meh. To avoid confusion and to maintain representation of the Karenni culture, I call the three families according to the given name of the head of each family. The three families are Teh Reh’s family, Ka Paw’s family, and Nway Meh’s family.

The Families’ History, Language and Literacy Background, and Current Circumstances

In this section, I introduce and describe the history of three families. I provide the family members’ biographical information and their lived experiences related to migration and language learning. In addition, I introduce them with the description of the space they lived in during the data collection process to portray the setting that played a role in their language and literacy practices and development. These linguistic and cultural resources (Moll et al, 1992; Pahl, 2004) influence their learning environments, but may be underutilized at school and less-commonly known by the American locals and public discourse. I begin with Teh Reh’s family, followed by Ka Paw’s family and Nway Meh’s family.

Tables 4.1 presents the biographic information, country of birth, and acquired languages of the sixteen participants divided by families. Alternatively, for a better understanding of the data analysis in the following chapters that also answer the research question on generational differences, Table 4.2 present the participants divided by age groups. There are six adults, four teenagers, and six younger children in the study. Table 4.2 also provides the information of the adult participants' occupation and the children's (both teenagers and younger children) education level during the data collection period. Grouping the participants by age also provides a different way of viewing the relationship between age and languages (and movements) of the participants.

Table 4.1

Biographic Information of Participants from Three Families

Family	Name	Country of Birth	Age	Primary Language(s)	Other Language(s) Learned
Teh Reh's Family	Teh Reh	Karenni State, Burma	33	Karenni	Burmese, Thai, Shan, English
	Loh Meh	Karenni State, Burma	36	Karenni	Burmese, English
	See Meh	Thailand	15	Karenni	Burmese, English, Karen, Thai
	Gu-Gu	Thailand	7	Karenni	English
	Ngee-Ngee	Thailand	7	Karenni	English
Ka Paw's Family	Ka Paw	Lai-go Village, Karenni State, Burma	43	Kayan ⁴ , Burmese	Karenni, English
	Sherry	Lai-go Village, Karenni State, Burma	46	Kayan	Burmese, Karenni, English
	Daw	Thailand	14	Burmese	Karenni, English
	Je Ru	Thailand	9	Burmese	Karenni, English

⁴ Kayan (pronounced /kəjən/) is a distinct language. On the other hand, Karenni, Kaya, and Kayah are referred to the same language, Karenni.

Nway Meh's Family	Nway Meh	Karenni State, Burma	45	Karenni	-
	Boe Meh	Karenni State, Burma	70	Karenni	-
	Hla Meh	Karenni State, Burma	18	Karenni	Burmese, English
	Saw Reh	Thailand	15	Karenni	Burmese, English
	Sha Reh	Thailand	12	Karenni	Burmese, English
	Toh Reh	Thailand	9	Karenni	English
	Eh Reh	Thailand	5	Karenni	English

Table 4.2

Biographic Information of Participants Divided by Age Groups

Age Group	Name	Age	Gender	Primary Language(s)	Other Language(s) Learned	Occupation/ Education
Adults	Boe Meh	70	Female	Karenni	-	Retired
	Sherry	46	Female	Kayan	Karenni, English	Homemaker
	Nway Meh	45	Female	Karenni	-	Homemaker
	Ka Paw	43	Male	Kayan, Burmese	Karenni, English	Janitor
	Loh Meh	36	Female	Karenni	Burmese, English	Shelf Stocker
	Teh Reh	33	Male	Karenni	Burmese, English, Shan, Thai	Interpreter
Teens	Hla Meh	18	Female	Karenni	Burmese, English	11 th grade
	Saw Reh	15	Male	Karenni	Burmese, English	11 th grade
	See Meh	15	Female	Karenni	Burmese, English, Karen, Thai	10 th grade
	Daw	14	Female	Burmese	English, Karenni	9 th grade
Young Children	Sha Reh	12	Male	Karenni	Burmese, English	7 th grade
	Je Ru	10	Male	Burmese	English, Karenni	4 th grade
	Toh Reh	9	Male	Karenni	English	2 nd grade
	Gu-Gu	7	Male	Karenni	English	1 st grade
	Ngee-Ngee	7	Male	Karenni	English	1 st grade
	Eh Reh	5	Male	Karenni	English	Kindergarten

All of the adult participants were born in the Karenni State of Burma (shown in Figure 2) and moved to Thailand in 1990s. All of them had been sheltered in the refugee camp called, Ban Mai Nai Soi, located in Mae Hong Son Province in the northern part of Thailand (shown in Figure 3), only two kilometers away from the Thailand-Burma borderline. From interviewing with Loh Meh of Teh Reh’s Family, she said that she, her parents, and siblings were those among the first Karenni groups in the area. When the groups became larger, both local and international news reporters came to document and publicize the refugees’ stories. Since then, international organizations, including the United Nations, started coming to provide them food and supplies. “Ban Mai Nai Soi” (which means the New Village of Nai Soi) Refugee Camp has been named after a Thai village Nai Soi nearby.



Figure 2. Map of Burma and the Karenni State (Karenni Independence through Education, 2012)



Figure 3. Map of Thailand and Burma borders and Thailand's refugee camps (Thailand Burma Border Consortium, 2012)

Teh Reh’s family: “We come here for our children’s education”

I have known Teh Reh’s family since September 25, 2009 when I began volunteering as an ESL tutor and a family mentor to Karenni refugees in Phoenix, Arizona as explained in Chapter 3. They first arrived in the United States on February 28, 2009 with support from a faith-based refugee resettlement agency that provided services in Thailand’s refugee camps and in the United States. The family consists of five family members: young parents, 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 United States for better opportunities, but mostly for their children as Teh Reh and Loh Meh often told me, “We come here (the United States) for our children. We come here for our children’s education.”

Teh Reh

Teh Reh was 33 years old when I first met him. He was born in “the Karenni State, or the Kayah State,” which he called “my home country.” Karenni is his native language. He described a peaceful life growing up in a family of farmers in the Karenni State:

We can plant—cucumber, vegetables, ANYthing. We plant when I grew up. I like it. I REALLY REALLY like it. I miss it. It’s very very different from the United States... 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 animal (he means “hunt”). Sometimes we get goat. Giant goats... wild animals, like wild pigs.

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

Teh Reh, his parents, and siblings crossed the border to Thailand and found their asylum at the Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp in Thailand. In the refugee camp, many refugees had already been re-settled and some schools had been built. Teh Reh began to attend classes at the refugee camp. He told me that his parents always taught him 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.” Teh Reh also told me that a typical school day in the refugee camp included 5 to 6 subjects: “Karenni language, Burmese, mathematics, science, geography, and English.” The teachers were Burmese and Karenni, including a teacher of English from New Zealand. He also mentioned that he was happy that he was always given free pens and paper at school.

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 of the refugee camp. During this time, he learned the Thai language through Thailand’s formal education system. However, after one 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 the Shan language by making friends with people from the Shan State who were living in the refugee camp 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 the 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 ลูกมะหนูน กิโละเท่าไรครับ

[Greetings, Sir! I want to buy your jackfruits. How much a kilo?]

Teh Reh (portraying a Thai): กิโละหนึ่งบาท ถ้าตกลงนี้ ไปเก็บเอาคนเดียว แล้วก็มาที่นี่

เดี๋ยวจะชั่งกิโละให้ [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”:

ถ้าหนึ่งร้อยกิโละนี้เราต้องให้หนึ่งร้อยบาท สองร้อยกิโละก็ต้องให้สองร้อยบาท แค่นี้ ถ้าห้าร้อยกิโละก็ให้ บาทไทยเนี่ยห้าร้อยบาท ก็เต็มรถแล้วห้าร้อยกิโละเนี่ย ห้าร้อยเนี่ยเราใส่น้ำมัน เราเติมน้ำมัน เราทำคนเดียวไม่ไหว เราก็ให้ลูกน้องมีหนึ่งคน ก็ให้เขา สองร้อยบาท ไม่ใช่ทุกวันนะ อาทิตย์หนึ่งไปหนึ่งครั้ง ถ้าไปทุกวันนี้ ขนุนไม่มีแล้ว

[If one hundred kilos, I have to pay him one hundred baht. Two hundred kilos, two hundred baht. That's it. If five hundred kilos, I spend five hundred Thai baht. With five hundred kilos, 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 everyday, you know. I do it once a week. If everyday, no jackfruits to harvest.]

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 enlisted his family to move to the United States with a Thailand-based refugee resettlement organization in 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 seven months in the United States, Teh Reh was sick and unemployed. During these months, he studied English at home by watching videos of English lessons that included basic-English conversation and job interview drills. Sue, a 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. Completing these tasks, he used public transportation or a bicycle he received from donation. He eventually bought a used car and started working as

an interpreter for International Rescue Committee (IRC), an interpreting service called Language Line, and local hotels, where he helped with orientation for newly hired employees from Burma and Thailand.

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 been going to school since she was eight years old. However, her education was always interrupted by events of the war:

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.

Loh Meh added, "everyone in my village ran away. They will hurt us if we don't run. If we leave our houses, clothes, food, pot and pan, they will burn...they burn everything." 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 as she stated,

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. Everyday in the jungle, I hear the shooting ... everyday.

After the terrifying border-crossing experiences, her group arrived in Thailand's border and had started 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, as she described:

LOTS of Burmese 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...

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 among the numerous ethnic groups living in the Karenni State and the refugee camp. When Loh Meh was eighteen, she finished what she called Pratom eight (secondary school), in which she added, “เป็นครูได้ [it's enough to be a teacher]” according to her experiences in the Karenni school system. After completing Pratom eight, 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.

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 and her American store manager and customers in English. 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 United States 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 แล้วยังพอมามาทำร้ายอะไรแบบนี้ค่ะ แต่ว่าหนู ตั้งแต่หนูอยู่ Refugee Camp ไม่เจออะไร

[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 six 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 was nine years old, she was sent out to stay with her grandparents, who lived in a Thai village outside of the refugee camp. After having lived only for a few months at her grandparents' house, 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 of the refugee camp and to attend a Thai local school had been a major turn in 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, would pay for food and other needed supplies. See Meh said that some girls had the opportunity to meet their sponsors because the sponsors would sometimes visit from Finland. See Meh was provided sponsorship by a Finnish family whom she had never met, but would send a card to at Christmas during her stay at the dorm. She wrote greeting cards in Thai as she explained,

แล้ว ก็มีคนฟินแลนด์ที่เค้ามาอยู่เมืองไทยนานๆ แล้วค่ะ คนที่แบบ 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 U.S., See Meh followed them. In the United States, 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 that 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 AIMS⁵ 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 4 English (Advanced) and History to

⁵ Arizona's Instrument to Measure Standards, or AIMS, is a standardized test administered by the state of Arizona. The AIMS test includes four content areas: writing, reading, mathematics, and science. The reading and mathematics content areas are administered in all grades. To graduate from an Arizona public high school, a student must meet the AIMS High School Graduation Requirement. The most common way to meet this requirement is to pass the writing, reading, and mathematics content areas of the AIMS HS test. High school students have multiple opportunities to take and pass these content areas.

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 really good.

On weekdays, See Meh traveled to and from school with about 5 other female Karenni teenagers who lived in the same apartment complex with 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 English Language Development program and in the content classes.

Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee

Unlike their parents and older sister, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee had not enrolled in school prior to coming to the United States. Living with their parents and playing with children their age in the refugee camps, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee acquired Karenni as their primary language, but the twins had limited Karenni literacy and academic language when they arrived in the U.S. at age 5. 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 1st grade while Gu-Gu remained in the 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 1st/2nd grade classroom, where all of the students were English language learners (ELL) enrolled in the English Language Development (ELD) program. The teacher reported that she sometimes did not recognize the physical differences between the two boys, but she knew from their academic performance that one was a faster learner than the other.

Teh Reh's family's space and circumstances

I provide a description of the family's living conditions in the United States to serve as background to draw from in order to analyze how their living conditions help to shape their language and literacy development in both their previously and recently acquired languages. For two years, I witnessed Teh Reh's family move to three different apartments in the United States. 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 major grocery store, called Food City. During their first six months in the United States (March – August 2009), Teh Reh's Family received housing funds from the government so

they did not have difficulties paying rent. However, after the initial six-month period, the resettlement agency required the family to pay their own rent. The housing funds stopped and the resettlement agency tried “to get the families self-sufficient. This family has been in the US at least 5 months now.” The circumstances resulted in financial hardship. The family requested more financial support but the funding was still insufficient. In November 2009, all five family members had to move to a smaller living unit, one-bedroom apartment within the Villa Bonita Apartment Homes to fit their budget. In this one-bedroom unit, two beds were set in the bedroom for Teh Reh, Loh Meh, and See Meh, while the living room served as a communal living space during the day and a bedroom for Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee’s 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 American countries. 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 February, 2010, Ka Paw’s family, originally from Burma, moved in the Villa Bonita Apartment Homes and became Teh Reh’s family’s neighbor. The parents and children of the two families socialized daily. Both Teh Reh’s family and Ka Paw’s family lived at Villa Bonita until the end of 2010. Both families moved to their new apartment, La Frontera (pseudonym), where they paid the same amount of rent for a larger two-bedroom apartment for each family, on December 31st 2010. The new complex is seven miles away from Villa Bonita.

Teh Reh explained that he moved to be closer to the Karenni refugee community and 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 the children had to enroll in a new school, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee in a new elementary school and See Meh in a new high school. The new schools served many refugee children in the Phoenix area. Their movement, even within the same city, shaped 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. For example, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee spent more time playing with friends, either from Karenni or other refugee groups, their own age and See Meh had teenaged friends to do homework and hang out with more often than in the previous neighborhood.

From the entry door of the Teh Reh family's two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment, the living space was on the right, where a worn brown leather couch was located parallel to the window. In the center of the living room between the couch and the TV there was a large bright red and yellow handmade floor mat. On this mat there were children's books (in English), a videogame console, videogames, and DVD movie cases with characters from pop culture such as *Dragon Ball Z*, *Happy Feet*, *Fantastic 4*, *Spiderman* scattered around the area. The space was often used by Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee and became more packed with their friends from the neighborhood in the evening.

On the top shelf of the TV stand were random items. There were some books and English –Burmese dictionaries that Teh Reh and Loh Meh always used

when they needed to look for word meaning or for a reference. At the right corner of the open space stood a round wooden table with a desk lamp on the top. On the table, some paper, workbooks, pencils, crayons, and candy were jumbled around. Sometimes, a black laptop, mostly used by See Meh, was on the table as well. Under the table were backpacks, some paper, and a trash-can. On the white wall there hung a poster of the English alphabet, in both small and capital letters. On the same poster there was a line of Arabic numbers 1-20 on the lower part, in addition to a little blue handprint on the upper left corner with the word “Left” and a little red handprint on the upper right corner with the word “Right.” Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee’s names were hand-written in English in the middle of the poster.

Their space had Asian food items (e.g. canned food, vegetables), appliances, and personal hygiene products (e.g. shampoo, toothpaste) mixed randomly with new items with English labels they just learned to know recently in the United States. For example, in the kitchen and around the wooden dining table, there often were big boxes of Asian instant noodle packages, with Asian and English languages written on the boxes. A clear plastic box with long-grained white rice sat in one corner of the kitchen by the refrigerator. A few cans of “All American” chicken soup are placed with Asian-brand beverages (e.g. strawberry fruit juice, soy drinks, and “Milo” chocolate milk), several colorful snack packages with labels in English, Thai, and other Asian languages, and some bottles filled with a milky orange liquid labeled “Thai Tea”, were placed on the shelf next to the refrigerator. Bottles and jars in different sizes were lined up next to the stove. There were spices (such as turmeric powders, ground chili pepper,

and sesame seeds), sauces, and preserved food (e.g. preserved shrimp paste, vegetables). Such items could be found in Thailand and in the Asian markets around Phoenix making their space filled with a combination of Asian items they were familiar with.

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 they moved from Thailand's refugee camp, Baan Mai Nai Soi, to Villa Bonita Apartment Homes in Phoenix, Arizona. The 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 United States for two main reasons. First, both Ka Paw and Sherry agreed that the children needed a better education than what 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 of the refugee camp while 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 decided to immigrate to the United States with the support of the International Rescue Committee (IRC). Having lived in the United States 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, an American family sponsored Ka Paw's family. They came to visit the family monthly with food and supplies. On occasion they took Kaw Paw's family out to the zoo, a park, or a museum. All of the 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. Sherry and her children often read the Bible and prayed in their free time and at bedtime. All of the family members spent time together in the afternoon when the children returned from school. Doing homework was usually a communal activity in this household. Everyone enjoyed doing homework, reading, and watching TV or a movie (in English or Burmese) as a family.

Ka Paw

Ka Paw was 43 when I first met him. Like Teh Reh's family, Ka Paw, comes from a family of farmers. He was born in a small village that belonged to a native tribe called the "Lai-go" in the Karenni State of Burma. For westerners and neighboring countries, his tribe is known as the long-neck tribe, an indigenous subgroup of Karen, 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 limited 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. Then, he decided to join the Karenni military and experienced fighting throughout his twelve-year service. After his final and most life-threatening fight, he ran away to Thailand, where he lived for fifteen 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 United States, Ka Paw worked as a janitor at a shopping mall in Phoenix, where he worked the night shift five nights a week. He normally took the bus from his apartment around 7 pm to work and returned home around 6-7 am the next morning. He slept during the day. Talking about his life in the United States, he said, “We are comfortable right now” although he and his wife had “many many problems.” They claimed that it was because they “are not education man and woman.” He also mentioned that other problems included not knowing directions (such as to go to a doctor clinic) or how to complete forms in English. He was also puzzled with 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, whom he always turned to when he needed help with errands and documents. In addition, living in the United States 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 was 46 years old and a homemaker when I met her. Like Ka Paw, she was from the Lai-go group in the Karenni State. Although she also spoke Kayan as her primary language, her group's 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 had worked very hard since a very young age growing up in a family of farmers. She helped her parents in the fields and sought firewood in the woods. She was enrolled in school in the Karenni State for seven years, even though she failed and had to be reenrolled 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 thirteen years old because of the Burmese invasion. She stated,

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.

After this event, Sherry decided to relocate to Thailand with a group of Karenni people 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 twenty years before coming to the United States. 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. Such limitations were her main concern.

In the United States, 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 she encountered while living in the United States was that she "cannot get the English to talk... very slowly speaking English." Nevertheless, like Ka Paw, Sherry felt comfortable and happy here in Phoenix, Arizona 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 4, she learned Karenni from the school and her friends. Since she was surrounded by Karenni users in the refugee camp and in the United States (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 United States.

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 host family had given her some CDs of American 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 English Language Development (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 interesting subjects for her to learn from. 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 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 study 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 at Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee’s home. Je Ru was 9 years old and fond of roller blading, drawing superhero characters, folding paper, and playing with English alphabet puzzles. Since March 2011, Ka Paw and Sherry had purchased Je Ru a video game console, so he had another favorite activity, playing video games at home. Similar to Daw, Je Ru was also 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 United States he did not fully become proficient. Since he learned English in the United States and Sherry

and Ka Paw 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 4th grade in a mixed class where the teacher explained that “20 students are bilingual and 5 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.

Ka Paw’s family’s space and circumstances

Each family member’s linguistic background contributes to the multilingual repertoires of Ka Paw’s family. Ka Paw, spoke Kayan as his primary language along with Burmese. Though later Ka Paw became a soldier of the Karenni Army and then resided in the refugee camp where the Karenni people were the biggest group in the camp, he admitted that he was more confident with speaking Burmese. Sherry, on the other hand, had grown up in a Karenni environment with Kayan and Burmese as additional languages. The children, Daw and Je Ru, acquired Burmese, Karenni, and minimal Kayan. Both learned English

in the United States. The parents 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 illustrated,

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).

For the first ten months in Phoenix, Arizona, Ka Paw's family had lived in Villa Bonita Apartment Homes, the same complex with Teh Reh's family. Since December 31, 2010, they 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 apartment. Entering the family's living room, a relatively old brown fabric sectional couch in large floral pattern was located parallel to the window wall and the room's corner. An armchair made of beige fabric sat on one side and a tall lamp on the other side of the couch. A long brown wooden coffee-table with small drawers stood in front of the couch. The area usually served as the family's gathering space for doing

homework and watching TV. At the end of March 2011, when Sherry and Ka Paw bought Je Ru a video game console, the space was used for videogame playing as well.

On the white wall on the right side of the living room there was a photo of Ka Paw. Next to the picture, there was a calendar with a portrait of a middle-aged, tanned, Asian man in long white gown with a gentle smile on his face and a decorated mitre (pastoral headdress) on his head. In the portrait, he stood in front of a white building with a cross on top of the pointed gable. In his left hand he held a metal shepherd staff and his right hand gently touched his chest. The script on the calendar was not a language I was familiar with, but I later learned from the family that it was Kayan, the language used by the Kayan group, or the long neck group.

Opposite to the couch was a two-shelf TV stand, with a black TV on the lower shelf. On the upper shelf stood a 12x12 inch 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. Some red ribbon hung around the frame of this upper shelf. A small side table next to the TV stand had a variety of items on the top. There were some colorful children books, picture dictionary, a big book with title *Call to Faith*, and some old books written in Burmese and Kayan.

In the kitchen, bright, colorful, English letter magnets were randomly placed on the upper part of the white refrigerator. A few inches from the random magnet letters were words spelled out of the letter magnets. I have observed that the magnet letters were rearranged in words or sentences (e.g. “soe reh” and “i love my friend”), 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 alphabet magnets. On the kitchen wall, a daily planner was hung. Each date block was filled with hand-written notes that Sherry used to organize herself. When I asked about the notes, she explained, “What I do, I write down.” The notes were written in red, black, or blue marker in the Burmese language.

Nway Meh’s family: “I came for my children and their future”

I had known Nway Meh’s Family since January 2011 when the Teh Reh and Ka Paw families moved to live at the La Frontera apartment complex. See Meh of Teh Reh’s family introduced to me her Karenni friend, Hla Meh, who also lived at the La Frontera. After talking to her, Hla Meh was 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 funding. Hla Meh explained that her father lived with the family in Phoenix and had worked at a restaurant as a dishwasher since 2009. With eight family members that included five school-aged children, parents, and a grandparent, his 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, Phae, 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 driven by the family's story and was eager to learn to know the family better.

Phae had been 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 family members including Nway Meh (mother), Boe Meh (grandmother), and 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, went 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 United States but added, "I came for my children and their future."

Nway Meh was born in the Karenni state of Burma. She was raised in a family of farmers. 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 Karenni. 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 in Thailand’s refugee camp (Ban Mai Nai Soi), where four more children were born. They were encouraged to move to the United States when they saw many of their refugee friends moving out of the refugee camp in the hope for 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 from 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 during 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 to get lost as she did not know how to

read the signs. If she had errands to do somewhere else, she would go with her friends or neighbors who knew the directions or had a car.

Boe Meh

Boe Meh, Nway Meh's mother-in-law, was in her 70's 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 the children, Phae's brother. Then, Nway Meh, Phae, and three-year-old Hla Meh came next and they reunited in the refugee camp.

In the United States, 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. During time of financial difficulty, every family member earned money whenever they could and even the 70-year-old Boe Meh helped the family 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

Hla Meh was the first person in Nway Meh's family that I met. I met Hla Meh because See Meh (in Teh Reh's family) was her close friend. In Phoenix, See Meh and Hla Meh spent time together after school and on weekends. Hla

Meh told me that she had met See Meh before in the refugee camp and Loh Meh, See Meh's mother, used to be her Burmese instructor (even though See Meh did not remember that she met Hla Meh in the refugee camp). At three years old, she moved to Thailand with her parents and did not have any memory of the border crossing. During the data collection period, Hla Meh was 18 years old. She speaks Karenni as her primary language and has a high level of Burmese literacy and language proficiency. Being the oldest sister 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, music videos (varied languages), and online chat rooms.

At school, Hal 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 4-hour ELD. As mentioned earlier, Hla Meh was looking for a job when her father went to Iowa. 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. Loh Meh's husband, Teh Reh, helped Hla Meh 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 she was not confident in using English during the 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 that Hla Meh, his older sister, was enrolled. Although he went to school in the refugee camp, he rarely took Burmese there. This brought about his limited Burmese proficiency, which was different from 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 a Karenni-English dictionary while there was a Burmese-English dictionary for his sister and Burmese-speaking classmates to help them look for meaning of new vocabulary, especially for writing.

Out of school, Saw Reh participated in a local soccer team that consisted of players from different Asian national origins such as Karen, Vietnam and Korea for two years. He told me that he used English with his teammates and his American 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 the karaoke DVDs.

Sha Reh

Sha Reh was a 12-year-old and was enrolled in 7th grade. In addition to speaking Karenni as his primary language, he 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. With friends, he also loved to play soccer with them both in the field and in the virtual world of the videogames. He told sometimes 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 United States, it reminded of playing soccer in the refugee camp and it 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 in 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, bike, 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 enrolled in a mixed 1st-2nd 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 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. 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. Since August 2010, Eh Reh started attending kindergarten in the United States. His class was a mixed class, where 5 students spoke English as their primary language and 21 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 learn to be familiar with. For example, he had to learn how to use the school’s bathrooms shared by many students and did not take a nap in the afternoon even though he looked like he needed to. Fortunately, in his first semester, Eh Reh had built strong friendship with a Karenni classmate, who always talked and guided Eh Reh in doing things. According to Ms. Moradi, it was a little sad for Eh Reh when the friend moved out of town at the end of the first semester. Nevertheless, Ms. Moradi was positive and said that it might be good for Eh Reh because he now 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 (e.g. Toh Reh). 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 Hla Meh's laptop.

Nway Meh's family's space and circumstances

Since all of the eight family members in Nway Meh's family had arrived in the United States, they lived in a two-bedroom apartment at La Frontera in Phoenix, Arizona, except when the father of all the children moved to Iowa in January 2011. In addition to the aide they received from the Arizona Department of Economic Security, Catholic charities worked with them during their resettlement and had provided them food and supplies. Entering Nway Meh family's apartment for the first time, I was surprised that the family had two televisions placed on different TV stands located side by side. While one was showing a local American channel featuring a Peter Pan film with very quiet sound, the other one was turned loud featuring hip-hop karaoke, in a language I did not understand. Around the TVs were random things: plastic bags filled with stuff, some paper, photographs, watches, and videogame boxes.

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, Nway Meh said that having two televisions helped her keep all of the children, especially the younger ones, in the same place.

Posters of Karenni and Burmese actors and singers (as Hla Meh and Saw Reh told me) were hung on the wall of the living area. There were also family photos placed randomly as the decoration. Among those photos, Toh Reh's photo was on a certificate-like paper with the phrase, "Student of the Month" followed by his name. Nway Meh told me that Toh Reh received it from his teacher. Only two feet away from the television stand was a couch along the wall, where Grandma usually sat. Another couch was placed next to it and had a long coffee table in the front. 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.

Nway Meh's family also owned a laptop that was usually used by Hla Meh. However, everyone used it now and then with Hla Meh's permission as she had set a password to log on the laptop. When Toh Reh and Eh Reh, especially, wanted to use it, Hla Meh was in charge in setting up the laptop for them and allowing them to use and view only the programs and websites she thought were appropriate for her brothers.

Summary

In this chapter, I introduced the sixteen participants (from three Karenni families) who participated in the present study. The background provided in this chapter informs the findings discussed in the two data analysis chapters that

follow. All of the Karenni refugees that participated in this study resided in Thailand's Ban Mai Nai Soi refugee camp before coming to Phoenix, Arizona. All three families had similar reasons for moving to the United States—to create and improve opportunities available to their children. I described their physical spaces and living circumstances to sketch the way they lived in Phoenix, Arizona and to introduce their language and literacy background and resources. The background information highlights the participants' rich and varied language and literacy repertoires. In the next three chapters, I explore how such repertoires were impacted by movement, processes of immigration, and socio-historical factors.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF ENGLISH IN THE KARENNI COMMUNITY:

A PROBLEM OR A RESOURCE?

In this chapter, I analyze my participants' talk about English and their practices derived from the ideologies of language that privilege English in order to understand contradictions as well as commonalities of what they said (during conversations and interviews) and what they did (while I was observing).

Although I initially approached the research site to explore how the three Karenni families relied on accumulated and multilingual literacies to manage the challenges of moving across national contexts, it is undeniable that English was valued and prioritized by these family members and by the communities in which they lived. One reason given for valuing English was that it is a language of power that carries with its greater local prestige and greater influence over others. The circumstances bring about the belief that English is a source of income and pride. For example, in the Karenni community, and possibly other immigrant communities, individuals with more English proficiency were respected by the community, sought after, and relied on by those who cannot. Conversely, stay-at-home parents and elderly with minimal or no English proficiency had limited access to the community outside the Karenni group.

The findings in this chapter present the experiences and priorities of these recently arrived Karenni immigrants, as recounted to me during interviews, with a focus on the role of English and English learning in those experiences and major concerns. With particular attention to what is said about English, how English is

used, and the consequences of that use, I examine ideologies of language that prioritize English. I examine such ideologies in relation to the language and literacy practices of the participants by dividing them in two groups, the Karenni adults and Karenni children. In this chapter, I also show that English proficiency and literacy are greatly influenced by generational factors, including one's age of arrival in the U.S. I reflect on the Karenni participants' talk and practice to examine the role that English has in these migrants' lives in their current receiving country by viewing on ideologies of English and how they differ by generation, adults and children. I describe how the high prestige of English in the larger society influences relationships between the belief about English and the practices carried out by the Karenni participants in my study.

In the testimonies of the Karenni adults that I interviewed, not knowing English was portrayed as something that created problems and difficulties for individuals and for the Karenni community in general. Most of the adult participants stated frequently that they had problems in everyday living because they knew "no English." They felt high pressure from government agencies and from influential individuals in the surrounding community to become self-sufficient and to get a job as soon as possible. This often-stated goal echoes the policies of refugee resettlement agencies and the U.S. government. As a result, the refugee adults in this study placed a high value on the English language. They wanted to learn it and use it in large part because they discovered through first-hand experience that their limited English proficiency obstructed them not only from completing necessary tasks in daily life but, also, from getting a "good" job

that came with a “good” pay. In addition, many parents did not have the necessary English proficiency to assist their children when they were completing school assignments. The parents had difficulties in discussing with the teachers in English about their children’s academic performance at school.

All of the Karenni children in the study had enrolled in Phoenix’ local schools and been required to enroll in English Language Development (ELD) programs since the very beginning of their resettlement in the United States. On the research site out-of- school, I explored the children’s practices, which demonstrated that their English proficiency was a resource for making connections, socializing, and playing in the neighborhood. In the following sections, I present the ideologies of English elicited from the adult group, followed by those of the children group and their findings. The analysis reveals insight the ideologies of language that value English and complicated factors among the recently-arrived group that is new to the United States.

“Everyday We Have Problems”: The Role of English in the Lives of Karenni Parents

In this section, I examine the talk of Karenni adults in order to understand their views about learning and using English. I document and analyze the different literacy practices I observed and witnessed. By examining language and literacy practices, in relation to participants’ talk about those language and literacy practices, I am able to identify language ideologies. I describe how the power and prestige afforded English speakers contributes to the difficulties experienced by those who are not proficient in it. While recounting their stories

related to English and their experiences learning English, in both informal conversations and scheduled interviews, participants reflected on the role of English in their lives and the relationship between limited English proficiency and everyday problems. Many participants admitted that limited English proficiency challenged the opportunity to fulfill their goals, and access material goods and resources, which influenced their overall well-being and quality of life in the United States.

Due to their lack of English proficiency, some participants faced a variety of obstacles. On different occasions, for instance, I was asked by my Karenni participants and their friends for advice and assistance on a range of issues from something as simple as asking for directions to complicated matters such as how to get married and obtain a birth certificate for a newborn baby in the United States. Once in a while, I was also asked to give a ride, call an internet provider, or contact a car insurance company, a moving-truck company, or a medical clinic to help get the services they needed. Such requests were made when participants did not feel as if they could communicate their needs in high-stakes situations as Ka Paw always said to me with exasperation, “Me, Little English!”

While collecting testimonies and observing practices, I understood the value that participants placed on being able to communicate in English. I was told that speaking English was needed to create 1) voice, or one’s opportunity to express opinions and needs and 2) access to a good job, economic opportunities, and a variety of resources. I will describe instances of this and analyze the ideologies of language inherent in them. Within the framework of English

ideologies, where limited English proficiency is often considered a problem, I carried out face-to-face and written encounters to demonstrate how the participants treated and reacted to the two modes of communication in English. Although I describe the participants' challenges in a variety of settings and how the participants reflected on those challenges, I also address their skillful strategies "to deal" with their individual obstacles by the utilization of available resources.

Face-to-face encounters

While one could live in the apartment complex with the Karenni language alone, meeting and communicating with the American locals and authorities was unavoidable, especially at work and with the local service agents, institutional personnel, who provided the services the participants needed. The participants had to perform multiple tasks such as daily interaction, making an appointment, talking to an auto insurance agent, talking to a doctor, and for some participants, communicating at the court or a law enforcement officer. Those who could go back and forth between the Karenni community and the larger community (e.g. with the English-speaking American locals) and being able to use both the ethnic languages and the English language to complete these tasks were highly valued while those who could not were believed to have lots of difficulties. Loh Meh described the dilemma:

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!

Based on the participants' stories, hardship, and practices that I witnessed, I have gained more understanding that lack of English proficiency means that they had limited opportunities to express their opinions, concerns, and needs in English to the locals and authorities they were required to encounter. For the remainder of this section, I describe these encounters and participants' insights about them. I examine how an outsider status might be constructed from one's limited English proficiency. I also analyze the participants' experiences when they had trouble communicating with the authorities. Finally, I describe the Karenni parents' challenge in communicating with the children's teachers.

“You live in America, you don't speak English, NOT GOOD!”

Loh Meh had experiences in her new workplace that illustrated local attitudes towards English and towards speakers of languages other than English. Loh Meh got a job immediately after moving to Arizona with the support of a non-profit refugee resettlement organization. She worked at a franchise discount store, called 99 Cent Only, and her job was as she put it “[to] make the line beautiful.” During my weekly visits to her home, Loh Meh asked me many times to explain the meanings of words she heard from customers at the store. For example, she wondered what baby shower, conditioner, and lotion meant. Loh Meh told me that she was able to stock shelves and arrange merchandise on the shelves, but not because she understood English. Instead, she used her matching skills and visual memory of packages' shapes, colors, pictures, and letters to put things where they belonged. She said she would like to improve her English to be able to communicate with the customers, and that she knew from experience that

“English IMPORTANT!” She was disappointed that, because of her limited ability to speak English, she frequently let the customers down by simply answering, “I don’t know” and she had learned that it was not the response that customers expected. On one occasion, she recounted how her lack of understanding prevented her from providing good service to a customer, and the response of that customer:

Loh Meh: Some people, uh, English ...uh... one day Many, MAny come to the store shopping, they shopping, come to the store. But, he ask what...the shampoo, uh, ask the, uh, lotion..., lotion, condition-conditioner...Yeah, anything, sometime I don’t know, [and I say] “Oh, Sorry, I don’t the...know anything, I don’t know the name.” Sometime, they come to ask me. Some, anything I know, some anything, I don’t know. [For] Good English [speaker] I show him, I told him, “Help me, help me!” He show me this one uh...here, this one, uh...that, he learning... he learning me.

Me: Teaching you?

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!

Me: 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!”

After she shared that experience, I asked Loh Meh to tell me what she would do if it happened again. When thinking about how she might respond to future customers’ requests for information, Loh Meh indicated a willingness and desire to continue trying to speak English with an expectation that an English speaker would help her:

Many people here GOOD! United States English [people] is 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.

At the same time, she seemed to feel pressure from those who discouraged her by saying that she should not live or work here in the United States without English. Here we see that Loh Meh recognizes the limitations of her outsider status when American locals position her as a newcomer in the American community. The above situation did not end with a good result as both Loh Meh and the American locals were disappointed with the outcome. Loh Meh felt bad that she could not do her job because of the language barrier. However, we also see that her conversation demonstrates her hope to become better at English and will be able to communicate with the customers as she stated, “maybe two years, next year, I know.” Due to her determination to be better at English, Loh Meh had taken 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.

Loh Meh is a representative of newcomers who would like to improve their English proficiency not only because they realize its importance but also because of the pressure they feel to assimilate from the local community in the United States. The perception that the English speakers exaggerate her status as "Other" or "outsider" in the host country because they connect membership in the community with the "ability to speak English." This, again, reinforces the ideology of English that influences the way Loh Meh has an image of her future self. The image influences her goals for the future, and her desire to speak English in order to become a member of the English speaking society.

After a few months of working at the store, however, Loh Meh became less disappointed and more content with her progressing English competence. In formal interviews and informal conversations between January and May 2011, after she had been in the U.S. for about 18 months, Loh Meh occasionally expressed her pride that she was able to better understand English and to work more efficiently than the year before. When asked if she had any problems at work (in 2011), she replied, "Before, it's problem... last year I cannot speak uh I cannot speak English well. It's problem. But, right now, no problem for me." She seemed more satisfied with her progress in English and felt that it improved her effectiveness at work and contributed to her happiness:

Loh Meh: Easy to work. Before, I, I work, very VERY difficult. I don't know, I don't know anything name, the store, anything... how to

use, how to do anything in the store, any... I don't know. Right now... uh...

Me: right now, very good?

Loh Meh: ri-right now, easy, easy for me. Another one, another one, anything how to use, for the kit-, for the kitchen clean, for the, kitchen plate, some people ask for the paper towel, for the school [stuff], uh...shower cap, uh, go to, for the car, for the dogfood, food, I, anything I know what are you looking for. Everyday, I know. Some people, they doing five years four years...no... they don't know. They don't know this shampoo, they don't know that. All...they ask me, "Excuse me, which one, where- where..." [and I say],"Oh, number three (number of the aisle), ah, number two", I ALways tell my friend. I always train [people from] Burma... Some people not so good brain, no.

Loh Meh's statement emphasizes the prestige of English in the local community and in her view. As seen in the excerpt, Loh Meh compares herself at the time of the interview (as a competent worker with the English knowledge for her work) to her past self (as a worker with problems and difficulties). In addition, she compared herself with her colleagues, who had not achieved the same level of proficiency, in her opinion. Her English improvement that brought about her content and pride revealed the ideology and the value of English both in her belief and in the community. In addition, her testimony shows that she prioritizes English language learning because she has experienced it directly that English

proficiency does provide access to resources. And with that, she feels happy because she believes she is on her way to become an “insider” of the English-speaking community.

Unlike Loh Meh, limited English proficiency brought about an opposite outcome for Nway Meh. Nway Meh, a mother of five, stayed at home and tried to avoid encountering English speakers. She did not go anywhere except her children’s school and the market. She once told me that she was reluctant to go out alone because she thought she would get lost: “I don’t know where and how to go.” Therefore, she did not have a desire to get a job because she was afraid that she did not know how to get to work or to home. Her days went by with taking care of the children and doing household chores, including cleaning and cooking and entertaining friends.

Asked if she liked living in the United States, Nway Meh replied, “I can’t speak anything, it is not fun. I know nothing.” Speaking of problems living in the United States, she emphasized her limited English proficiency as the cause of all the problems:

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 United States. Nway Meh connected her happiness to the ability to speak English: “If I understand English, I will be more happy.” Despite the fact that she had lived in the U.S. for two years, she was only

comfortable with living in her safe, yet limited space in the apartment complex and only went to a few places in the neighborhood because all of these interactions in the space needed only Karenni. This is very different from the kind of life she lived in the refugee camp (in Thailand) where she had lived for fifteen years. Although living in the refugee camp only allowed her to be inside the fenced area, this seemed to give her more familiarity, security, and freedom to navigate and interact with her neighbors, friends, and surroundings. The U.S. provided her numerous opportunities and was indeed a country that takes pride in protecting freedoms that would theoretically enable its residents' unfettered access across its vast lands. However, she seemed to be fenced in a limited space because she lacked the English language, a tool to claim her place, access, and comfort in the larger community. When Nway Meh needed to go to some places further away from the neighborhood such as a doctor office or a market, she needed a friend who was familiar with the direction to accompany her since she could not ask anyone else in English. In addition, although she walked her three sons, Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh 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 everyday was their mother.

At the refugee camp in Thailand, she had seen many of her friends leaving the camp to start their new lives in the other countries and she thought that she should leave for a better place as well. In addition to the idea of moving encouraged by her friends, Nway Meh agreed to come here because of her

children: “My children wanted to come. Hla Meh (the oldest daughter) went to put our family on the list... now I want to go back to Thailand but I know I can’t.” She understood that because she was a refugee, she could not go back to live in Thailand again.

Though Loh Meh and Nway Meh faced similar challenge with accessing local communities of practice and being accepted by the larger community, they dealt with those challenges differently. Loh Meh chose to move forward to progress her English and work skills. Nway Meh, on the other hand, solved the problem by avoiding interactions with the English-speaking locals and by limiting her space to where she could use Karenni to navigate. Nevertheless, in both cases, English is considered an entrance to resources and acceptance in this English-dominant society.

“None of them are valid here”

When Teh Reh was unemployed, he was responsible for household chores and errands as well as taking care of all three children that included six-year-old twin boys who went to a kindergarten at the time. Not having a car caused inconvenience for Teh Reh. Later, after he accepted a job offer that needed a car to commute, he wanted a car even more. Because they did not have a car, Loh Meh had to ride the bus very late at night on the way back home and they did not feel it was safe for her. In addition, in order to carry everything they needed from the store located around three blocks away, all family members, including the twin boys, walked together to the store from the apartment complex. Often, they

had to put all of their groceries in the store's shopping cart and bring the cart home.

Teh Reh told me that he drove a truck in Thailand, both inside and outside the refugee camp for his small business, so he was confident that he could drive in the U.S. He asked me how he might get a driver's license. However, after getting in a serious car accident, he was less confident about his ability to reach this goal. After the accident that took place around 6 pm on Saturday, October 17, 2009, Teh Reh called me and explained what happened and then asked (with a frustrating tone), "Can you help me? Can you come to the corner of Twenty-Eighth and Indian School streets?" 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. In one call, he told me that the police were with him but he needed an interpreter to describe the situation and discuss with the police officer.

After I arrived, Teh Reh explained that the accident had involved a truck and his friend's car. 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 gone when I arrived. Teh Reh and his friend showed me a piece of paper and, together, they explained to me what was on the paper. On the top line of the paper, they explained that the police indicated the report number and something about the insurance company. I returned the paper with report number (police report) back to his friend. He grabbed and kept it in an insurance-company-stamped envelope he was holding.

There was a police car parked about ten feet away. I went to introduce myself to the police officer sitting in the car, writing. 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 other car 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 permanent 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 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 case. 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.

That afternoon, Teh Reh was overwhelmed with the accident that just happened. After his friend left, he expressed his concern about the processes he had to go through, especially how to find and contact a defensive driving school and how to communicate in the court. He also requested, "Can you explain to my

wife about this?” So, I accompanied him to his home. “My wife is worried”, he said quietly and added that he did not know what to do and how to inform his wife about the situation. I learned from the accident that Teh Reh’s language barrier, the limited knowledge he had of local traffic laws, and the consequences of the accident all reinforced his fear and frustration.

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.

The accident and his efforts to deal with it aggravated and emphasized the more regular struggles he encountered in everyday life because of his lack of English language proficiency.

Teh Reh’s experience is an illustration of newcomers trying to navigate in the new context. His experiences show the language learning processes that involve stress, frustration, disappointment, and communication breakdowns. At one point, Teh Reh told me that none of his four proficient languages have value here. Because he knows those four languages that are not valid and functional as he experienced it first hand when encountering the law enforcement, he feels that he has no place here.

Witnessing such experiences and difficulties, I have learned that studying a language from textbooks and dictionary, as Teh Reh had done, and practicing it at home is not enough. Teh Reh's effort to learn English by himself at home did not help him correspond with the police officer. Likewise, being able to drive in Thailand was not similar to how things work here. His situation demonstrates that a language has to be learned and associated with local social norms, semiotic systems, and involved audiences in order to communicate in and understand a certain situation. Teh Reh must understand more than the meanings of English words in order to interact appropriately in the situation.

Teh Reh was less discouraged after he went to the defensive-driving school recommended by his Burmese friend who knew of a school where one of the representatives was Burmese. Teh Reh, then, went to court one month after the accident with all of the paperwork but without an interpreter accompanying him (no volunteer staff from the refugee resettlement organization was available to assist him). He told me (while laughing) that when the judge saw him with the ID card and the paperwork, he asked, "Is this your first time?" and "Are you a refugee?" After Teh Reh nodded in response to both questions, the judge let him go back home and did not require that he pay the fees associated with the ticket. In 2010, Teh Reh bought a cheap used car from a used-car dealer located close to the U.S.-Mexican border. He gradually gained confidence with his ability to drive in Phoenix but he received a traffic ticket occasionally due to parking citations that were a new concept for him. This was because he had to learn the new system

of traffic signs, surroundings, symbols, paint on curbs, and parking meter. For his peace of mind, he paid full-coverage car insurance every month.

Another refugee, Boe Meh, was not as lucky as Teh Reh. In her case, support services became unavailable for her because of the fixed identity on her refugee card. Recording one's date of birth was not a common practice in the Karenni state. Many Karenni refugees, especially the parent and grandparent generations and the children born before the family moved to Thailand, have their current birthday record as January 1st on their ID (that follows the UN record issued in the refugee camps), with the "estimated" year of their birth. As Boe Meh said,

some families record 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 information on official records and documents. For instance, when Boe Meh applied for services in the United States, 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 her real birthday and she had to accept what was reported 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 50s. Unfortunately, because the services were for senior citizens over 60 years old, she did not qualify.

I later learned that, during the interview with the authorities and the refugee agencies prior to coming to the U.S., the family did not fully understand the interviews. They could not explain the problems to the authorities in English, Burmese, and anything in the documents. In fact, they did not foresee what was waiting for them in the host country or how to “deal” with it. When I was introduced to the family, Boe Meh had not received any services from the Area Agency on Aging, though the family had been in the United States for two 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 fight for her benefits. They were not able to make an argument in English and in the way that the authorities would comprehend. Instead, they need 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 supports 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 emphasize 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 whom to talk to, how to start the process for Boe Meh, and what to say to those support agents. I called the Area Agency on Aging a couple of times in hopes that the issue could be resolved but was told that I had to discuss the issue only 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 is the expected language for creating official documents and for the legal process not only in the American society but also in the international context. As we see, this family's lack of English language proficiency while living in Thailand had profound consequences, even before they emigrated to the U.S. As for this case, I have learned to know that flaws in the document can be caused at the moment of creation due to language barriers that bring about misunderstanding when speakers of different languages encounter. And for this family, without English proficiency, their "voice" is silenced and access to the benefit is not granted whereas 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 can later achieve a high level of English proficiency to recall the issue, I am uncertain about the resolution of the obstacle because the "already-made" legal documentation and ID issued by the reliable authorities holds a lot of weight.

"I don't know how to talk to the teacher"

All of the Karenni adults in my study told me that they decided to come to the United States for their children's "quality education," and they were eager to know how well their children did at school. Based on the data from both

observations and interviews with the Karenni parents, I learned that a lack of English proficiency among the Karenni parents limited their ability to communicate with teachers at school and to be informed about the children's grades and academic performance. During an interview with Sherry and Ka Paw about their life in the United States, Sherry (the mother in Ka Paw's family) 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 limited proficiency in and understanding of English made her reluctant to meet and discuss these concerns with her children's teacher. She said, "I don't know what to say." Although Sherry seemed to believe that her children's education was very important, she was extremely intimidated by the idea of speaking English with the children's teachers. In March 2011, the middle of Je Ru's first semester at his current school, Sherry received an invitation from Je Ru's 4th-grade teacher to a parent/student lunch with the teacher on one Friday as an informal gathering. I translated the invitation to Sherry and encouraged her to attend as it was a first 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 the event because she was uncomfortable to be in the English-speaking environment at school. While Sherry felt at ease to do 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. This example shows that building connections with parents and communities requires more than bilingual

invitations to school-sponsored events. It is important to create comfortable environments for parents, who are eager to know how their children are doing at school.

To avoid the intimidating encounter with the teachers but to fulfill her need to know more about her children's academic performance, she helped her children with their homework in the evenings. Indeed, doing homework became a communal activity in the family. Both parents, Ka Paw and Sherry, utilized this practice as a way to catch up what their children learned. When I was assisting Je Ru and Daw to do their homework, Sherry and Ka Paw always sat on the side and followed the instruction I used with their children. Sherry and Ka Paw always checked with their children in their Karenni and Burmese if they understood the content. I observed that Sherry and Ka Paw enjoyed the tutoring session, particularly when I explained to them that a school assignment needed their assistance and that they could join in the activity to catch up with their children. Ka Paw, who worked the night shift and tried to sleep during the day, often caught up with his family during homework time in the evenings.

Again, Sherry and Ka Paw's practice reveal their belief in the high prestige of English. While limited English proficiency hinders them to participate in an English-speaking environment such as at school, they show their effort to learn more about their children's works. Even though they may seem "absent" and "voiceless" in the institutional encounter, their practice presents their effort to "access" an arena where English is prioritized. In fact, their practices and strategies show how intensely they are concerned with their children's learning in

the United States. Based on their testimonies, their lack of English proficiency did not prevent them from keeping up with their children's academic performance or receiving important information from their children's teachers. Indirectly and silently, they maintained communication about topics they really cared about.

The challenges faced by the Karenni adults emphasize the prioritized status of English. They experienced difficulties when encountering face-to-face communications where English was required. The difficulty in communication strengthened their belief that it was caused by limited English proficiency. To overcome this challenge, these adults carry out a variety of strategies. Some navigated only for survival needs. For example, Nway Meh could manage things around the house and within the neighborhood; she tried to avoid the settings where English was required. On the contrary, the other participants such as Loh Meh tried to gain more access to resources by practicing the language either at home, work, or an ESL class available in the community. Others, like Sherry and Ka Paw, were indirectly informed about their children's academic performance by joining them in their homework tutoring session. In all cases, limited English proficiency greatly influenced their daily problems and encounters with the locals.

“We don't know how to read”

Apart from certain face-to-face encounters with the locals and authorities outside of the Karenni community, dealing with documents and paperwork written in 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 newspaper, auto insurance company, schools, the International Rescue Committee (IRC), and the U.S. government. Often, I had to decide for the participants what mail to throw away or to respond to last and what matters required immediate action (e.g. traffic tickets).

The participants' abilities to comprehend and interact with these written texts depended on their proficiency and literacy in English. While some texts were quite simple and self-explanatory, others required more contextually complex and specific terms in order to sort documents into categories and priorities. It was challenging for them to interpret the meaning of legal or institutional forms such as applications for food stamps (aka "food stamp paper"⁶), an application for support services, and police reports to secure their safety and benefits in this country. Reading these texts was frustrating for all of the participants. As Sherry once stated, "The main problem is that we don't know how to read any document. That's really a problem." In addition, the Karenni adults in Teh Reh's and Ka Paw's families who used a dictionary shared their upset feeling sometimes when using a dictionary, which was the tool they thought it would be helpful. They said, "One English word, many Burmese words" to emphasize the problem they had with finding the right Burmese word to use. In the next section, I elaborate on the challenges that participants faced when they were unable to read English written texts. In addition to the practices that the

⁶ The form is "Application for AHCCC Health Insurance, Cash Assistance/Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, Nutrition Assistance Benefits, and Tuberculosis Benefits", created by Arizona Department of Economic Security.

participants utilized to overcome the challenges are presented in these examples, the hierarchical order of literacy will be identified as it has been constructed in the community through the analysis of these participants' perspectives on the literacy required in different domains. Within this hierarchy, the participants connected English literacy, especially the "challenging" form of it, with accessing education and good job.

"I look, I see, I like it, I buy it"

A critical problem faced by all of the six adult participants in my study 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 successfully identified shampoo, hair conditioner, soap, shower gel, facial soap, shaving cream, hand soap, and lotion in a variety of brands, sizes, packages, and colors. She said she had received these items from the refugee resettlement agency and from a local church, but she did not know which one was used for what purpose because she did not understand their labels. The limited knowledge of the words on the labels limited her ability to use them for their intended purpose. When needing any of hygienic items, Loh Meh traveled to an Asian store located on the other side of town that took time and energy to travel in order to get the brand she was familiar. Her bathroom had only those items with Thai or Burmese brands.

Loh Meh also told me that choosing what to buy in the grocery store was challenging because the label was not understandable for her. During the first few months of living in Phoenix, she went to Food City because it was only three

blocks away from her apartment complex and she did not know where any of the Asian stores were located. At Food City, she 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 English 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 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 Walgreens' pharmacy, he told me that though he did not understand what the pharmacist said about the medicine, he just smiled. He hoped that he could decode the texts 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, and if the medicine could be refilled.

Although Nway Meh had limited writing and reading skills even in her own language, Karenni, Nway Meh was a little bit luckier in that she had moved in the apartment complex that consisted of more than twenty Karenni families since the very beginning of the resettlement. 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 CVS 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 to use them.

Sherry, the mother of two who was married to Ka Paw, had a different strategy while purchasing food and household stuff. She explained to me in a simple way, “I look, I see, I like it, I buy it (laughing).” To start her experiment in selecting food, snacks, and supplies, she bought the similar item but in two or three brands (with English labels) to try them all so she knew what she and her

family liked the most and would buy the only ones they liked later on. She sometimes offered me some of those packages by saying, “If you like it, have it” or “If you like it, I give it to you” and by that she meant I could take the whole bag home. Sherry said it with a little explanation, “My children don’t like it.” As I could see, the packages were almost full and I understood that this happened as a result of her experiment.

For these newcomers with limited English proficiency, being unable to access their necessary supplies because they do not understand the written labels confirms their belief that English is extremely valued here. Being unable to understand it can either encourage the immigrants to learn English so that they can live comfortably or exaggerate the obstacles in living here. Based on the data, however, the Karenni adults utilized resources in a sophisticated way and incorporate their strategies to “read” these labels and to “communicate” their desire, such as by guessing, making use of visual features such as letters, gestures, and pictures, previous experiences, and inquiring others. These strategies were carried out to navigate in the new context where English for them was a key as well as a puzzle.

“Right now, I cannot do that much”

Apart from reading written texts on the product labels for their daily living supplies, a more complex form 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 contain high-stakes information and require 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 them benefits and resources they needed. I experienced these needs both from the documents and the participants' circumstances. For example, Nway Meh, whose husband lived in 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 and institutional mode was ranked more highly whereas the oral and informal written modes were ranked lower. For instance, although Loh Meh had acquired English needed in the workplace to contently answer her customers and to direct them to the product they were looking for in the store, English use in the other domains were still challenging for her. Documents from her children' school and homework were Loh Meh's important and respectful resources because she had high expectation education and her

children academic performance was her priority. Every evening before she went to work at 5:30 PM, she opened her twin sons' backpack 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 homework and 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 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 her concern about how well the children did in school. She admitted that, more often than not, she did not understand the words on the worksheet. As she was checking what the children were learning, she was also checking if there was something she understood and 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 her sons that they had homework and needed to finish it. If there were letters from school in which she highly cared about, she would ask me, her husband, or her oldest daughter to translate it for her as she prioritized and wanted to know those messages. The other types of documents from school were grade reports and flyers (e.g. school events, book/clothes drives). Both of them were challenging for Loh Meh and I had to explain each one to her when she received them sometimes.

In addition to documents from her children's schools, a writing task such as filling out legal forms in English that requires comprehension to specific technical terms and writing skills was extremely new to Loh Meh. The limited skill 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 the 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 United States.

The ability for recently arrived refugees to read and fill out legal forms was complicated by contextual and cultural influences that were unfamiliar. 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 hopes that his friends he met on that day would be able to translate the documents to him. Then, he would understand what he was supposed to do with them. At home, Teh Reh often used English-Burmese dictionary and picture dictionary that he brought from Thailand to look for word meanings and to make a comprehension of English in the letters and documents around him.

When we met, Teh Reh asked me for help. Although he knew that the letters he received were important because he recognized symbols and brands of

those institutions, 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 of date written numerically and in American English style that goes by month/day/year. In several countries and languages, date is written with “day/month/year” order and/or spelled out the month. This may cause misinterpretation and communication failure. In this particular case, Teh Reh missed a Hearing appointment on his benefits because he did not understand that the number “9” positioned in the month section of the American date abbreviation stands for September.

The misunderstanding of the date in the appointment letter led us to look at the other correspondence and bills that required a prompt response from Teh Reh. Even though Teh Reh wanted to pay bills on time, he did not know the correct way to pay the bills and this 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, I helped him write out money orders, payment slips, and envelopes to pay other bills.

Teh Reh’s experiences highlight the need for newcomers to comprehend both language and socio-cultural norms in order to read, understand, and prepare correspondence in response to important letters and documents. In this case, the challenge of overcoming limited English proficiencies is not sufficient in and of itself. In other words, even though Teh Reh understood the basics and made progress with learning to read and write, he was still picking up the cultural nuances such as to be able to understand difficult abbreviations, to interpret the

intended message 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. While he sought clarification, he was penalized in the form of late fees added onto the original billing statement. Because of his multiple difficulties in doing errands that required reading and writing English competence, he was very cautious about completing paperwork. When his daughter, See Meh, brought back a letter from school to request his permission to let her take summer classes, he read the letter carefully to make sure that he understood the content. The daughter asked him to quickly sign but he responded, “I have to read first. I can’t just sign” as he truly understands that misinterpretation might cause a problem.

With the real-life challenges he encountered, Teh Reh later communicated and repeated the similar message frequently during our informal conversation, including three formal interviews between January and May 2011. Teh Reh said that he learned to have what he called “ambition” to be able to read the English language. Teh Reh concluded that the fundamental priority to solve all of the problems was to learn English:

We have problems. There’s a problem. It’s in our community, Karenni group. There’s a problem. Sometime they receive the DES⁷ letter, and need to renew, they don’t know how to read... They need to know the American government policies and stuff. Before [that], they need to know...it’s very very important to learn English because they don’t know

⁷ DES= Department of Economic Security

how to read and write English. That's the main problem. Those families, after they know how to read and write English, it's easy to learn the policies of America, of the United States.

After facing challenges during his resettlement such as being involved in a car accident, receiving traffic tickets, and missing various appointments, not to mention learning of his Karenni fellows' difficulties, Teh Reh has arrived at the conclusion that knowing how things work here is the fundamental basis to living here without problems. He emphasizes in the excerpt that knowing the receiving nation's policies and rules are priorities. But, again, to accomplish those specific priorities, he and his cohorts have to be able to read and write English. Teh Reh's expression reveals and reemphasizes the language ideologies he has increasingly learned from the receiving context and its dominant language, the United States and the English language, respectively. He believed that English was the key that holds the information he and his fellows need to attain and comprehend. He also seemed to understand that not knowing "how to read and write English" compounds existing difficulties.

In addition to the high status of English, English literacy level had been connected to socio-economic status and employment. With the vertical hierarchy of literacy and English proficiency, Loh Meh and Teh Reh linked English proficiency and literacy to potential job opportunities. Growing up in a farmer's family, Loh Meh had a dream to go to school and became a teacher because "[teachers look] nice and smart." She went to school in the Karenni State of Burma but did not finish her elementary school level because she was interrupted

by the ethnic-cleansing war in Burma. After arriving in Thailand's refugee camp, Loh Meh continued her education until she finished secondary school and became a part-time teacher of Burmese and Karenni languages to refugee children. She loved being a teacher but she did not think that she could as she said, "I can't be a teacher here. I can't speak English" based on the assumption she drew from difficult experiences in this English- dominant setting.

Teh Reh also connected a good job with a higher level of English literacy as he expressed his career goal as the following:

I don't want to work, cut the meat⁸. I want to work with languages. If I get interpreter's certificate, I can make \$30 an hour.

Teh Reh explained that several Karenni friends worked as a butcher or a dishwasher because they did not know English and added that these jobs were labor-consuming and physically exhausting. His friends expressed their physical pain derived from the jobs but they had to be enduring because they needed money. In addition, their limited English proficiency did not allow them to compete for better jobs. Hoping that he could gain more wages working as an interpreter, Teh Reh explained the process that he had to complete consisting of a 6-week training course culminating in an examination that would provide him certification as a professional interpreter. However, he considered it challenging because the language of instruction, course materials, and the test itself were administered in English. Teh Reh said: "The main language is English. If we don't know the main language, we cannot interpret." Here, we can see that he

⁸ working in a slaughterhouse

believes that he still needs English (in addition to his multilingual repertoires) as he explained that he knew four languages. For this reason, Teh Reh studied hard to pass the test and receive the necessary certificate to fulfill his professional goal. Teh Reh believes the certificate is the key to advancement and will provide better pay as well as a higher socio-economic status.

Expressions from both Teh Reh and Loh Meh show that they understand how the socio-economic hierarchy works in this new context by comparing jobs categorized as labor, in this case, cutting meat, to a job that is associated with “being educated” and “higher level of literacy” such as a teacher or an interpreter. Levels of English language proficiency and literacy constitute and are constituted by ideological forces. In this case, the great divide as explained in Chapter 2 that the oral language and written language are distinct and that literacy (defined as reading and writing) is considered to be in a higher position. And, the participants see themselves struggling with a lower level of literacy because of the perceived hierarchy/ class level. While the adult participants as described in this section have been knowledgeable in adjusting their skills and available resources to achieve their perceived goals, and even though they believed in the elevated status of English language and literacy, they thought it was out of their reach.

Listening to the Karenni adults’ stories and witnessing their practices, I have gained an understanding of “language” as one of the mechanisms that builds “boundaries between minority and majority” (Byram, 1986, p.2) and the establishment of language ideology is observable in “personal relations, face-to-face encounters, and the invidious distinctions of the workplace and residential

neighborhood” (Woolard, 1989, p. 121). According to the data analysis, I also add that language is a divider not only between minority and majority and between social classes, but also within the same class. That is, even though all of the participants in my study are originally from the Karenni state in Burma and hold a refugee status in the United States, they do not receive similar socio-economic opportunities 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. In this Karenni community, the more English proficient one is, the more valued one becomes as he is considered resourceful. This is because he can help others in the community by giving guidance to his fellows on how to do things here or by being an interpreter for his fellows. In addition to providing support, the Karenni refugees who have English competence have more opportunities to better their social status, job, and stipend and to contribute to the larger community.

The data analysis in this section suggests that the adult participants relate limited English proficiency and literacy with problems and timidity while English proficiency and literacy are associated with access and confidence. In addition, the vertical hierarchy of languages, literacies, and socio-economic status has been constructed due to the subscription of language ideologies that value English. All these beliefs are rooted in the dominance of English in their new host country, but were bolstered by the difficulties the participants faced in every aspect of their everyday living because of their limited English proficiency. With the firm beliefs of the high prestige and power of English, they (and many of us) are blinded to

see how much they can do with the hard-earned language and literacies they have acquired through their multiple movements.

The Role of English in the Lives of Karenni Children

In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss the ideologies of language that I found in the Karenni children's talk and behavior. The data analyzed here were collected from participant observation and talk in both interviews and informal conversations. As explained in Chapter 3, I collected three sources of data and triangulated them to elicit language ideologies from the children. First of all, I asked caregivers about the children's language and literacy practices. For example, I asked the parents about what language they used with the children at home or what language used among children that they had witnessed. The second source of data was from participant observations that took place in their home or in the neighborhood. Participants on the observation site varied. Sometimes the children were with their family members and sometimes with neighboring children. In one site, I observed the interactions among the participants to elicit what language was used for what purpose and why. The third source of data was from direct discussion and conversation with the children. Sometimes, they were accompanied with their friends or their family members, or both. When young children were accompanied by their friends (or siblings), I usually learned more because the children were driven by the fun conversation and information exchange with friends in addition to talking with me.

With family members, primary languages were often used by the children participants in the home context, daily conversations, and activities such as

dining, doing household chores, and playing⁹. That is, in Teh Reh's Family and Nway Meh's Family, the parents and their children used Karenni as the primary language used in the households. In Ka Paw's family, Burmese and Karenni were used in the home context. To my surprise, the role of English among children has gradually developed and caught my attention even though the children's primary languages were used extensively in their everyday living and throughout the data collection process. The following data analysis shows that the children value and prioritize English in a variety of circumstances. The analysis explain how the ideologies of English among these children have been developed, how and in what situation they employ English, including the children's perspectives toward the English language and its usage.

“Do you speak English?”

To the younger children in the study, I was an English-speaking person. To Gu-Gu (7) and Ngee-Ngee (7), children of Teh Reh and Loh Meh, I was their English-speaking guest, tutor, and friend. We met in September 2009 when they lived in the previous housing. Whenever Teh Reh and Loh Meh introduced me to other families, they described me as a “sa-ra-mo” (or ‘teacher’ in English). In their new apartment, where they had lived since December 31, 2010, I was often present when Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's new Karenni friends came over to play with them. They often played video games with friends in the living room. On other occasions, other Karenni children (including Toh Reh from Nway Meh's children) brought their homework with them. We had conversations about

⁹ I explain the participants' multilingual strategies and the factors of those strategies in their everyday living in Chapter 6.

homework, school, friends, and technology. We also played hangman, reviewed English vocabulary cards, or read children's books that I borrowed from the library. I believe that they came to me not only for my help with their homework as their parents wanted them to, but also because I could speak English well. Conversations with me provided an opportunity to use English in purposeful ways for meaningful communication. I could speak with them in English and introduce them to activities in which English played a major role.

Since March 2011, three months after having moved into the new apartment, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's friends from the same age group became increasingly more diverse as they were from a range of ethnic groups, such as Burmese, Karen, and African. The intergroup communication that I observed shed light on a new genre of language socialization among these immigrant children in this linguistically and culturally diverse neighborhood. One afternoon, while I was having a conversation with See Meh at the dining table, she stopped talking to me in order to listen to her brothers more carefully and asked if I also heard Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, who were accompanied by their friends in the living room, speaking English. I heard when they said, "Look it! Look it!" and agreed with See Meh. Then, she admitted that this was surprising to her because she hardly heard their use of English in the house. She even said that they never used English with her or with the parents. Later, when I asked Teh Reh, the father of Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee what language he used to communicate with their children, he said that he had witnessed the twins speaking English in the home space but "only

with friends.” He told me he had noticed that they had recently become friends with children from different ethnic groups.

Although I had always spoke English to Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, this was the first time that I noticed their using English within the home space with someone else. This change in their language choice led me to wonder when, how, and why English was employed. Based on the recognition that speakers develop multilingual competence through social practice (Canagarajah, 2009), in this study, I have witnessed Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee and their interethnic friends’ use of English often in the situation of playing, especially when playing a video game¹⁰, where English fulfilled many purposes. First of all, English served as a way to express their personal preferences such as “I like this one (while pointing to an object or a character on the screen)”, “I don’t want that”, and “I like the purple one.” On numerous occasions, they asked their friends and me for our opinions. For example, when they shared their snacks with me, they asked me, “Do you like it?” and they offered more snacks to me if I liked them. These utterances do not only serve as the expression of their preference, but also help to construct and maintain relationship among speakers who are participating in the shared space and activity.

English was also used to make suggestions or requests among young children in the group. For example, while playing at home, the children often said, “Be quiet, man!” to ask their friends to stop talking loud so that they could pay attention to something on the video game or the television. Often, they said “Look

¹⁰ Playing video game among younger children is discussed more in Chapter 7.

it! Look it!” to call for attention. They also often said “My turn!” or “Me, me!” to indicate that it was now their turn to play or to speak. For instance, when I played vocabulary cards with them, we heard such phrases from the player who could name the object on the card received certain scores. In addition, the word “No!!!” was shouted out as an exclamation to express their dissatisfaction with what happened during an activity. These utterances demonstrated the children’s strategic knowledge of how to communicate a variety of opinions, preferences and requests in English. With the English usage, they knew that everyone in the audience would understand and listen to them and their goal may be fulfilled.

The children also used English for exchanging information about everyday issues. The phrase “Only one more left,” for instance, was used to indicate how many remaining energy bars were left (or that the player of a video game still had one life left). “You are the green guy!” was uttered to help another player understand their role while they were playing video games. In addition, the children’s use of English indicated their multifaceted desires and knowledge of directness and indirectness strategies. For example, when they described what happened in the virtual world of the video game they were playing such as “He die” or “You die” to describe the status of the character in the game, they also indicated that a player had lost and needed to stop playing. Or, “No one gonna win this” was stated when the game took a very long time and it frustrated the gamers and those waiting for their turns. These utterances demonstrate the situation when the English-learning children learn to use available English

repertoire to communicate complexity of their needs, thoughts, and feelings in the social interaction when English is used as a communicative tool.

The children's verbal communication strategies demonstrate their resourcefulness as learners of English, including the value of English as a language of wider communication in a multilingual group. Their comments indicate that they have learned to know how to do things with words in English, driven by authentic socialization with other interethnic social actors. English is prioritized here as it is learned by all of these young children immediately after their movement to the United States. Due to the instant needs of communication and socialization in the neighborhood made up of children from linguistically diverse backgrounds, English plays an important role in the lives of these children. As their common language in this receiving setting, they have found new and innovative ways to use it in everyday communication.

In addition to using English in their everyday interactions with friends from various ethnic groups, the children in this study also talked about English in ways that revealed dominant ideologies of English. I include three examples of this, but these examples reflect larger trends in the data. In the first example, English is considered an instrument of access to the younger children's socialization. In the second example, we see that, through talk and practice the children prioritize not only the English language but also Standard English. In the third example, I show that the Karenni children's exposure to English in their extended communities is quite extensive (even though it remains limited in the eyes of their teachers at school).

“Karenni women don’t speak English”

While observing the children interact with each other, I often sat off to the side or behind them and silently watched them playing video games. At first, I was more of an observer than a participant. However, after they realized I could speak English, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee (and their friends) made more attempts to include me in the conversation. One afternoon, for instance, I was sitting near Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee when they were in charge of the video game controllers. Three other boys sat around Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee while they were watching the screen and waiting for their turn. Watching them playing and listening to their conversations, I started to enjoy it. In English, I said to Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, “Faster!”, “Shoot him!” 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)

Me: Yes! I do. Do you?

The Boy: Yeah...**You are not Karenni? Karenni women don’t speak English.**

Me: Where are you from?

The Boy: Burma.

The other boy: I’m from Africa.

Me: (to the other two boys) How about you? What's your name?

From the excerpt, when the surprised boy raised his question to me, and the fact that I replied in English astounded him even more is largely based on his preconceived stereotype. I spoke English and because in his opinion "Karenni women" do not speak English, therefore 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. 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. After I asked the other two boys, "How about you? What's your name?" to include them in the conversation, I learned that English was used among these five video gamers. The whole group, then, started talking to me in English and introducing themselves. I was surprised how easily I was now included in the conversation with them by starting with simple English words that demonstrated our shared linguistic repertoire.

In this excerpt, we see that the first 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 U.S., have strong ideas about who speaks 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 because they did not think I could communicate with them in English.

To better comprehend the videogame playing culture that had developed among the children, and the role English fulfilled in that culture, it is important to remember that Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's primary language is Karenni, Burmese is the primary language of the Burmese boy, the African boy's primary language is an African language, the other two boys' is Karen, and mine is Thai. In this situation, English has functioned well as our communicative language. As my English proficiency allows me to communicate with the children, I have gained more understanding that English is not only a lingua franca in the younger children's interethnic communication here, but also a lingua franca between the children and me. None of us have acquired English as our primary language but we have shared the experience of transnational movement from a country where its residents learn English as a second or a foreign language to the English-speaking United States. During data collection for this study, I realized that the younger children and I have are all influenced by (and enact) ideologies of language that privilege English over other languages of wider communication and that afford more prestige and status to English. During our interactions, while they take advantage of English to expand their entertainment sphere and social network, I also "take advantage of English" with the goal of gaining access to them and being accepted among them. In order to fulfill these multiple needs, I have discovered how useful and strategic it is to use English, our common language.

When we were not playing video games together, the younger children and I moved from mode to mode and continued using English with each other.

We read English children books, wrote our names in English to show how our names were spelled and pronounced, and spoke English together. I noticed that when they spoke English to me in order to include me in their playing and talking. This shows some of the ways that the children and I have learned to distinguish membership in the speech community where we utilize English to get involved in an activity such as playing and talking.

In addition, I recounted what activities I usually did with the younger Karenni children in the study and found that the majority of activities incorporated English teaching and learning throughout. The many activities sustain the ideologies of language that privilege English, which the children and I hold. While they had fun things to do, I gained access to learn to know them more by using English because I was lacking Karenni proficiency. Apart from reading English children books and tutoring them with their homework assignments delivered in English, Je Ru in Ka Paw's family were fond of playing the game Scrabble with me and using English alphabet magnets on his family's refrigerator in the kitchen. We liked to compete building words from the English alphabet characters available there. Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee in Teh Reh's family were excited and happy to play every time I used English alphabet cards and vocabulary cards. They also liked to sing ABC songs while playing. In addition, Toh Reh (Nway Meh's son) liked to be a part of the conversation when I used English to talk with his mother and grandmother. He often voluntarily jumped in and helped his mother and grandmother answer questions delivered in English even though I always had provided an interpreter (e.g. See Meh or a Karen girl, a

friend of the family) to assist me when interviewing Nway Meh and Boh Meh because they only spoke Karenni. On one occasion, after I interviewed with Nway Meh (with an interpreter to assist me), Toh Reh showed up from his room and joined in when he heard my conversation in English:

Me (asking Nway Meh): Can you speak English? (waiting for the interpreter to assist)

Toh Reh: No!

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Me (asking Nway Meh): So, you are from Burma but from the Karenni village.

Toh Reh: But, we are Karenni. We are not Burmese.

Me (asking Nway Meh): But, can you speak Burmese?

Toh Reh: No!

In this situation, Toh Reh answered the questions for his mother right away once the question in English was asked. He had both the information I was trying to gather from Nway Meh and the English proficiency necessary to articulate it. Therefore, instead of interpreting for his mother, he sometimes chose to respond immediately because he knew that his mother did not speak English as well as he did. Toh Reh had learned the value of English and its function here to interact with me on his mother's behalf. His practice demonstrates his desire for his voice and his mother voice to be heard. Either consciously or unconsciously, Toh Reh has learned that his English proficiency works effectively in the situation.

At school, all of the children participants in my study were in the English Language Development program. Outside the school setting these children used English in a variety of contexts as presented above—by playing, taking risks, and socializing because English allowed them to have connections with those both in and out the Karenni group. The conversation in English that occurred among the young children and between the children and me triggered my curiosity to focus my observations on the children’s use of English, their views of English and its user, and the perspectives of their caregivers. Therefore, I have also recounted the situations when the children talk about English, which was hindered at the beginning of my data collection and analysis process. On numerous occasions, however, children also draw on their English proficiency to judge and correct their caregivers’ English. Their practices, detailed in the next section, emphasize the prestige accorded English and those who speak it.

“Her English is very very bad”

The children were intentionally and unintentionally allowed by their parents in many occasions to correct and ridicule the non-standard pronunciation and non-standard usage of English among their caregivers. Loh Meh and I had used English since I knew her for the first time in 2009. However, our conversation normally required interpretation support either from her husband, Teh Reh or her daughter, See Meh when they were around. When we had informal conversations alone, however, Loh Meh simply used English without her nervous feelings. She put English words together, often with body and facial expressions, including performing other people’s sayings. 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 us as an interpreter. See Meh spoke Karenni to her mother and spoke Thai to me. In the later conversations and interviews, on the other hand, Loh Meh became more and more confident with being interviewed in English, also taking into account that See Meh or Teh Reh was not always available. During this time, if See Meh was around and overheard her mom's English, she made fun of or corrected her mom's English pronunciation and interview answers. For example, See Meh overheard Loh Meh offering me some watermelon and said, "wat-mel-l-lon" to me. See Meh laughed and said, "wa-ter-me-lon" to correct her mother. Loh Meh repeated after See Meh a couple times to verify that she could pronounce it correctly. In addition, See Meh ridiculed her mother's English sometimes when she overheard her mother's use of 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 United States for a while. See Meh overheard it and interrupted:

Me: 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 entertaining practice within the family and with me, whom she is very close with. Both See Meh and Loh Meh are English language learners and newcomers in the American society, but See Meh's higher level of English proficiency allows her to see the flaws in her mother's production of English. Loh Meh points out that her daughter was embarrassed for her. On other occasions, I 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 like Hawaii" and she continued with other illustrations, "For Colorado, they pronounce Co-Ra-Doe... for California, they pronounce Ca-Lee... Ca... something funny. It's funny! (laughing)." See Meh appears to believe that she knows better how these words should be pronounced.

Daw was very close to her mother, Sherry, who usually learned English by herself at home with the 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 in a couch next to her mother. Though Sherry knew the meaning of "chicken" and "kitchen" very well, the pronunciation was difficult and could lead to her tongue-twisted 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, repeated after her daughter, until both of them were satisfied with Sherry's pronunciation.

Children's practice of correction is similar to what I found in the language practices of Gu-Gu and his father. Teh Reh, who helped with his children's homework, claimed that Gu-Gu sometimes corrected him for the pronunciation of English words such as "girl" and "car" by exaggerating the word to him like, "giRl" and "caR" to emphasize the "r" sound to his father. Teh Reh told me that he liked it that his children were learning English. The evidence highlights the values of acquiring the English language and the parents, to some extent, encourage the children to correct their English. In the parents' view, their children learn English at school, and the parents believe that the English acquired at school is the correct form of English. For these reasons, they believe that their children can serve as mediators of "good" English transmitted from school to their households. In this case, a certain form of English is valued as shown that 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 American society (Labov, 2001; Lippi-Green, 1997, 2011; Preston, 1996).

This section highlights the beliefs and practices of the Karenni children in the study. Through such beliefs and practices, the children have become active makers of language policy. They have strong ideas about English and who should

speak it, even at a very young age and soon after resettling in the United States. The analysis provided here shows the influence of dominant ideologies over the children's language practices in these immigrant families even though the children used their primary language with the family members at home. The high prestige of English was solidified and reinforced through the interactions between parents and children. In addition, it is important to note that the children (and I) adopted "dual strategy" (Dagenais, 2003, p. 273) where they (and I) utilized English as a lingua franca to be accepted in a wider communication. That is, along with using a native language with family members in the households, the children employed and took advantage of English when needed.

Summary

The analysis of data collected from participant observation, informal conversations, and interviews shows that both adult and children participants have subscribed to similar ideologies of language (those that value English and Standard American English) but responded to them differently. Even though both Karenni adults and children seem to view English as a language of resource and voice, young children do not seem to view a lack of English proficiency in the same way (negatively) as the adult participants did. While the adults hope that English will help them claim their benefits and their right to be here in the English-speaking society. The adults in the study often seemed to feel frustrated, timid, and unconfident when their tasks and errands involved English communication, both oral and written, because of their limited English proficiency. Conversely, the children often use English to participate in an

activity and notify their audience that they are part of the group, especially in an interethnic communication. The children often used English to socialize with their peers in the home space and neighborhood. They did not talk about themselves as having any of the language barriers in these settings. In fact, they connected the lack of English proficiency to adults in their own neighborhood, as we have seen in their talk about Karenni women and their practices of correcting their caregivers' English.

As discussed in the practices of correction, both Karenni adults and children have learned to know the hierarchy of English variations, and they both seem to value Standard American English varieties the most. Ideologies of language (which place Standard American English at the top of the hierarchy) among adults have influenced their perspectives on legal documents written in English and on their views of the role of English proficiency in securing a better job. Similarly, the children's practices of correction (and mocking) reflect the influence of ideologies of language that value Standard English over other forms of English.

Next, in the socialization among the younger children with friends and refugees from other ethnic groups such as the other groups originally from Burma and the Africans, for example, the Karenni children used English as their communicative code. This is a notable difference because English as a lingua franca is not yet the case in the older generations. Particularly, what language and literacy practices were used by participants across age groups was greatly influenced by the language and literacy levels at the time of their migration to the

United States. When the young Karenni children stayed in the refugee camp, they were exposed to the home language and only acquired other ethnic languages partially because they had no or limited time in the refugee camp school due to the interruption of migration. Conversely, teenagers and adults had acquired other ethnic languages outside their households, such as at school, work, and everyday interethnic communication in the refugee camp for a longer period of time and had become more competent in those languages such as Burmese, Karen, and Shan, (see Table 4.1 and 4.2, Chapter 4). Therefore, having an interethnic communication in the United States, teenagers and adults utilized the languages other than English because they were more comfortable in those languages than they were in English. When English was required, the adults made use of strategies such as guessing (e.g. when shopping for food and reading product labels), asking others for help and guidance, avoiding the situation, or asking for an interpreter. After resettling in the United States, the younger children learned that knowledge of and proficiency in English would expand their social and learning opportunities, so they prioritized learning English for everyday communication and utilized it as their language choice in a wider communication.

There were also a few more differences between the Karenni adults and children's beliefs and practices. While adults are expected to take responsibilities for their families' well-being that concerned working, looking for financial and social supports, and involving in legal activities, the children's daily lives involved minimum amount of those responsibilities. As a result, the adults sought resources to fulfill such tasks while children found their home space as their

playground to spend their free time after school. Their learning and working is playing (Chick, 2010) and utilizing English as a way to expand their fun activities with other children (Maynard & Tovote, 2010) or with adults (Lancy & Grove, 2010) is exciting and at ease for them.

CHAPTER SIX

**MULTILINGUAL REPERTOIRES, ACCUMULATED LITERACIES,
AND MULTILINGUAL IDEOLOGIES**

This chapter explores the participants' accumulated linguistic repertoires and the literacies acquired as a result of their movement across multiple boundaries and borders. Drawing on family portraits, thick description, and a study of artifacts, I describe and analyze the many useful ways the Karenni participants utilize their hard-earned linguistic and literacy knowledge to navigate in an unfamiliar setting. I first identify the language and literacy resources used in the community. I then examine how the participants use those resources to accomplish particular goals. The analysis of data yields insights into the relationship between their accumulated literacies, movement across contexts, and engaged participation in local communities of practice.

Unlike Chapter 5, which focuses on ideologies of language that privilege proficiency in English, the findings discussed in this chapter demonstrate that English is not the only language that participants used to live, work, and play in their new context. In fact, the languages they have acquired as a result of their residence in previous countries, Burma and Thailand, continue to play an important role in the current setting. I will show that languages other than English serve as social, economic, and educational resources that are essential in their everyday lives, even though they are underutilized at school and devalued in American discourses. Participants' multiple languages have fundamental functions in the Karenni community—including in a wide range of interactions

that include everyday communication, entertainment, academic purposes (e.g. doing homework), religious practices (e.g. praying, reading Bible), social events and gatherings (e.g. at the association meeting, farmers market, new year celebration), and institutional encounters (e.g. at the hospital, at the court). Findings discussed here illuminate a complicated relationship between the Karenni individuals' backgrounds and experiences, their situated language use, and the language ideologies they hold.

My analysis of the data shows that, even though the participants want to learn and use English, they also draw on their multilingual repertoires daily. For example, most of the participants use Karenni with family and Burmese with neighbors from Burma or Thailand. Loh Meh and Sherry reported that they used Burmese with a Nepali neighbor, who understood Burmese because her previous residential country, Nepal, shares a border with Burma. Many of the Karenni participants used English at work and school but also used their primary language to better understand the subject matter (e.g. taking notes in the primary language while learning the content in English). Many went further and learned a language other than English (e.g., Karen) because they believed they would need and want to utilize both languages in the future. Though their future is still uncertain (i.e. they do not know in what city and country they will live), they believe that acquiring and maintaining multiple languages will help to secure present and future opportunities (Dagenais, 2003). Such findings highlight ideologies of language that value multilingualism and language maintenance as a result of transnational experiences.

This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first section, I describe the children's literacy practices and multilingual strategies in a variety of contexts such as playing, doing homework, and interacting with family members. I show the many ways they use and interact with other social actors and with multilingual oral and written texts in those contexts. The second section describes linguistic strategies used by Karenni adults and how their multilingual repertoires were used for different purposes and in various domains (such as work) from those of the children's. The findings from both sections indicate that maintaining multilingual repertoires, derived from the multilingual ideologies the participants hold, have been an integral part of their transnational lives.

Language Learning and Multilingual Strategies among Karenni Children

The data presented in this section were collected while I was serving as the Karenni children's tutor. Having dual roles (researcher-tutor) allowed me to approach their language and literacy practices associated with both everyday living and academic purposes. The data presented here come from a variety of ethnographic methods that include participant observations, interviews, and collection of artifacts such as their homework and photos of their activities and households. When I assisted them with their homework, I observed the language use in our interactions. During home visits, I observed the children's interaction with their family members, with me, and with other guests, such as their neighbors and friends. In both interviews and informal conversations with them, I recounted the topic related to language, literacy practices, and their thoughts on those practices. In the remainder of this section, I present how the Karenni

children do things with languages, or how they language (García, 2009), in order to fulfill their communicative needs, to overcome the academic challenges, and to express their beliefs, thoughts, feelings, and identities.

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. The data analysis in this section shows how many linguistic systems, including their primary language and the English language, interact and compliment each other in their everyday talk and their literacy practices. Indeed, the data demonstrate the difficulties of separating codes and linguistic systems into discrete categories. According to García's (2009) theory of "translanguaging" (as described in Chapter 2), a bilingual individual does not acquire two separated linguistic systems, but evolving linguistic features drawn upon two systems for a meaning-making purpose in their bilingual worlds. In this study, the Karenni children make use of their meaning-representation tool in order to accomplish and produce translanguaging. The first data analysis shows consequences of migration across national and linguistic borders at a very young age when the primary language has not fully acquired before the movement. In this case, translanguaging is the outcome. The second data analysis illustrates how "translanguaging" is utilized for academic purposes in the new context, where the language of instruction, English, is not the learners' primary meaning-representation code. The two sets of

data demonstrate the complicated ways that migration and schooling experiences influence and shape children's language acquisition.

Counting in English

In Chapter 5, I described the way in which the younger Karenni children utilized English as a lingua franca for a wider communication and socialization with friends from linguistically diverse background even when their primary language was maintained and used within their families. I have also witnessed younger participants use translanguaging practices in playing with friends from the same primary language, especially when codes for numbers were involved. I initially noticed this practice in the interaction between the twin brothers, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, who always used Karenni with each other, with family members, and with Karenni friends. Based on observations of conversations, homework tutoring, and playing with Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, they used English words for numbers (e.g. one, two, three...). However, they also used English words to communicate numbers as needed because English was our lingua franca in those settings. During one of my visits in early 2010, I was talking with their family members while Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee were talking and playing in one corner of the living room. Their language use caught my attention when I overheard them said, "One, two, three, four, ..." in the middle of their interaction in their Karenni language. While some children said "*KARENNI.KARENNI*. one, two, three, four...", others said "*KARENNI.KARENNI*. one, two, three, four, five, six. *KARENNI.KARRENNI*." Following additional observations, I found that they were playing with some cards where counting was involved. During this same

visit and observation, they counted in English several times throughout their interaction in Karenni with each other. After that, I followed them and their friends to verify the pattern of this similar linguistic production and found that all of the Karenni children their age in the neighborhood used similar counting strategies when numbers were involved in their conversations and activities.

From 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 primary language, Thai, is the most accurate process for me when counting and calculating. Sometimes, even though I count aloud in English because it is the language that my audience understands, I cannot help counting or calculating again (silently) in Thai to make sure I have not miscalculated anything. My observation is extended to other non-native English speakers 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 come into question since I overheard Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee counting in English when numbers were involved in their everyday conversation.

After discussing the issue with Teh Reh, the father of Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, I came to understand that Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee's age, the time of their movement to the U.S., and the received formal education are factors that influence whether they are comfortable counting in English. Teh Reh, who was not surprised about the matter, explained that "they (Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee) 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.” Even though Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee have learned some numbers in Karenni, they still have limited knowledge of the Karenni words needed for communicating numbers and their meaning. See Meh, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee’s older sister, said that her brothers used only “one” and “two” in the Karenni language, for example, when they asked for money. Other than that, she had not heard them using the Karenni words to articulate numbers. Right after arriving in Phoenix Arizona, they enrolled in a kindergarten, where they learned the concept of number delivered in English. Therefore, they were more comfortable counting in English than they were in Karenni, even though English was their second language. Something similar occurred when Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee played with other Karenni friends. I witnessed them several times when they played a snakes-and-ladders board game that involved rolling a dice (or two) or using a spinner to indicate how many square a player was allowed to travel on the board. All of the Karenni children switched to words for number in English in the interaction predominantly led by the Karenni language. Depending on what number was the result of their dice rolling or using the spinner, they then spoke out loud when counting the squares on the board and walking their marker to place at the appropriate square.

Such findings demonstrate a holistic view of bi/multilingualism 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 in the interaction for these children to create meaning and to communicate efficiently in the 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 the situation is cognitively understood by the speaker himself. When we move away from the codes that we call English, Karenni, German, and Spanish, what is firm and unchangeable here is the concept of “a single unit” 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 is prioritized rather than what symbolic system (e.g. English, Karenni, German, or Spanish) is being used.

Doing homework

Thai had been See Meh’s strongest written and academic language. In her free time in the United States, Thai served as See Meh’s language of entertainment, the language she used for reading comic books, magazines, for listening to songs, and for watching Thai soap operas and music videos more than

those of other languages. See Meh knew a lot about current Thai news that ranged from celebrity gossips and fashion to Thailand's politics. On numerous occasions, her literacy practices showed native-like Thai proficiency. For example, she watched and understood the Thai series that the characters used the Thai Royal variety and she was able to understand the variety that takes a foreigner learning Thai longer than the Standard Thai to comprehend. However, See Meh explained that for her, "English is used the most at school" in the United States because it is the language of instruction in the classroom in addition to the language of socialization with American and international friends. However, the two contexts demand different types of English proficiency and that it is more challenging for See Meh to understand academic content required for her class. I had observed such challenges while tutoring See Meh and while listening to her reflect on those challenges,

ยากค่ะ แต่ว่าตามเพื่อนไม่ค่อยได้ (ข้า) ตามไม่ค่อยได้ อยู่ที่ประเทศไทยนี้ ตามเพื่อนได้ค่ะ เพราะยังไงยังไง ก็ตามเพื่อนได้ แต่อยู่ที่นี่ตามเพื่อนไม่ได้ ครูพูดอะไรนี่บางครั้งก็รู้บางครั้งก็งง ไม่รู้ ใช้ภาษาไทยสอนค่ะ ก็ยากกว่าภาษาไทย คือพูดกับครูรู้เรื่อง แล้วครูก็พูดก็แบบอธิบาย ครูอธิบาย แล้วก็แบบสอนอะไรแบบนี้เข้าใจมากกว่า เวลาครูบอก อธิบายครั้งเดียวเราก็เข้าใจได้บ้างเลย อยู่ที่นี่นี้เค้าพูดภาษาอังกฤษค่ะ นี่ถ้าเราไม่รู้เรื่องนี้ยังไง เราก็ไม่รู้ค่ะ เพราะเราไม่เข้าใจ

[Difficult. 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.]

Here, See Meh describes how the language of instruction influences how well she understands the content of the lesson. She understands the academic concept used in content-area class and its meaning right away when it is delivered in Thai. See Meh also described how studying in the class delivered in English was difficult for her. 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. Keeping this in mind while realizing that See Meh and I always used Thai with each other with ease, I intentionally used Thai while explaining the academic content of instruction delivered in English that she 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: ...

Me: Photosynthesis ก็คือ การสังเคราะห์แสง เข้าใจการสังเคราะห์แสงเปล่า [Photosynthesis is garn-sung-kroh-saeng. Do you know the term garn-sung-kroh-saeng?]

SM: ค่ะ [Yes, I do.]

Me: ต้นไม้สีเขียวเนี่ยมันสังเคราะห์แสงได้เมื่อมีแสงมากกระทบ 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]

Me: ใช่ เพื่อสร้างอาหารและการเจริญเติบโต เรียนใจใหม่คะเนี่ยที่เมืองไทย [Yes! To make food and to grow. You have learned it in Thailand, haven’t you?]

SM: ค่ะ [Yes, I have]

Me: การสังเคราะห์แสงเนี่ย ภาษาฝรั่งเค้าเรียกว่า photosynthesis [garn-sung-kroh-saeng is called “photosynthesis” in English]

In these instances, we are 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 have consciously used Thai and English as translanguaging practices with Thai-speaking See Meh in tutoring sessions. When See Meh’s prior knowledge is activated in the language that she understands, she can transfer the comprehension she has already had to English and complete the assignment in this session, which is about photosynthesis. In the excerpt, I use a Thai word “การสังเคราะห์แสง” [photosynthesis] and ask See Meh if she understands the meaning. Then, I receive the response from her that photosynthesis is naturally processed in plants “เพื่อการเจริญเติบโต” [for its development and growth], which shows that she has already had some prior understanding of the concept. What she needs is the activation of what she already knows and the connection to what she is 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 linkage of the concept in two languages, “การสังเคราะห์แสง” in Thai and “photosynthesis” in English, has to be emphasized so that it makes sense to See Meh. 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 is 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 to complete a specific task for a science class on “five things you know about respiratory or circulatory system.” 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 the human organs worked as she learned in her biology class, she could not link this prior knowledge to these two challenging words. I called and asked 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, or ระบบทางเดินหายใจ (literally translated to English as the path of breathing system), and the circulatory system, or ระบบทางเดินเลือดไหลเวียน (literally translated to English as the path of blood circulating system). With the explanation in Thai, she could link “lung” to the respiratory

system and “heart” and “vein” to the circulatory system respectively 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 are competent in helps scaffold the meaning to the English language. For example, math was not simple as she expected. She often brought math worksheets back home with 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 “ลบสองลบสาม”, which I 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 been gone through a “minus” process. She, then, understood it how the answer becomes “-5” because of the word “ลบ” [minus] that 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 struggled 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 meaning of those words and explanations. Here, See Meh does not only have a difficulty with getting the meaning of English vocabulary, but she also has a difficulty to connect the words with her acquired prior knowledge stored in her repertoires. In this case, using only English prevents her from looking for the connection of the meaning of those words with her prior knowledge because English is not the language she intuitively uses for 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. 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 data analysis above demonstrates the process of translanguaging and reveals that the monolingual view, especially English-only ideology, is not sufficient to facilitate learning for the recently-arrived Karenni children in the study. In the first example, where young children were counting in English while interacting in Karenni, it is clear that their communicative needs are fulfilled only when the children use both languages they have been acquiring. While we sort the

languages out as Karenni and English, both languages are equally and simultaneously needed to fulfill their meaning-making process and socialization for these children. In the second example, a learner's strongest academic language is used to bridge an academic term and its meaning in one language to its representational term in a target language. The evidence is also applicable to linking the conceptual meaning in learners' primary language to second language in reading and other context-area classes. In both examples described here, the children's acquired languages are proved to be utilized for the optimal outcomes in understanding their multilingual worlds and communicating their thoughts.

Negotiating identities through language learning and choice

The song *We are Karenni*¹¹ was sung by a group of fifteen Karenni teenagers at the Karenni New Year's Celebration on April 14, 2011. A local school that was within walking distance of the participants' apartment complex provided the cafeteria and the stage for this event. Hla Meh and Daw, two of my teen participants, were among the participants and sang on stage. All of the teen 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. Listening to the song sung by these young singers, I was touched by their clear, loud, and proud voice. However, it brought about the question of what it means to them to be a Karenni. In this section, I focus on 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

¹¹ It was sung in Karenni.

Karenni State in Burma and crossed the border with her parents to Thailand when she was only three 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 United States, the Karenni teenagers are 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 could tell us about their happy lives on a fertile land before the war and the difficult experiences of border crossing. The Karenni teenagers only received those passed-on 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 U.S. raise questions about how they see themselves while living in the U.S. I talked with them and observed their language and literacy practices, materials used in those practices, as well as their daily activities. I also asked the questions about their families' histories.

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 United States as he told me that English would help him “get a good job to help family.” After two years of residing in the United States, he had advanced to Basic level in the English Language Development program. Talking about living here in the United States 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 missed them as well as his life in the refugee camp dearly. 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 CD, DVD, and VHS that he and other family members brought from Thailand and purchased from an Asian market and other refugees, who made copies of these materials for sale. Frequently, I entered his apartment where the music videos were turned on loud with very energizing hip-hop style music in the language I did not understand and found Saw Reh there in front of the screen. And frequently as well, 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 even though the singers looked similar to my Karenni participants.

I talked with Saw Reh about his language repertoires and literacy practices and I learned that the Karenni language has several dialects (all mutually intelligible). He described in detail that the Karenni written language has three forms: 1) Karenni written in Karenni alphabetical system 2) Karenni written in Burmese alphabetical system and 3) Karenni written in a romanticized (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.

I discovered that Saw Reh was interested in Burmese language learning for two reasons. First of all, because of his attachment 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 United States, 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:

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, we see that Saw Reh found the way to reconnect with the people who shared similar experiences of refugee-ness, refugee camp, and movements. Along with learning English and using English everyday 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 of learning a foreign language is driven by pop culture (e.g. a Japanese student learning English because of his interest in American 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 has helped Saw Reh develop his multilingual repertoires. We can see that Saw Reh makes use of available resources in the new context that consist of family, friends, and available materials to serve his goal, which is to reestablish the idea and the community taken root from the country of origin and the 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 the current location in the United States, especially when the tattoo on his right forearm caught my eye. The 3x3 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."

I connect the meaning of the tattoo as a symbol of his identity—"I am Asian boy" to all of Saw Reh's everyday practices that include learning Burmese, watching Burmese and Karenni movies, and listening to and singing Burmese and Karenni songs. By observing his practices and talking with Saw Reh about those practices, I have learned that Saw Reh has a strong idea of what an Asian boy should be. Having Asian friends, consuming Asian media, and learning another Asian language have become his way of living in the United States. 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 current setting, 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, such as Burmese in this case, also have important functions. Here in the United States, Saw Reh is interested in meeting and socializing with people who have similar experiences. In the process, Saw Reh has created an imagined community (Anderson, 1996), where he learns and utilizes Burmese with friends originally from Burma and with the cultural products. In the meantime, he has also recreated a community similar to what he had outside the refugee camp that consists of people who have had similar experiences.

Like Saw Reh, See Meh has learned (or relearned) a language other than English in her new place. In addition to acquiring Karenni as her primary language and using Karenni at home with her family, See Meh had learned the Burmese language at the refugee camp's school and the Karen language from friends since she was five 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 four years from age nine to thirteen, she had been trying to learn the Karen language again while living in the U.S.:

พอไปเรียนภาษาไทยไม่มีคนคาเรนค่ะ หนูก็เริ่มลืมๆ มันไป แล้วหนูก็ไม่เคยพูดคาเรนอีก พอหนูมาถึงที่นี้เวลาเพื่อนหนูคุยกับหนู หนูเข้าใจแต่หนูพูดไม่ได้ พอหนูมาถึงแล้วประมาณห้าเดือนหนูก็เริ่มพูดออกมา 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 U.S., Karen friends talked to me, I understood what they said but I could not talk back in Karen. After five months in the U.S., I started speaking Karen again. Now, I speak it. And now, it comes out so easily].

See Meh's Karen language development is not typical in her community even though interethnic communications among the refugees from Burma are common. This is because Burmese is usually used as a lingua franca among these refugees. For example, a Karenni speaking to a Karen in Burmese (as in the previous section about Saw Reh) or having an interpreter using Burmese is a more frequent scenario. However, See Meh chose to learn and use Karen, the language of her Karen friends, to communicate with them, both in school and when they visited her at home (once or twice a week). The reasons are threefold. First of all, she explained that there were more Karenni individuals being able to speak Karen than Karen individuals speaking Karenni because See Meh's Karenni ethnicity

and language is a smaller group. Her Karen friends did not learn to speak Karenni because they believed that learning and using Burmese, an official language of Burma used by a larger group, would be more useful because Burmese continues to hold its powerful and symbolic status among the refugees from Burma. 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. The second reason for learning and using Karen with her Karen friends is due to her limited Burmese proficiency brought about her timidity to use it. See Meh claimed that she had good Burmese listening skills but was uncomfortable to speak it yet because her Burmese pronunciation was “ไม่ชัด [not quite right]” and would bring about 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 language she has acquired for community support, in 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, job as an interpreter and his intention to strengthen the community support network. 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 American 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 trend in the 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. See Meh demonstrated her strong desire and had done research on the flight attendant job and asked me several questions about it (e.g. “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 prioritizes multilingualism because it allows her to fulfill both personal and professional goals and she considers being multilingual advantageous. Her language learning endeavors presented here bring about the picture of her future self (Norton, 1995, 2000; West, 1992), 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) does 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 as Blommaert (2010) called super-diversity. Such a living condition provides an opportunity for See Meh to see the positive outcomes of learning a language such as Karen and Burmese even she has moved far away from Thailand and its refugee camp. In the next section, I examine the ways that she manages her language choice in context.

See Meh: “I will use the language they use”

Due to See Meh’s varied lived experiences (e.g., living in a refugee camp, living in a Christian dorm, going to a local school in Thailand, and managing the transition to living in the United States), she brought with her a rich background as well as a unique perspective on languages. As mentioned earlier, See Meh had acquired Thai since she was nine years old during her stay outside the refugee camp and her study in the Thai local school. In the United States, she used Thai with friends from Burma and Thailand, who know Thai, including me. Nevertheless, asked if she considered herself a Thai person, she said she was not:

See Meh: I am Karenni.

Me: What makes you think you are a Karenni?

See Meh: My father speaks Karenni. My mother speaks Karenni. I speak Karenni. I speak Karenni to my family.

Me: You speak Thai, too. Do you think you’re Thai?

See Meh: No.

See Meh considers herself a Karenni by emphasizing “Karenni” as the spoken language of her father, mother, and the whole family. From this standpoint, her Karenni “true self” (Hall, 2003) is the one that speaks Karenni as her primary language is unalterable. This fixed identity is strengthened as she emphasized that this characteristic of speaking Karenni is shared by others with the same history. Nevertheless, her practices as a multilingual person and a multiple-language learner present the multilingual ideologies she holds. According to See Meh’s multilingual ability that includes Karenni, “Karen, Thai, a little bit of Burmese, and a little bit of English.” When I asked her to reflect how she managed her language choice, she said:

ถ้านั่งกับคนอินเดียกับคนดำ ก็จะพูดภาษาอังกฤษ ถ้าอยู่กับกะเหรี่ยงขาว ก็พูดภาษากะเหรี่ยงขาว ถ้าหนูกู้กับเพื่อน
คารเนนนี่ หนูกู้พูดคารเนนนี่

[When I sit with Indian friends and Black friends, I will speak English.

When I am with the White Karen friends, I will speak White Karen. When

I am with Karenni friends, I speak Karenni.]

She also added,

ถ้าพวกเขาคุยกันเป็นภาษาอังกฤษหนูกู้คุยเป็นภาษาอังกฤษ ถ้าพวกเขาคุยกันเป็นภาษากะเหรี่ยงขาวหนูกู้คุยเป็น
ภาษากะเหรี่ยงขาวค่ะ แต่ว่าพวกเขาคุยก่อน พวกเขาชอบภาษาอะไรหนูกู้คุย แต่ว่าเขา ถ้าบางคนกะเหรี่ยงขาว
พูดไทยเป็น เขาพูดไทยกับหนู หนูกู้พูดไทยกับเค้า หนูรอให้พวกเขาพูดก่อน เขาพูด อะไรหนูกู้พูด (ภาษา) เพราะ
หนูกู้รู้ภาษาเยอะ

[If they talk in English, I will talk in English. If they talk in the White

Karen, I will talk in the White Karen. I let them initiate the

conversation...whatever language they like, up to them. Some White

Karen can speak Thai and they speak Thai to me, I will speak Thai to them. I wait for them to start first. I will use the language they use, whatever language they use...because I know many languages.]

Being multilingual enables See Meh to be flexible. Her multilingual repertoires grant her a variety of options to select the appropriate language to use in each context depending on the audience. In many situations, she is the person who speaks the most languages, so she can give more. In other words, she uses her available language options to accommodate her audience and let them use the language they want to use based on their preference and ability. I too have benefitted from See Meh's unique multilingual repertoires.

See Meh's multilingual practices allow her to enact context-embedded multiple identities. Her case substantiates that "identity is not a fixed category" (Schechter & Bayley, 2003, p. 6) but it is a process of becoming, in which an individual learn from a variety of settings (school, home, workplace) to practice, negotiate, and choose his/her identities upon circumstances. See Meh's schooling experience in different contexts (including at a local school in Thailand, a Christian boarding school in Thailand, and a high school in the U.S.) influence her strategies of social interaction. The first high school she enrolled in Phoenix Arizona did not have many Karenni refugee students and she wanted to be accepted by friends from a diverse background (e.g. American mainstream, African American, Mexican American, and Karen). She later joined the school's volleyball team where she used English to talk and connect with other students. Such experiences provide opportunities for practice and language socialization.

In January 2011, her family moved to the apartment where they live now. At the time, there were more than twenty Karenni families in the complex and many Karenni students enrolled at the local high school. Although she enjoyed her Karenni friends, See Meh brought with her the confidence and enthusiasm needed to make more friends outside the Karenni group, which many other newcomer Karenni individuals did not have. When See Meh hung out with other groups such as Indians, Vietnamese, and American friends, her Karenni friends made fun of her by saying to her, “You have just found your long-lost relatives?” However, See Meh emphasized the positive aspects of having international interactions to her Karenni friends, “Don’t be shy. It’s good. It helps you make more friends and to practice the language.” She also happily told me, “หนูมีเพื่อนหลายแบบหลายสไตล์ [I have all kinds of friends].” While See Meh considers herself a Karenni because of her “fixed” Karenni identity and because of the primary language used with her family, her ‘multiple’ identity is discursively produced through social engagement with “all kinds of friends.” That is, the use of certain languages in a certain situations helps produce the identity she wants her audience to perceive and accept in the interaction and that makes her proud of being multilingual. I had witnessed her interactions when audience members from linguistically background became involved in the conversation. For example, one afternoon during my visit, Hla Meh (a Karenni speaker) came to see See Meh and help her cook, Neela (See Meh’s Karen friend from school) sat by the kitchen doing her homework, and I (a Thai speaker) was sitting with Neela. See Meh had

used Karenni with Hla Meh, Karen with Neela, and Thai with me throughout that afternoon.

See Meh's experiences demonstrate how an individual's successful language learning might be influenced by discursive forces in the local context (e.g. Burmese as an academic language expected at a school) as well as personal choices made by the learner (e.g. learning Karen to fulfill personal interest). Here we see that language socialization and language choice change throughout our lifespan depending on needs and contexts. However, reasons for learning and language choice in See Meh's experience also involve the positive thinking about multilingualism. Each language has a function and purpose; however, an individual must have a perceived need or reason to undertake language learning. By recognizing a particular language, its usefulness, function, and purpose, See Meh understands the potential benefit and adopts a positive mindset that stimulates her language learning, while confirming that her true self is Karenni, speaking the Karenni language.

Hla Meh: the oldest sister's role

Hla Meh's linguistic repertoires include Burmese, English, and the Karenni that she uses daily in the United States for herself and her family. Her language and literacy practices—including how she manages the 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 six years old. When doing school assignments, Burmese helped her with academic comprehension because, for Hla Meh, Burmese is her “a meaning-making and representational tool” (Soltero-Gonzalez & 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 notebook, word for word, English and Burmese, so that she could use it as a reference.

In addition, because Burmese has remained an official language for the Karenni group as well as for other ethnic minorities from Burma, Hla Meh was very interested in actively maintaining the language even though her family had moved across national border 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 to Karenni families were written or typed in Burmese. This is because the computer software has Burmese as one of its available languages and fonts. For this reason, limited Burmese literacy may cause communicative challenges among the refugees from Burma. In the Karenni’s New Year 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 language broker, 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 to post on the wall because she was fond of watching Burmese movies and listening to Burmese music featuring these actors and singers. Hla Meh's multilingual ability allows her to fulfill personal interests, family's matters, and 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 with in 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 with 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 of 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 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 of how their native language was practiced 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 instructs 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 is in a real context where the boy learns to comprehend the phrase associated with the situation directly with the direction from the older sister. In addition, Hla Meh guides him by using Karenni and he produces the phrase in Karenni, instead of English, though he had been attending an American kindergarten and he knows that I do not fully comprehend Karenni.

Nevertheless, Hla Meh does not correct him. Instead, she allows the young boy to thank me in Karenni and then interprets the phrase to me in English. The situation emphasizes the value of the native language in the household, the process of passing on the language in this space where three generations reside.

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 vocabulary cards with pictures (e.g. fish, elephant, 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.

As a multilingual person, Hla Meh chooses to switch between the two languages she knows well, Karenni and Burmese depending on the context. Hla Meh uses Burmese daily for entertainment and beneficial purposes, including accessing information and academic comprehension. For example, she took an academic note in Burmese and always used Burmese-English dictionary to assist her English writing. 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 the language in their linguistic toolkit to use in a given context and domain. The language choices made 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 sees those practices in relation to notions of nation-state boundaries and relation to her experiences living in a new host country.

Daw later told me that she grew up with diverse languages within her own family because her parents use both their primary language, Kayan, and a lingua franca, Burmese, to communicate with each other and with friends and neighbors. In the United States, however, Daw has spent more time with her Karenni friends and increasingly spoken Karenni to her younger brother, who has been raised in diverse languages as well. Nevertheless, her Burmese has been maintained because her father has limited Karenni proficiency, so Daw and her younger brother have decided to use 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 the 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 Kayan¹², 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 Kaya¹³" [Catholicism in Karenni], volume 1 to 4 that the family brought with them from Thailand. In contrast, the youngest boy in the family, Je Ru (9), started learning to read the Bible and pray in the United States in English because at the time when the family moved, his Karenni and Burmese literacy were both limited. While he was learning English here in the U.S., he joined Saturday's Bible class for children where the instructor from the Shan State of Burma used the materials written in English so that the young children from a variety of ethnic groups would start to comprehend the same thing 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 her routine in the United States. She liked "to go to church" on the weekend and prayed before she went to bed every night, sometimes in Karenni and sometime in Burmese, but not in English. At the

¹² Kayan (pronounced /kəjəŋ/) is a distinct language from Karenni.

¹³ Karenni and Kaya, or also known as Kayah, are referred to the same language, Karenni.

church located in the downtown area of Phoenix, Daw prayed in Karenni or Burmese depending on the majority of the churchgoers in attendance at the mass. In addition, the church encouraged the written materials to be translated for the refugees from Burma as they recognized the influx of these people in the area. In addition to the available materials, 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 United States, 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 to maintain their family's religious practices.

In this section, I have identified the multilingual repertoires, linguistic strategies, and literacy practices that I found among the four teen participants. Despite the fact that the four Karenni teenagers have shared their Karenni refugee-ness and experiences of movements, their language repertoires and literacy practices reveal their distinctive interests and purposes as well as the influence of several factors (including their previous schooling, family's religious background, personal interests, available resources, and future plans).

Multilingual Repertoires and Accumulated Literacies among Karenni Adults

In this section, I identify how the Karenni adults develop and make the most of their multilingual repertoires and accumulated literacies to navigate and survive challenges in their everyday living in the United States. The findings not only demonstrate how they utilize their acquired multilingualism in the new receiving context, but also why they benefit from maintaining their multilingual repertoires and literacies although they have crossed national and linguistic borders. The data are from interviews and observations, as well as my

participation in the participants' daily life and activities, social gatherings, and special events.

Multilingual repertoires to make a living

One of the benefits multilingual individuals have is that they are able to earn money from working with the languages they are proficient with. Teh Reh is among those who makes good use of his multilingual repertoires and is improving his skills and paving his way to be a professional interpreter and an ESL teacher for his community. Below, I describe his career goals, his experiences, and the value of multilingualism that he and his Karenni community hold even when there is a pressure for them to learn English.

“I want to do things with languages”

Teh Reh once said, “I can speak Burmese, Karenni, Shan, and Thai... FOUR languages! But, none of those are valid here.” This complicated statement captures the dilemma facing those who speak multiple languages when they live in places where dominant ideologies of language not only devalue multilingualism but also prioritize monolingualism in a language they are not proficient in. However, Teh Reh later found the way to make use of his rare multilingual ability when the Phoenix-based International Rescue Committee (IRC) needed his Karenni and Burmese proficiency in October 2009. Since Karenni-English bilingual interpreters were extremely rare, IRC could usually find only a Burmese-English bilingual. Therefore, Teh Reh who was proficient in both Karenni and Burmese, but with minimal English at that time, was called in to

be an intermediate interpreter translating the message from Karenni to Burmese while another interpreter translated Burmese to English.

After Teh Reh received the first job call to be an interpreter between the refugees from Burma and the IRC agents, in which he was paid \$10 an hour, Teh Reh started working as a part-time interpreter using Burmese and Karenni depending on the needs of IRC. This worked well with his personal goals and priorities. He had often said “I don’t want to work as a dishwasher. I want to do things with languages,” and he was happy to pursue a career as an interpreter when he found the opportunity. Often, he was called to assist the refugees originally from Burma and the English-speaking doctors at the local hospital. While helping the doctor and patient, he found the job challenging because of the unfamiliar medical terms (e.g. “They don’t call blood “blood”, they call something like circu-LE-shun or circula-to-ree, something like that”). Nevertheless, he expressed positive attitude toward the experiences such as, “I like the translation job because I can help my people and I ALSO learn more languages.” As a result, apart from the interpreter jobs, I often witnessed Teh Reh helping his friends by translating the messages in the documents such as a car insurance card, rental agreements, and job applications.

Teh Reh had gradually become a more skillful interpreter as well as an improved English user. One of his many jobs was as an interpreter at the court and hearings where they needed Burmese or Karenni, or both. He explained, “I use my own language, which is Karenni and Burmese. And, I translate English to Karenni, or English to Burmese” depending on the needs. Apart from earning

money as an interpreter, Teh Reh believed that he supported his Karenni community. Once, he had showed me some documents about the Karenni State and culture written in English he received from the International Rescue Committee (IRC) with geographic photographs, in which he explained, “I have to write about the Karenni people and translate this. They want to learn more about the Karenni people and culture.” He seemed to like serving as an ambassador for the Karenni community:

I would like to tell them (the government and the locals). I would like to report our problems, many of our problems. They need to improve, set up the project for us, the people, like, immigration, they need to find out the interpreter, they need to find out who can speak our language and set up their role, like, their duty and help the Karenni family or the Burmese family, any immigration, refugee...

In addition, by serving as a regular interpreter at the hospital, Teh Reh had an opportunity to be introduced to the newcomers in the Karenni community who were required to receive the health check-up at the hospital where Teh Reh was the interpreter. Therefore, Teh Reh did not only make a living from his multilingual translating skills, but he also found the way to fulfill his goal to help his Karenni fellows. Learning to know the Karenni newcomers, Teh Reh introduced the Karenni Association that he served as vice-president. This way the association could keep track of how many Karenni families living in the area and what kind of help the association could provide. Also, Teh Reh could follow-up with the problems and issues these newcomers had. For example, a Karenni

mother visiting Teh Reh with some paperwork had a baby boy with ears that were misshaped. I asked if the mother came to see him about the baby's health paperwork but he said, "No. The baby is six months. The doctor says "Yes, he can hear." I went to interpret for her at the doctor office" and that her visit was related to something else. The evidence shows his careful attention to details of his Karenni fellows, in which he took it as his service to his own community.

In addition, Teh Reh helped newcomer Karenni to find a job by inquiring at the restaurants around Phoenix area if they needed workers. He asked me sometimes if I knew any Thai restaurants that needed a dishwasher. Several Karenni refugees were hired to work at a Thai restaurant in Phoenix in part because they could communicate with the owner and coworkers in Thai. On the weekend, Teh Reh helped his Karenni friends sell their produce at the Phoenix's farmer market. He used both his selling and language skills to get the business.

In addition to working for IRC, Teh Reh worked for many other language services and local companies upon request. For example, he was called to be an interpreter at a hotel for the new employee orientation. The Language Line Service, which he said they paid him the best and he could do the translation over the phone without driving to their offices, was also among one of them. He said, "I love all the jobs that they pay me" considering that "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. We can work today and take a day off tomorrow." After discovering (in January 2011) that his wife, Loh Meh, was expecting another baby, Teh Reh looked for

even more ways to earn more income so that Loh Meh would be able to stay at home for a few months for her pregnancy and maternity leave. As a result, from March to April 2011, Teh Reh enrolled in a 6-week interpreter training program recommended by the Language Line company that he worked for to strengthen his interpreting skills. The training program also prepared him to take an interpreter's certification test. He shared his hope with me that if he got the [interpreter] certificate, he would make "\$25 to \$60 an hour." He studied hard for this training program and explained to me what he learned, for example, he explained, "My work needs to have accuracy, confidentiality, cultural awareness, respect, and professionalism."

Teh Reh demonstrated his commitment to an interpreter's ethics as he mentioned above. When I followed him to his friends' dwellings and Karenni gatherings (where he often served as my interpreter), he listened carefully to the message before attempting to translate it. He asked for clarification when he did not understand my questions with responses such as "OK, let me clarify this, you mean...?" and when he needed time for the careful translation he requested, "OK. Give me a moment." When I asked him to be my interpreter in the interviews with other participants, he was very glad because it opened up an opportunity for him to practice interpreting in authentic situations. All of this shows his dedication to be a professional interpreter, which indicates that he will continue using all of the languages he has acquired.

“No pink in Karenni”

Since March, 2011, Teh Reh has also taught English once a week to his refugee friends at an apartment complex located about three miles from his own apartment. There were at least ten Karenni and Shan families there and he told me how he became a teacher in the community:

They used to have American teacher teaching them but they don't understand the English teacher. She gives them a lot of paper and talks and talks but they don't understand. And they said to me “We need only you.”

After discussing his teaching job with him and observing his three-hour class, I began to understand that there are many advantages to having someone fluent in both languages (the first language and the “target” language) as the teacher. First, as a non-native speaker of English but sharing the same linguistic background with his students, Teh Reh understood (from experience) what aspect of the English language he should explain and emphasize to his students so that they had a better comprehension. In the lesson about color, for example, he explained that there was “No “pink” in Karenni.” While showing a pink color card, he told his students that this was called “pink.” He emphasized the color pink because according to the Karenni language, the word “ni” is used for both pink and red, which are considered the same color. However, the word “ni” is literally translated to English as “red” only. Therefore, “pink” is not only a new word, but also a new concept for a Karenni speaker learning English. The same thing can be said about the color “orange” in English. Teh Reh pronounced “orange” while showing an orange color card to his students. He explained to me

later that orange was also a new term for a Karenni speaker and “[as] we don’t have the word orange, we will say a little bit yellow, a little bit red, something like that, in Karenni.” He also added that as far as he knew there were only words for yellow, red, green, blue, black, and white in the Karenni language. By drawing attention to the colors “pink” and “orange,” Teh Reh demonstrates his meta-linguistic awareness, his multilingual repertoire, and his ability to articulate how English and Karenni are different according to how the speakers of the two languages view and describe them.

Second, as a refugee who shared the same experiences with his students, Teh Reh understands the resettlement burdens, basic needs, and difficulties associated with finding a job in the United States. Teh Reh spent a considerable amount of time during his lesson to show his students how to fill out name and date of birth, in which he told me that he repeated this teaching portion every week for them. He taught his students how to introduce themselves and also “how to tell people their addresses. That way they can apply for a job.” After explaining these items, he asked the students to bring out their ID cards or driver’s licenses and asked his students to write down their information in their notebook in order to exchange and discuss it with each other for fifteen minutes: “I always give them time to practice and talk [to each other] so that they can do it on their own.” I have found that he had valuable skills as a language teacher in large part because of his experiences as a language learner himself. The students were allowed to check for comprehension with each other in their own language and learn from each other, not solely from the teacher. In addition, he emphasized the cultural

information to his students as he told them that eye contact and firm hand shake were expected when meeting an American, especially an employer.

In spite of the fact that Teh Reh is a non-native speaker of English, his friends really liked and enjoyed his teaching because Teh Reh could explain the materials in the language that they understood. Teh Reh used English books he brought from Burma and Thailand as the main textbooks. The books have explanations and translations from English to Burmese and Burmese to English though he used Karenni as the language of instruction. In addition, Teh Reh also incorporated an electronic dictionary that had an audio function. When it came to words that were challenging for him and his students to pronounce such as “well” and “quite,” he keyed in the word and pushed the speaker button of the dictionary so that his students could listen to and repeat the word as often as they wanted. I find him a practical and resourceful teacher, who could utilize as many resources as he could to make the English teaching and learning possible.

As a multilingual person, who also has teaching skills and analytical views on languages, Teh Reh has found a way to utilize his hard-earned knowledge to make a living in the United States and to help other refugees. On February 1st 2011, after having been in the United States for almost two years, he summarized his language repertoires as the following,

Right now I speak five languages. My native language, my first language is Karenni. My second language is Burmese. My third language is Shan, or Tai Yai. Number four is Thai. Number five is English. I can write three languages, Karenni, Burmese, English.

In addition to the description of his multilingual ability above, Teh Reh happily told me about his conversation with an American client he met, “I told him I speak five languages and he said, “Congratulations!” Wow! He said, “Congratulations” to me. That’s good (laughing).” Having learned to know Teh Reh since September 2009, I find that he has gradually become more cheerful and confident because his multilingual abilities have been valued.

Being multilingual is common in the Karenni community but it is distressing to say that not many of them find their multilingualism resourceful because of the ideology that values English over multilingualism prevalent in American society and communicated to newly-arrived immigrants (see also Chapter 5). Teh Reh’ experiences are concrete examples of how and why being multilingual is beneficial. At a personal level, he can make a living from his multilingual abilities. At the community level, he serves as a liaison between his community and the larger community.

Maintaining multilingual repertoires across space and time

Having been a family mentor and friend to the participants, I have learned to know the challenges they face with living here as well as the skills they have used to overcome those challenges. I helped them with errands, gave them a ride, accompanied them to special events (including association meetings), and attended informal social gatherings. Through the process, I found that their multilingual repertoires are valued, utilized, and maintained extensively. In the remainder of this section, I present how the Karenni participants completed their tasks by employing the multiple literacies and languages they acquired while

living in Burma, Thailand, and United States to improve their daily lives. The approaches they employ include creating a support network, making use of multiple translations, and planning for the future. These strategies perpetuate the maintenance of multilingual competence.

Support network in the Karenni community

One factor that helps Karenni refugees maintain their multilingual repertoires is the survival skills and the support they receive from their refugee community. For example, as discussed above, Teh Reh's translation and teaching ability can be used to support his community. In addition, since I had known Teh Reh's family since 2009, he had kept track of Karenni families in Arizona, their names, and phone numbers as part of their established Karenni Association. Teh Reh also explained that there was a Karenni representative elected by the Karenni members in each apartment complex in Phoenix. All of the representatives attended a monthly meeting, where a wide range of issues was discussed, for example, their concern of Karenni people's well-being in the United States, their plans of social events, fundraising for families in need, how to find a job, and what to do when having a problem, getting involved in a car accident, a crime, or a fight. The meeting demonstrates their strong connection to their ethnic-enclave network in both sending and receiving nations.

The Karenni participants had support network from their community as well as from 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 the United States' Permanent Residence status, I

served as one of his many resources and made an appointment with a doctor clinic for his medical record, one of the required documentations for the application. I took him to the doctor clinic in the Southwestern part of Phoenix, where Teh Reh's refugee friends recommended and commented that this clinic offered the most affordable price for the medical record of refugees. The location of the clinic, as I observed, is in another immigrant community, where services for immigrants are more available and affordable than they are in other areas in Phoenix. This shows strategies that the refugees use 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, Teh Reh had taken many refugee friends to this same clinic for the same process and did not have to ask me for the 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 information.

Another illustration of their efforts to modify their lifestyles in order to accommodate local norms includes calling on Burmese friends with experience buying a car to help them shop for a car or car insurance. They even traveled to the U.S.-Mexico border for their car purchase. They also learned to know where they could find other sources apart from American local stores to purchase

affordable food and supplies such as from a private seller of other ethnic minority groups who carried the goods at their houses or walked around with their goods in a wheeled-container in the apartment complex.

Life in translation

As described in Chapter 3, multiple translations were vital and had to be practiced in conducting this study because I am not a Karenni, nor Burmese speaker. It is important to also note that multiple translations are not only the method of my research but also the common practice of my participants in order to live in this new migrant community and in the current host country. Language brokers play a crucial role in this community. Because it was often difficult to find professional interpreters of Karenni and English or Karenni and Thai, I had to find interpreters from those in the community. My research methods yielded interesting findings about the value and role of my participants' multilingual repertoires.

Interethnic communication has been a vital part of the participants' lives since they lived in Burma and Thailand. As they are members of ethnic minority groups with strong ties to their roots, they have maintained their own native language even while learning Burmese, the official language of Burma. Multiple translations to get the message across in interethnic communication were common for trade and communication in the previous countries and have been brought with them to the new location. This is because of two main reasons: 1) they chose to live in the similar ethnic communities and environments, and 2) not all of them could communicate in English, so they needed a language broker.

Ka Paw told me that he had been engaged in the communication that required translation both in Thailand and the United States. When he worked as a security guard in the Thailand's refugee camp, he made friends with Thai visitors and locals. Since he did not speak Thai, he always had a friend who could speak Thai in the camp helping him. Here in Phoenix, Arizona, he described the reason he needed to have an interpreter:

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

At the current stage of the Karenni refugees' resettlement in the United States, there are very few translators who can directly translate Karenni to English. If the agency can find a Karenni who speaks Burmese, and a Burmese who can speak English, the translation will be a multifaceted process, completed by Karenni translated to Burmese and from Burmese to English. It is the same process as the work that Teh Reh did to translate as described above.

While interviewing my participants, See Meh (Karenni and Thai) or Teh Reh (Karenni and English or Burmese and English) served as my interpreter for Thai-Karenni translation depending on who was available. On a rare occasion, when none of them were available and my interviewee did not share thoughts on his/her linguistic repertoire, their neighbors or other participants were asked to assist me with interpreting the meaning of what was said during an interview where multiple languages were used, and multiple translations occurred. For

example, in an interview with Nway Meh, who knew only Karenni, I was supported by Loh Meh and an 18-year-old Karen neighbor. Loh Meh spoke Karenni, Burmese, and English but she was not comfortable using English in the translation process because she was afraid that she could not deliver the right message across from Karenni to English. The Karen friend and neighbor of Nway Meh’s family, Mu Yo, spoke Karen, Burmese, and English. Here, we can see that Burmese is the common language that Loh Meh and Mu Yo speak. Unlike Loh Meh, Mu Yo was confident in using English as she had been in the U.S. longer than Loh Meh. She jumped in to help us when she witnessed our language barriers. As a result, our interview was carried out through multiple translations that started from my question in English translated to Burmese by Mu Yo and from Burmese to Karenni translated by Loh Meh. When Nway Meh responded, the translation started from Karenni translated to Burmese by Loh Meh, and Burmese to English by Mu Yo. It can be represented by Figure 4.

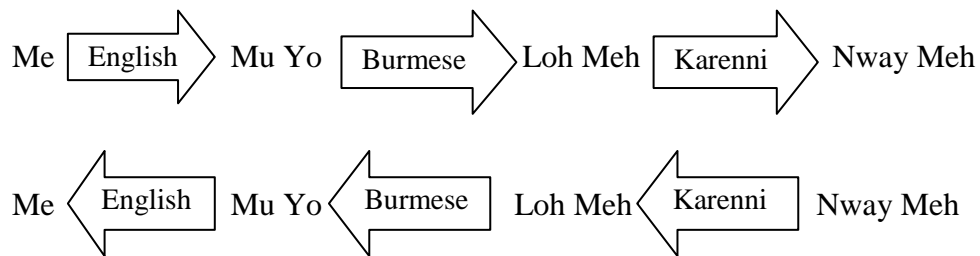


Figure 4. An example of translation process used in the Karenni community

The process of providing (or obtaining) multiple translations has helped the Karenni refugees improve their way of living since they arrived in the U.S. There are several factors as I have discussed earlier in See Meh’s experiences of learning Burmese and Karen because the 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 or speak Karenni. Therefore, one or more translations throughout the process of communication are needed if the intended audience (in this instance, me) does not know Karenni and any of the other Burmese ethnic languages. This figure also shows how authorities, support agents, and those who use the mainstream language are in contact with the Karenni refugees, and vice versa.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described and analyzed the recently-arrived Karenni families' experiences of language learning and literacy development by focusing on the multilingual strategies they used in a variety of settings. I have also examined movement across linguistic and national borders in terms of the complicated ideologies of language that influence what they say and do, their actual practices, and the simultaneous emphasis on learning English AND maintaining languages and practices of their home communities. The data analysis yields insight into the complicated relationship between accumulated literacies, multilingual repertoires, and linguistic funds of knowledge (Moll et al, 1992; Veléz-Ibañez & Greenberg, 1992) among the Karenni participants. I view such resources as a form of "multilingual capital" (Dagenais, 2003, p. 269; Bourdieu, 1977). In many communities, multilingualism appears to compete with the language ideologies that privilege English; however in the families I observed

and talked with, these languages and resources live side-by-side, in apparent harmony, with implications for their future trajectories. In spite of the fact that the participants have challenging tasks throughout their migration trajectories, the analysis emphasizes and demonstrated the valuable, hard-earned skills of the participants that should not be disregarded.

CHAPTER SEVEN

MULTIMODALITY AND EMERGING LITERACY IN

THE KARENNI HOUSEHOLDS

In Chapter 6, I explained how my participants utilized the languages and literacies that they acquired and accumulated over the course of their lifetimes. In this chapter, I highlight the literacy practices that have emerged among the participants in my study as a result of living in Phoenix, Arizona, with a particular focus on their use of technology and multimodality. With increased access to information technology and to inventive electronic gadgets that they never or hardly had when they were in the remote refugee camp in Thailand, they encountered and learned to use technology in their everyday lives, to work, communicate and play with each other. The findings and analysis presented here reveal how and what kind of technology the Karenni participants utilized as well as the many different purposes of their use of computers and communication technology. I describe and analyze the way in which technology has shaped and transformed their lifestyle, daily activities, the way they “learn,” and how they “develop” literacy skills that accommodate their unique experiences, desires, and the current setting.

Technology has shaped (and been shaped by) the lived experiences of participants from all age groups. Factors such as language proficiency, personal preference and interest, audience, technical knowledge, and purpose are all relevant. For example, a mobile phone is widely used among adults for talking with friends and relatives within and across national boundaries while teenagers

prefer texting with their peers. In this study, the Karenni youth used texting codes, abbreviations, and slang. The adults, on the other hand, had enough English proficiency and computer literacy to read and write in full sentences while texting and writing e-mails. Children under the age of 12 preferred to build and participate in a community of video gamers in their neighborhood. All such new literacy practices represent experiences of movement that intersect with recent advances in information and communication technologies. These practices assist and create productive lives, social networks, and learning in the receiving nation and facilitate the migrants' connections to people, institutions, ideas, and values from the homeland.

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 how the children's literacy practices were influenced by playing video games with siblings and friends. The next section examines how and why the Karenni teenagers use digital literacies, social media, and texting. And, in the third section, I explain the Karenni adults's use of technology, especially a mobile phone. Although the adults' technology usage is considerably less than that of the children's, their practices indicate strong desire to connect and reconnect with the people from their homeland. Collectively, I underline the newly-arrived Karenni immigrants' emerging literacy practices as a result of movement shaped by current available resources and technology advancement.

Younger Karenni Children's Video-Gaming Community

In this section, I describe and analyze the experiences of six younger Karenni children (5-12 years old), all male, while playing video games. The data analyzed here come from observations of processes of language socialization in households, on playgrounds, and in other community settings. With a focus on how certain communities of practice emerge among the younger children group, I examined where the children played and spent time with each other (e.g., the living room, the apartment's parking lot). I had meaningful discussions with them, and played with them in numerous occasions. I found that the younger children in my study, Gu-Gu, Ngee-Ngee, Je Ru, Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh, used multiple modalities to participate in digital literacy socialization on a daily basis. Each of them (individually, in pairs, or in groups) moved from activity to activity by practicing digital literacies more often than adults. 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 their favorite and most time-consuming activities at home and in the neighborhood. It became a part of their daily life. As reported by Nway Meh's Family, their current video game console was their fourth one. They had already had three game consoles that they used until they were damaged beyond repair within two years.

The practice of playing video games had been established in the neighborhood soon after the children moved to La Frontera. They were introduced to a video game console and many exciting games, which they had never seen in the refugee camp. In addition to learning a second language, English, to socialize

with other children from ethnically diverse backgrounds through video games as described in Chapter 5, I found that the children have learned (from their peers) how to use technology to interact and play with each other while working towards a larger goal.

Drawing on the communities of practice framework, I examined how their video-gaming activities foster learning and technology-mediated literacy and socialization. I explored what knowledge they used, what they learned from playing the video games, and how this knowledge is related to the children literacy development. My findings from these children's videogame playing are threefold. First, the data analysis gained from this Karenni children's community emphasizes the usefulness of multimodality. That is, playing video games influences the children 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, playing video games promotes a community of learning that involves interaction with other gamers through playing and discussion. Each gamer brings with him unique knowledge and skills to share with and to teach his fellows while exercising his expertise as a digital native in this social group. Finally, video games are a tool for these gamers to access a broader community and educational opportunities through pop culture and globalization.

Literacy development and the art of using a video game controller

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

game console, or a machine to operate a game, and a TV, a video game controller, and a game cartridge. The video game controller is the key tool. A gamer must become familiar with this particular tool because it is the device the gamer uses to 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 2x4 inches that has two protruding pointed handles sticking out at the lower portion so that the gamer's two hands can easily grip. 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, X, and \square symbols, respectively. On the left hand side, there are four arrow-like buttons as the representations of \uparrow , \rightarrow , \downarrow , and \leftarrow . In 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 skills and familiarity with these buttons, their locations and their functions while the gamer pays his most attention to the screen. The controller that my participants used had a wire to plug in to the video game console. The console could be plugged in by the maximum of seven controllers depending on the console's design. This means that one game can be played by multiple gamers, each using his own 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 videogame 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 tons of actions such as running, jumping, punching, and somersault, 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 learn to know each button's function by reading the game manual, guessing from his experiences of playing a game similar to the current game, or pressing all the keys to experiment with how each button works until he¹⁴ 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, 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

¹⁴ "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.

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.

The features of the game above demonstrate the extensive knowledge of the game that young gamers possess. In these ways, video gaming is a situated practice that draws on designed details and a multi-layered context based on the storyline (such as a fight, a race, or a war), a purpose (to win, to score, or to solve a problem), rules, and restrictions. The game players learn how to take action or react in the context from the hands-on activity, trial, taking risk, and both success and failure circumstances.

It is even more complex when an action needs an ability to operate a combination of two or more buttons. While observing Je Ru, Gu-Gu, and Ngee-Ngee playing a car racing game, I found a white paper plate that had the five following lines written in pencil.

R1 R1 O R2 → L1 L2 × × □ R1

R1 R2 L1 R2 ← ↓ → ↑ ← ↓ → ↑ ← ↓ →

R1 R2 L1 × ← ↓ → ↑ ← ↓ → ↑ ← ↓

Δ ↑ ↑ ← → □ O ↓

△ ↑ ↑ ← → □ ○ →

Researching secret codes or special techniques was one of the strategies the young Karenni game players employed to solve problems, overcome a challenge, and win the game. When I asked the children about the codes on the paper plate, they explained that by using the sets of combination key listed on the paper plate, they could gain access to some special features. As explained by Je Ru, these codes were for the particular racing game they liked to play, not for other games. The five combination keys were for car, sun (light), energy, getting bigger, and getting smaller, respectively. Even though all of the children admitted that they did not read the manual, they shared with me that they had opened the manual booklet to look for help with what they could try and they found these codes. They learned to know what each code could do by trying each code while playing. After repeatedly using the combination codes, Gu-Gu, Ngee-Ngee, and Je Ru remembered them by heart and learned to press those buttons on the controller within a second without looking at either the controller or their notes.

This finding reveals two aspects of learning. First, the children's strong commitment to achieve the optimal outcome when playing the video game leads to their motivation to explore additional information. Even though they avoided reading the manual from beginning to end, they utilized the manual as a reference when they needed to understand how to be a more competent player, how to overcome a challenge, or how to win the game. In the process, they used a skimming technique to search for useful information in the written texts and took out only what benefitted them. Second, the children made use of the secret codes

effectively in the appropriate situation, calling on certain practices as needed during play. They apply the knowledge of the codes that they have learned through “first-hand experience.”

The illustrations above demonstrate a key ingredient of literacy development processes. The literacy practices described here reveal the ways that semiotic systems work in practice. By calling on their knowledge of written symbols in relation to what they know about images, gestures, movements and sounds, the children learn that meanings are attached to things, even if such meanings change according to context. The cognitive and logical dimensions of literacy are complex (Gort & Bauer, 2012), especially among the younger children who are in the process of “emergent” literacy development. This is because young children have not fully developed ‘conventional’ literacy (p.2), or reading ‘written’ texts, in the way that competent and experienced adults readers do. Therefore, the connection of available semiotic system and the children’s interpretation of meaning here indicate the literacy development in progress shaped by the mixture of multiple symbols, multi-layered plot, and rule-governed details of the game. This experience serves as a foundation in learning to read and understand images, symbols, and texts in other settings (such as in reading) that are also context-dependent.

The mixture of graphics, texts and images, modalities, and the video-gaming activity requires and develops the children’s hand-eye coordination (as mentioned in Chapter 2). Many of the children did not need to look at their controller to see where the button they wanted to press was. In fact, they

remembered the combination codes by heart while operating the controller by hands and fingers. The process of using a game controller to operate the avatar in the virtual world is comparable to hands-on, authentic learning (though the outcomes appear only on screen) because the results of the children's performance and action are immediately carried out. What gamers are required to do and learn to play the game successfully is entirely visualized, authenticized, familiarized, and experienced.

Situated learning and multimodality

Because the children in this video-gaming community are also English language learners, I paid attention to how gaming enhanced or was related to language learning. From multiple observations and conversations with the children, they did not necessarily need to fully understand the language used in the video game to be able to play it. For instance, observing Sha Reh, Toh Reh, and Eh Reh of Nway Meh's family playing *Call of Duty* (a warfare-based game in which the children called "America"), I learned that they could continue playing the game without the knowledge of sentences showing up on the screen such as "Press X to pick up health", "Press O to shut the door", and "Press Δ to stand up."

Later, I discovered that all of the children enjoyed the game because they could rely on the other features such as sound and graphic, apart from spoken and written language. Often, the games started with a brief description of the game context or an introduction of a character delivered in spoken or written in English and even Japanese, in which 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 could relax. 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 its winning goal of the game they played. For example, when Toh Reh was playing *Call of Duty* that 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 iron sight of the rifle to assist him in aiming his target¹⁵. During the time when Toh Reh managed 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. However, when he (and his avatar) faced the dead end represented by a huge brick wall without an exit, he managed to turn his avatar around and to go in the opposite direction and looked for another way. Here, we can see the practice that is situated according to the game design. Whether or not Toh Reh understood the phrase “Wrong Way” on the

¹⁵ This game genre is called the first-person shooter game.

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 iron sight of the rifle, 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 game software orally articulated the 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 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. He is able to choose and read cues that make sense to him from the many cues available on the screen.

While Toh Reh’s performance above proves the usefulness of multimodality in the technology-mediated literacy practices, Gu-Gu’s experience shows that gamers must pay attention to more than just the written text. One day, Gu-Gu faced a technical problem while playing *Star Wars* game. His activity was

interrupted when the 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 port 1 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. 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 is 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 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 how young gamers learn through multiple modes, even when they have limited writing and reading competencies in their native language. Because they are also English language learners, they react better and faster when texts make sense to them. That is, when texts are associated with images, movements, symbols, and sounds that give 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” (p. 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 system 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 Chapter 1 and 3, for young children, who rely on a variety of modes around them because of their limited reading and writing competencies (Gort & Bauer, 2012), game-based literacy filled with multimodality provide rich and multiple semiotic options for young children to make meaning.

Communities of practice among gamers

In this section, I will discuss how literacy as social practice is performed among gamers. The gaming community has been established in this apartment complex in part because the parents knew each other and were comfortable letting the children play with neighbors without adult supervision. As a “newbie” in this video-gaming community, I learned that the children become members of a particular gaming community by participating in the activities of the multi-layered game and by exchanging information with each other. One evening, the young gamers played the game at one individual’s apartment, and the next evening, another group member would host the activity. Also often, the group moved from

one apartment to another or more in one evening. The gamers often lent and borrowed their games. When a latest video game was purchased, it normally became the greatest attraction and these gamers would crowd at the apartment where the new game was featured. When they finished playing, they discussed the game and performed a fighting style to each other as if they were the characters in the game they loved to play.

I experienced this process of community building first-hand one evening while playing a car racing game with Je Ru. Je Ru and I played *Sonic* car racing game while Gu Gu and Ngee Ngee were watching us. When the race started, I thought that pressing the button → would move my virtual car but I was proven wrong. Je Ru effortlessly navigated his virtual car at high speed around the track while I was struggling with the buttons on the controller. Witnessing my struggle, Ngee-Ngee came closer to me, pressed his small finger on one button on the controller I was holding. My virtual car started moving. Then, Ngee-Ngee moved my thumb to touch a button on the lower part of the controller on the right hand side, then instructed to press the button, “X, like that, like that, and then go, press X”, while I was looking at what was happening on the screen. When my virtual car moved, I hoped that I could control it to run to the finish line. However, it was not that simple. While trying to run fast, the car had to avoid the missiles fired from opposing players. Ngee-Ngee watched me and continued his instruction, “Shoot this one, L1, shoot like this, press this one to shoot” while pressing his finger over my finger on the controller to help me shoot the other cars to clear the path of opponents. I have learned to know that these game players learn both from

the experiences of playing the game and from the other game players through interactions in the setting where other game players accompanies them.

Another example was when my virtual car was severely damaged and smashed into the wall on the track. I could not operate it to move and I was giving up, in which brought about the following correspondence with Ngee-Ngee,

Me: I gonna die.

Ngee-Ngee: You not die yet.

Me: I not die yet?!

Ngee-Ngee: Yeah.

Me: ...

Ngee-Ngee: Your car is broken. You have to move like this...

(pressing his finger on my finger on the controller).

Me: This one, right?

In this situation, I could not continue because my virtual car did not move. I quickly realized that I was losing the competition. From Ngee-Ngee's standpoint and experience of playing this game, he also understood that I was about to "die" so he said "You not die yet" and the car is just "broken" while instructing me to press the button he believed would move my virtual car back into the running. Following his instructions, I was able to move my car back on to the track and stay in the game. Here, we see how useful information might be exchanged between gamers. Ngee-Ngee participates in the community of practice where he has acquired skills to read the context. Then, he calls on his knowledge and experience that fits and works effectively in this context to react. Ngee-Ngee

can interpret the emergent situation and predict the solution based on the logical elements available to him. As an inexperienced gamer, I have a different interpretation in the situation because I have only partial knowledge of this context.

The interactions between “Ngee-Ngee and me” in the virtual world shows that playing with other gamers fosters new knowledge and techniques to play the game. Each one brings the knowledge to share, deepen, and widen the comprehension. With the hands-on practice, guidance and comments from other gamers, I was able to gain better understanding of the game’s context and find an adequate solution to the situation. The situation also emphasizes the concept of digital natives (Prensky, 2001) among the young gamers while I was a digital immigrant in this local community. The children had experienced being outsiders to this community before when they started playing video games, but through regular participation in this social activity and instant playing to improve their skills, they became comfortable and knowledgeable insiders.

I also observed other gamers helping each other learn knowledge and skills needed to succeed at gaming. For example, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee made use of their computer literacy to browse for the information they needed online. Finding a way to overcome the challenges in the fighting games such as *Dragon Ball Z* and *Naruto* games, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee typed in YouTube.com on their sister’s laptop that had access to internet. On the YouTube page, they typed the name of the fighter they wanted to select as their avatar in the game and the opponents’ name in the search box on YouTube. For example, they typed “Goku

vs. Freeza”, which meant the contestants will be Goku and Freeza, the characters of *Dragon Ball Z*. Then, many potential video clips that contain “Goku vs. Freeza” in the titles showed up on the screen. These video clips were cut and uploaded from the animation version of the stories. They clicked one of the video clips to watch how the two fighters fought and what techniques they employed. They also clicked and watched other video clips. Then, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee tried to apply the fighting techniques they saw on the video clip when they played the *Dragon Ball Z* game. In addition, they typed “Naruto” on Youtube.com to watch the animation version of *Naruto: Clash of the Ninja* to gain more information about the storyline and the characters. Often, when accompanied by other gamers, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee replayed the video clips they found to show their fellows. In these ways, the knowledge acquired by one gamer in the group became everyone’s resource (Wenger, 1999, p. 252).

Through the lens of literacy as social practice and language socialization, I have described how the children in these households have learned to use technology through social interaction and participation. I have identified at least two stages of learning that are involved in playing video games in this Karenni children’s community. Gamers become full-fledged members by 1) learning through responding to the multimodal texts available in the virtual world and 2) learning through interacting with the other gamers.

Since a game consists of cultural and multimodal texts that contain a set of rules and restrictions, the gamer is required to know and apply those meaning texts and rules in a given context. The gamer may start at a very slow step to

understand the game context, plot, what he can do, and how to react to a challenge. When the gamer has repeatedly tried many techniques, failed multiple times, and won a couple of times, he has learned the norms, techniques, and strategies to initiate an action, to react to the situation, and to overcome the challenge by using all the available resources. When playing with other video gamers, the activity contributes to strong communities of practice (Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010). When Ngee-Ngee instructed me how to play the racing game, when gamers talked about a game, and when Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee showed a video clip of the animation version of *Dragon Ball Z* game to their friends, knowledge and information was sought, disseminated, and exchanged. As discussed in Chapter 2, the gamers bring their similar goals and shared knowledge (cultural capital) to the video game community. This communal activity presents a non-linear learning community outside school and institutional setting (Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010, p. 363). However, it reveals the meaningful engagement and sense of belonging in their gaming community while indicating their shared cultural values and artifacts. Altogether, gamers construct knowledge from two interrelated sources, the socio-cultural context designed in the game and the socio-cultural involvement with their gamer community.

Popular culture as a resource

Through their active use of technology, the children in this study 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 new immigrant's 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 children in this study 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 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.

According to Gort and Bauer (2012), young learners try to learn the meaning of things around them in their immediate contexts (e.g., from interactions with peers and family members) and from “the integration of different modes” (Gort & Bauer, 2012, p. viii). But children's practices are also shaped by influences that might be more distant—part of the social, political, or

historical context. As their reading, writing, and interpreting competencies are still limited (Bauer & 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 for developing their understanding and meaning-making process. In return, as a way to express their knowledge, thoughts, and understandings 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), not limited to only reading and writing print texts.

As illustrated in this section, video games and popular culture produced in a variety of modes (e.g. virtual game, poster, animation, coloring books, cards, video clips, DVDs) have the power to educate, inform, and entertain the young Karenni children. It is evident that they were engaged in the communities of practice in their local community. 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 videogames and products of popular culture shape these young children's values, attitudes, perspectives, and opinions.

Parents' opinions

The parents of these young video game players had mixed feelings about the practice of playing video games, especially when the children were involved with what they considered "excessive" playing. Teh Reh and Loh Meh told me that they did not like their sons to play video games so much because this activity took away their time to do homework and school assignment. Teh Reh and Loh

Meh had to force the boys to do their homework everyday after school. This was not always feasible because as soon as the boys came back from school, they started playing video games right away. As mentioned earlier, the Karenni participants felt at ease living at La Frontera where allowed the children 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 p.m.) before they went back to their own respective houses, which meant that they did not do their homework and academic assignment earlier than that. Teh Reh and Loh Meh bought the video game console and several video games for their sons to help the 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 child and his friends to play video games would help keep their children at home

and out of trouble. If there was nothing interesting to do at the house, they tended to go 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 I talked with all gave different reasons for allowing their children to play videogames, 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 the video games at all. I had not experienced this before. 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 up 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 finished.

Here, we see evidence of the parents' unique perspective on the hierarchy of learning. Learning from school and academic assignments is 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 United States, 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 Chapter 4, the parents wanted to come here to the United States because they expected their children to receive "quality education." Although playing video games contain fruitful resources for learning, it was different from what the parents

define “education” and from their expectation of what “formal” schooling in the United States should be. Also, since the very beginning of their resettlement in the United States, 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, “No good, no 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 a wide range of activities using different modalities. They enjoyed music video viewing, watching Burmese and Karenni movies, doing homework, and reading religious texts such as those mentioned in Chapter 6. In this section, I focus on the multimodal literacy practices of three female teenagers, See Meh, Hla Meh, and Daw¹⁶. The observational and interview data was obtained from observing these three teenagers and talking with them about their digital usage and opinions on the usage. The three girls’ multimodal literacy practices include online chat room and internet surfing, as well as texting by using a mobile phone. Their practices presented here indicate their literacy development and their identities that are carried out through a variety of social engagements.

¹⁶ During the data collection period that I observed and interviewed the four teenagers, I had not seen that Saw Reh used social media and texting.

Internet surfing and social media

When moving across national borders, the Karenni refugees also moved to the digitized society where they have greater access to digital technology, device, and usage than the country they left behind. See Meh told me that she had been amazed with the fact that she had access to computer both at home and school here in the United States: “ที่นี่มีเทคโนโลยีเยอะกว่า อย่างเช่น มีคอมพิวเตอร์ แอร์เพลน เซลล์โฟน [here has more technology, like computer, airplane, and cell phone].” During data collection, 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 (e.g. at the library, in the computer lab) and at home every day. Mostly, they used it for internet surfing and participating in online chat rooms. Their practices indicate several features of their emerging digital literacies in this new context.

See Meh and Hla Meh’s digital literacy practices present the expansion of their hobbies that can be alternatively fulfilled online (Lam & Rosario-Ramos, 2009). For instance, See Meh shared with me that she liked Thai songs and read Thai magazines and 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 soap operas. Her interests are due in part to her exposure to Thai pop culture during her four-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, “ชอบดารานไทยมากกว่าดาราราคีอื่น ละครไทยก็สนุกกว่า [I prefer Thai actors to others. Thai soap operas are also more enjoyable than others].” After her family purchased a laptop, See Meh used it mostly for entertainment, searching her favorite actors’ pictures (mostly Thai), Thai new songs, music videos, and soap operas. While continuing reading print texts in Thai magazines and books to fulfill interests that she had before moving to the U.S. (see also Rosolová, 2007; Rubinstein-Ávila, 2007), internet provided another mode and served as an additional mode (Cruickshank, 2004) for See Meh to continue her interests. Hla Meh, on the other hand, used Internet in addition to a DVD player to fulfill her interests in Burmese and Karenni songs, karaoke, actors, and soap operas.

Socialization is accomplished in virtual spaces as these migrant teenagers use particular literacy practices to navigate not only their movement across geographical and cultural borders but the challenges of using information technology. The refugee teenagers in this study had physically moved across borders but had been able to reconnect and create a network among old friends by using social media (e.g. gmail and ooVoo). See Meh said that this communicative mode helped maintain her friendship with these friends:

เคยเจอที่เมืองไทยค่ะ ที่แคมป์นั่นค่ะ แล้วก็หนูรู้จักเขา ยังติดต่อกันอยู่ แล้วหนูก็ขอไว้แล้วก็เล่นด้วยกัน เพื่อนที่หนูสนิทที่แคมป์นี้เขามาอยู่อเมริกา 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 the United States but in another state (states outside Arizona).]

Like See Meh, Hla Meh was also fond of using the Internet. Hla Meh used ooVoo.com¹⁷ 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 virtually reunite with their old friends whom they met face-to-face in the past because they and their friends have moved to the United States 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 shows us how a transnational community is constructed virtually even when participants live in different geographic places. In this particular case, See Meh and Hla Meh's refugee friends' network has moved across physical borders, in a transgeographical (Lam, 2009b) way, and this phenomenon brings about a shift in modes of communication. The new virtual network here has built up based on the previous, yet maintained, relationship in addition to the physical Karenni community and network they have created at La Frontera in Phoenix, Arizona.

In addition to reconnecting with old friends, online social media created new connections among the participants in my study in part because they shared

¹⁷ ooVoo.com is one of the most popular video-conference websites among teenagers (*Forbes*, February 1, 2012).

similar linguistic and socio-historical backgrounds as well as interests and purposes of the connection. Unlike Hla Meh, who used ooVoo.com to talk only with old friends, See Meh sought for and met “new” friends to talk with via this online chat room by using its feature of video conference or the voice call. At home (unlike 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 camera 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 camera and talk to each other by using speakers and microphone (without typing texts). This video conference also had an option whether or not 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 in her real life, she used these options differently depending on how comfortable she felt allowing the person at 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 need with a careful attention, See Meh 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 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 introduced to them 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 would like 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 United States 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 “พี่เขาใจดีมากเลยค่ะ [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 experiences of living in the United States. 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 & 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. I asked See Meh if she had a facebook account because I knew that some refugee teenagers her age living at La Frontera used it. 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 was sent to a Karenni social network, several Karenni people's mobile phones, and See Meh's father's phone. This incident horrified See Meh. Even though she understood that it was her picture that was transformed, and not the real her, she 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 protection and of her right to choose whom she contacts on the virtual space. Among strangers online, she created a virtual name and logged on to chat in order to test the waters for security purpose. 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 (Schechter & Bayley, 2003) as well as her knowledge that she can choose to perform certain identities for certain purposes.

I also learned from both See Meh and Hla Meh that their socio-historical and linguistic backgrounds played an important role in their virtual socialization.

In return, the virtual socialization provides a space for identity construction through language choice. From networks with virtual friends, we can see that both Hla Meh and See Meh had “filtered” through their online friends and continued the connection only with certain, not all, online users. For Hla Meh, she only talked to old friends who used Burmese and Karenni and whom she had known since she was in the refugee camp. For See Meh, in addition to making new friends (who were also refugees from Burma and Thailand), she also gained some new online friends, all of whom were American-born Thais or are Thai-speaking immigrants living in the United States. See Meh told me that she liked being able to communicate in Thai and talk about their similar experiences of living in the United States. Both girls prefer to keep in contact with those who share similar backgrounds, and importantly, linguistic repertoires.

As discussed in Chapter 6, See Meh made use of her multilingual repertoire (she was fluent in English, Karenni, Karen, Thai, and a little Burmese) to engage with others here in the U.S., and these repertoires influenced many of the choices she made on the virtual space. For instance, she used her virtual name with a 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, whom she wanted to continue talking with, 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. In doing so, she used similar language practices in both domains:

I will use the language they use, whatever language they use...because I know many languages.

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 of them attempted to keep in contact with the people who shared similar linguistic and cultural roots. In other words, the virtual space provided the two newly-arrived teenagers ways to maintain their regional linguistic affiliations (Lam, 2004, 2009a) and socio-cultural 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 movement across contexts intersects with information technology—and how they both are used to maintain transnational connections and languages.

See Meh and Hla Meh's use of information and communication technology raises questions about equal access. Hla Meh told me that she did not subscribe to an internet service provider at home because she could not afford the monthly subscription. Instead, she used the wireless internet connection at See Meh's apartment unit or the wireless internet connection she appropriated from her neighbors (without them knowing it) when she was in her own apartment. She sat with her laptop next to the window in her room where she claimed it is the right spot to receive the best internet signal.

Hla Meh's use of this technology indicates that a digital divide remains where there are inequalities between those who have access to information and communication technologies and those who do not. Although Hla Meh was among those who could not afford an internet subscription at home, she was aware of its advantages in creating connections across borders. She tried to find a way to receive the internet signal and ended up "piggybacking," or obtaining Wi-Fi access without the internet subscriber's knowledge or permission. With the computer literacy Hla Meh had learned in this new context and her strong desire to reconnect with her friends and maintain the transnational relationship, she found a way to achieve her communicative goal. She liked that 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 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 another 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 spoke English minimally both in informal conversation and in class, they texted often in English to Karenni and Burmese friends living in the U.S. because it was the only language option they had on her phone. However, while texting, Hla Meh, who owned a mobile phone and texted me sometimes, used words I never heard her saying orally (e.g. “Hi my love,” “We miss u so much”). In addition, her texts included abbreviation and colloquial languages 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, similar to Hla Meh, 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 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?” and “I <3 u¹⁸” for “I love you.” I also read some of her texts on the phone that read (the following messages are not

¹⁸ “<3” stands for a horizontal heart shape.

necessarily correspondence used in the same conversation just a random sampling of messages retrieved from Daw's inbox with her permission),

Omg u wright 1 work many long time

Gooooood!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

Daw told me that she had not had a mobile phone and used text messaging in Thailand. The texts above show the emerging literacy and linguistic creativity in her new context and the impact of electronic/mobile devices on her new method of communication as well as linguistic production. In addition, Hla Meh shared with me that she learned the text codes from friends through texting and online chat room whereas Daw learned it from conversing with her Burmese and Karenni friends by texting alone. As I have 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 them all out, or to pronounce the whole word or sentence like in the oral communication. The data show the emerging literacy and linguistic creativity derived from the receiving context and from their second language learning.

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 "Gooooood" 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-age children as it provides more opportunities for children to engage with the language through reading and writing. Similar to language as semiotic system, learning how to read and write text messages exercises literacy skills that predominantly include the connecting between the visual to 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 co-constructed and textual society is created and maintained while language creativity is the tool. Here, while texting, Hla Meh and Daw used textese, or language used in text messages, instead of spelling whole words or sentences out to signal that they belong in the same speech community, or the same gang (Crystal, 2006). Importantly, Hla Meh and Daw’s texting practices in, as they called “English,” were carried out even though it is not their native language. Nevertheless, due to their “desire” to communicate and the “device” that offers them only English alphabet, the teens began to create their own norm of interaction and to establish unique codes to circulate among their texter community. This process presents how their linguistic creativity was initiated to suit their demands.

Transnational Literacies among Karenni Adults

All of my adult participants owned a mobile phone and they enjoyed using it to connect with friends and relatives both inside and outside the United States.

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 turn to talk to Phae in the living room. Such telephone call 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 relationship with their friends and relatives by using a mobile phone. They all told me that they had a lot of friends living in the United States such as in California, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Texas, and Utah and in foreign countries such as Canada, Finland, and New Zealand. All of them agreed that a mobile phone was very important for them. It was not only the key tool for maintaining a good relationship with the Karenni people in the United States 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 "don't use computer or internet there."

All of the adult participants 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, they became familiar with the buttons and texts on the screen after a couple times of usage. On the contrary, the adult participants believed that using computer 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 among their teen children.

Teh Reh made use of texting function of a mobile phone as well as e-mailing through the Internet access for his work as an interpreter that required him to contact with clients, organizations, and companies by diverse methods. And through the methods of texting and e-mailing for work, he 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 was afraid that the phones ring would interrupt the intended receiver's studies, work, business, or important meeting. He also sent text messages to me with the reason that texting allowed me to check the messages whenever I was available. He added, "It's important. 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 [texts]." Apart from texting, Teh Reh made use of voicemail function and multimedia messages such as pictures and songs to send greetings to his friends. He also regularly used e-mails to communicate with his clients related to his translating job.

I have found that most of the Karenni adults did not use the texting function and e-mailing with Internet access not only because of their limited English proficiency, but also because they viewed it as an unnecessary practice. The Karenni adults had desire to connect and reconnect with the country and the people they left behind and they fulfilled their desire by using other methods.

Watching Karenni or Burmese movies, music videos, and soap operas bought from Thailand or borrowed from friends and neighbors in the United States, for example, were always practiced among 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 considered Boe Meh's favorite songs and music videos boring because they were filled with "old languages" for "old people." This is different from the teenagers, who sought for new and up-to-date songs, music videos, and soap operas from Burma and Thailand online. In addition, when the Karenni adults wanted to learn more about their home countries and people, they asked their teen children to surf Internet for them apart from making a phone call.

In addition, the maintenance of transnational relationship was also found through the Karenni adults' practice of money transfer (see also Blommaert, 2010) through Western Union and a local store. They told me that, while they were far apart from their people, they had strong ties and cares for their friends and family members, who were in need of financial support, both in the United States and other countries. Their attachment to their roots was extended to not only friends and family, but also the Karenni people as a whole. At the Karenni Association's monthly meeting (see also "Support Networks in the Karenni Community" in chapter 6), for instance, a male member announced that a retired Karenni military officer, who was known among them, passed away in Thailand's refugee camp. From the meeting, I learned to know that this Karenni community

in Phoenix had transferred money for the retired officer's medical treatment for many months of hospitalization. At the meeting, they all planned to collect more money from Karenni families in Phoenix to contribute to the funeral in Thailand and 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 a job. The fund was planned to be distributed to families in need who lived in the United States and in other countries. This indicates their strong ties to their roots and their desire to continue the transnational relationship by using other methods available to them in the current setting. In conclusion, although the Karenni adults minimally used electronic gadgets in comparison to the children, their strong connections to the people in and from their homeland were maintained.

Summary

This chapter highlights the value of multimodal literacies as resources in the recently-arrived Karenni refugees' everyday living. I move away from the "great divide" that privileges reading and writing print texts over other kinds of communicative modes. In fact, I emphasize how social interaction and multimodality exist and evolve in the participants' households and neighborhood. As discussed in the data analysis, the participants' emerging multimodal literacies include written texts, oral texts, sounds, and other kind of visual elements that consist of images, graphic, symbols, signs, and gestures. 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 the people from their homeland or who share similar linguistic background and interests.

The practices among teenagers and adults suggest their desire to maintain strong connections with Karenni youth and adults living in other parts of the world. The Karenni adults did not use all the multiple functions that their electronic gadgets provided. However, their practices such as consuming cultural products from their homeland and sending money to their friends and family indicate that their transnational connections are actively maintained. For teenagers, online chat room and texting serve as resources for their social and educational opportunities. 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 system, 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 globalization, technology, and popular culture in these immigrants’ lives. As shown in this chapter, practices that involve multimodality and real-life experiences can be utilized, applied, and adapted for 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 counts 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 not only negatively influences the American locals and educational policy makers that the new immigrants are unproductive. In fact, this assumption affects the recently-arrived immigrants' perception of "education" that it has to be what is approved and standardized institutionally. Consequently, their literacy practices at home and neighborhood are marginalized due to its low value-attribution.

CHAPTER EIGHT

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

In conducting this study and privileging ethnographic methods, I aimed to provide an inventory of language and literacy practices used by the participants (what language and mode was used, by whom, for what purpose) and examine how language and literacy facilitated learning, created new understandings, and maintained transnational connections. I found similarities and differences of literacy practices across individuals, families, and generations. Below, I explain the findings of this study as understandings that are still “in-process” (Hall, 2003, p. 234; see also Brazier & Mannur, 2003), or taking shape, as I continue to learn about the language and literacy practices of the participants in relation to their experiences as refugees and their emerging trajectories.

Contested Language Ideologies

Throughout the study, contested language ideologies (e.g., different kinds of language ideologies between the sending and receiving nations) among the Karenni families were constructed and re-constructed. For instance, the Karenni refugees’ ethnic languages have been contested by Burmese 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 Association), and as a language of the mainstream media and entertainment transcended 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 United States.

Upon arrival in the United States, tension between English and the participants' previously-acquired languages emerged because of the hegemony of English perceived from 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. corresponding with locals and authorities) and written forms reinforced their belief that their lack of English proficiency (and literacy) created problems in living here and challenged their efforts to live comfortably and to access social and economic resources. As a result, the adult participants show their hesitation when it came to the question of their future plan and where they wanted to live and work. At times, many Karenni parents were exhausted with their day-to-day challenges in the current settings 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."

The young children, however, claimed their existence and participation in literacy and social practices by using English for their fun activities (playing) and for creating social networks, especially with other social actors from linguistically diverse background. They became involved in situations that required English because they knew that their voice would be heard. In addition, the children in this study were influenced by their surroundings, popular culture, and the prevailing notions that have been established and disseminated throughout their

community. Unfortunately, misconceptions regarding other's language proficiency or lack thereof are formed based on the aforementioned influences and their own personal experiences shaped since 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 group.

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 of the linear theory of learning and great divide perspective (Goody, 1977) that still dominates our public discourse, education, policy, and society where language is structured in a vertical hierarchical order. Although the adult participants had acquired certain kind of literacies to fulfill their tasks, they seemed to feel devalued and unrecognized. With such ideologies, language socialization became a two-way process in this community. While the elder generation passed on the native language and culture to the younger ones, the younger generation, who had formal schooling in the United States, became the mediator 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 & 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 & 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 here. Nevertheless, throughout the data analysis, I have found that my participants are in the process of examining what language and literacy practices work effectively for them and fit their needs during the first years of their resettlement. Trying to overcome the challenges in the receiving nation, the Karenni adults asked for help, experimented, questioned, observed, and made use of their 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 way 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, the language and literacy skills at the time of movement (Blommaert, 2010), and what additional practices emerged

after their resettlement in the United States. I found that variations of linguistic repertoires among the participants were prominent, primarily due to differences across generations (i.e. adults' linguistic repertoires are different from children's) and 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, socio-cultural, and socio-historical backgrounds but their language and literacy practices and repertoires varied because they had acquired different languages at different levels while living in different countries. While in the receiving nation, 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 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 a 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 movement. Therefore, See

Meh and her younger brothers utilized different linguistic strategies in the United States. That is, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee learned English as their second language in the United States. As a result, the act of translanguaging (as described in the section on “counting in English” in Chapter 6) was carried out to create their unique communicative strategy and their own norms of interaction. Conversely, See Meh understood the content better when I used Thai to explain the class materials (e.g math, biology) to her as Thai was her most-used academic language in the past.

I found that generational differences in linguistic strategies were influenced by the language and literacy levels that participants had before their movement. While living in the United States, 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 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 are used for certain goals. For example, See Meh (re)learned Karen apart from English because she wanted to be accepted among her Karen friends in the United States. 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 make use of their strongest academic language other than English to make meaning of the English academic language they are required to accomplish. 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 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.

The data also shows that language socialization, or how one learns to become a member in a speech community, occurs and changes throughout our life (Schechter & Bayley, 2002). In this case, migration is a major factor in the participants' new trajectories of 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 the present ideological circumstances. Previously-acquired and recently-acquired languages are used to fulfill context-dependent strategic goals although the dominant language in their receiving nation is 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 the high status of the languages of the dominant groups, they were determined to maintain their primary languages because they are the language of their family members shown in the data analysis, 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 & 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 they 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 one can put to use the multiple languages one has acquired.

In addition to distinctively unique skills, practices, and strategies, the participants’ experiences and everyday living show that what is more prioritized in their lives and community is being multilingual. Here, instead of viewing languages in the form of vertical hierarchy, where English is at the top, the participants’ use of multilingual repertoires in the data analysis leads us to view

languages in the form of continuum where English is one of many useful and available languages in the participants' repertoires.

Emerging Digital Literacies

For the Karenni refugees, moving across national boundaries also means moving to a digitized society where there is technology that they have not used before. The data discussed in Chapter 7 indicate that recent advances in technology might have had some influence on the recently-arrived Karenni refugees's transnational experiences, although the amount of influence varies depending on one's generation, preferences, purposes, available resources, and language proficiency.

The practice of young Karenni children playing video games demonstrates the value of having alternative resources for language and literacy development. As suggested in Chapter 7, the children had learned to operate at high speeds while engaging in the activity seriously through the discursive demands of the video games. Each game consists of multi-layered details in depth and requires proficiency to understand substantial sets of rules and possibilities. Through these meaningful learning experiences and meaning-making processes, the young gamers gained a variety of proficiencies, especially literacy skills required to read and interpret situated symbolic systems while playing a "good" video game. Facilitated by the context situated through the game designs, they learn rules, norms, role, and techniques to become a better gamer. This works the same way as becoming a competent member in a given community, where the members

acculturate, learn to understand the language, and the norm of seeing, living, and interacting in the community.

Several studies have examined the literacy development of individuals involved in multiplayer communities online/virtually (e.g. Martin & Steinkuehler, 2010; Steinkuehler, 2006, 2007), and some research shows that participating in virtual multiplayer video games enhances English learning among English language learners (Rankin et al, 2009). Similar to the virtual gamer community, the neighborhood-based gamer community investigated in this study demonstrates language learning and literacy as social practice among gamers, who meet on a daily basis, both at home and school (though the video game community was only performed at home). In playing with interethnic friends, their English was practiced both for playing games and oral communication while they were engaged in their communal activity such as guiding and following their friends, discussing their knowledge, and doing more research on the games.

The findings from the Karenni teens' use of online social media and texting illustrate how historically-influenced, socially-adapted, and emergent language and literacy practices are acquired. They discovered and utilized available resources that had evolved within the structures and constraints of the receiving context. We can see here that there are two key components involved in their emerging digital literacy practices. They are *desire* and *device*. By using the electronic devices they encountered in the United States, the teenagers in the study could accomplish their desire to communicate with both old and new friends, who shared similar linguistic and cultural background regardless of

geographical boundaries. The two ingredients stimulated their learning of how to use advanced information technologies. Their literacy practices here were distinct from their practices in their previous location in Thailand, where they claimed that access to the electronic device and Internet was limited.

Both online chat room and texting are the foundation of social identification created through engagement in a virtual community and a speech community, where members can decide on their language choice. According to Lam (2004, 2009), the “virtually uncontrolled space” (Blommaert, 2010, p. 49) allowed these teen immigrants to express, exchange, and share their native languages and transnational experiences that outsiders of the immigrant communities rarely understand. As shown in See Meh and Hla Meh’s digital literacy practices, they only talked to friends who were originally from Burma and Thailand or to those born in the United States to parents who were originally from Burma and Thailand. They sought for connection and comfort online (Lam 2004, 2009a) in order to expand their social network apart from the refugee friends they had in the neighborhood and school. The Karenni teens’ practices shed light on this new immigrant group’s construct of socio-cultural identity in the United States since the very beginning of their residence. We can see what it means to be a Karenni in the United States even though it is still an ongoing process.

In addition to the sense of belonging that these online practices have provided, these teenagers have also become adept at texting—another practice that has helped to maintain their strong ties to community. Texting among the Karenni teenagers served a social function (e.g., to keep up with friends), even

though the practice was conducted mainly in English. Such practices demonstrate their progress with literacy development. According to Crystal (2008), an awareness of literacy mechanism and a certain level of achievement in the language as a reader and writer are required among texters (p. 163). While texting, the teens activated and were engaged in the symbolic system created by their speech community. Such practices demonstrate one type of communicative competence often discovered or created by youth.

Finally, generational differences were found in the digital literacy practices in these participant families. Among all of the six Karenni adults, only Teh Reh used texting and occasionally e-mailed, while the other adults used a mobile phone simply for talking in this study. Although the Karenni adults did not use information and communication technology often, they did maintain a connection to their roots, homelands, and friends by employing other methods such as founding an ethnic-enclave organization. They communicated with each other to get help by word of mouth to navigate in the current setting. They moved around within a few months of resettlement in the United States to seek support and to be close to members of their ethnic community when they were separated from their country of origin. The adults told me that the Karenni friends in their neighborhood helped with watching over their children and they felt strongly supported when they needed help. The finding shows the value of out-of school literacy and learning not only in one particular family, but also in the *web* of family members' social interactions and practices in their transnational community.

All in all, the Karenni families productive practices in the United States show that their existing and emerging knowledge and literacy practices strongly support their efforts to work, study, and live in their new environment. It is important to note that they do not necessarily learn the whole new system in their new context. In fact, while they face the challenges of differences, they also learn to fit in their new environment by learning the language prioritized in the new community. And, in doing so, their current language and literacy practices were complex, consisting of traditional communication, oral and written, and digital literacies, depending on available modes, their location, and their purpose. Despite the fact that their limited English proficiency is usually accompanied by assumptions that they are deficient, their existing and emerging knowledge and literacies have been employed to the maximum.

Implications

In a time of increased movement of people across borders, the findings shed light on complicated issues impacting not only refugees but also other groups that have been minoritized and marginalized, linguistically, socially, and culturally. This study has a number of implications (theoretical, methodological and pedagogical), and I will discuss each in turn below.

Theoretical implications

The study adds ethnographic texture, nuance, and depth to what Blommaert (2010) has called the sociolinguistic reality of our times. As a study of language in society as it is (Hymes, 1974), this work illuminates the constraints and affordances of of globalization and social mobility (Block, 2005; Blommaert,

2010; Rampton, 2006) for specific people living in an era of accelerated movement across boundaries and borders, with a focus on the role of multilingualism and information technology in that movement. By investigating the recently-arrived “multilingual” Karenni refugees living in the United States, I bring needed attention to the ways that refugees move across national borders and bring with them their accumulated language and literacy practices to their new space. Drawing on Blommaert’s (2010) theory of changing language in a changing society, I have examined how the language and literacy practices of the participants have been shaped and changed in the process.

The study shows that it is important to take into account the historical influences (Holland & Lave, 2001; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wortham, 2001, 2005) that shape the participants’ experiences and to illuminate the complex language ideologies that have influenced life events in diverse social and geographical spaces. While each space is a field of language practices, the immigrants also bring with them the ideologies they hold to contest with the sociohistorically-constructed ideologies held by those who live in the current circumstances.

This study contributes to theories of bilingualism and multilingualism by showing that, while English is desired, other languages and interpreters are needed, especially in this time of globalization and the influx of transnational individuals in various parts of the world. In addition, for these multilingual newcomers who interact on a daily basis in various domains, they “naturally need and use different languages because no language is sufficient or suitable for meeting all the communicative requirements across different situations and social

activities” (Mohanty, 2006, p. 263, see also Canagarajah, 2009; Kramsch, 2009).

In line with ideologies of language that value multilingualism, the newcomers work to maintain and use their multilingual repertoires. The findings show that for multilingual individuals, proficiency in one language is not enough. Indeed, separating one language from another constrains meaningful application of their multilingual repertoires. The findings show that learning and using a language effectively and efficiently takes place when learners have an important role and meaningful interaction with others through participation and engagement in an activity.

In addition, this research has implications for studies in multiple literacies. With a focus on the complicated trajectories of migration and language learning intersecting with advances in technology, I explored and explained how literacy evolves and develops among members of displaced communities. To capture the literacy events and practices I discovered and observed, I collected traditional oral and written texts while also documenting the role of multimodal practices. My findings support the central tenets of sociocultural theories of learning and demonstrate that learning is a process. Learning takes place when learners are exercising their repertoires of knowledge and skills through hands-on experiences, meaning-making process, social participation, and situational engagement (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Wenger, 1999).

Methodological implications

Recent research on transnational literacies focuses on how migrants use their multilingual repertoires and literacies to maintain ties across national borders

either by traditional mode (e.g. Dicker, 2006; Farr, 2006; Guerra, 1998; Rubinstein-Avila, 2007; Sánchez, 2007) or digital mode (e.g. Lam, 2004, 2009a, 2009b; Yi, 2009). The present study augments *both* traditional communication (oral and written) and the use of digital literacies while exploring the notion that all communication is multimodal (Kress & Jewitt, 2003, p. 2; Nelson & Hull, 2004). To capture all of these multimodal literacy practices, I paid close attention to artifacts, materials, and electronic device found in the participants' households. I also took pictures of the households' settings and activities, as well as to observe the routines—language, mode, by whom, and for what purpose.

Unlike traditional approaches to language socialization which assume that language and culture are passed on from caregivers to children; this study treats family members in all age groups as active participants in the language socialization process (Aries, 1962; de la Piedra & Romo, 2003; Orellana, 2009). To capture the dynamic processes, I took multiple roles as a teacher, a researcher, and a friend to the families. I participated in activities and conversations with every family member in a wide range of contexts—tutoring, playing, and doing errands. Collecting data in this way, I could explore the interactions between children and parents, between the participants and me, and between the participants and those (non-participants) involved in the context. By doing this kind of observation, I was allowed to see language and literacy practices of the multilingual individuals across contexts. In addition, to understand how ideologies of language have influenced their beliefs about language and their (language and literacy) practices, I combined data collection methods that include

observation, artifacts, practices, talk about talk, and family's language policies. I then triangulated the data gained from what they said, what they did, and what I observed.

To work with multilingual individuals, who did not share a primary language with me, I utilized two strategies. First, the participants and I used English as a lingua franca. Using English, which is the participants' second language and the dominant language of the receiving nation, I was allowed to observe their linguistic choices, their everyday creativity (Maybin & Swann, 2007; Swann & Maybin, 2007), and the ways those choices and creativity were collectively achieved, collaboratively negotiated, contextualized, and contextualizing (Carter, 2007). Second, I made use of interpreters, who were from the participant families and/or from the participants' community. The interviews became more collaborative, comfortable, conversational and natural, which is crucial in building rapport in an ethnographic study. In addition, the translation processes allowed me to see how these recently-arrived individuals handled the situations that involved multiple languages, which is at the heart of this study.

Because I worked with young children, who were also influenced by movement (even though the decision to move was made by their parents), and because young children are often voiceless, I gathered the information from the young children by "listening" to them and "talking" to them in a variety of contexts. Using participant observation (where I actually participated in their interactions and their play), I was able to elicit more information about their

language and literacy practices, their reflections on those practices, and their experiences as recently arrived refugees.

Pedagogical implications

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 already bring to the classroom. Teachers can and should accommodate different languages, modes, and learning especially among learners from linguistically and culturally diverse backgrounds. Also, to help learners succeed academically, pedagogy should incorporate multiple media and student-centered pedagogy (Short, 1991) where language is taught simultaneously with content and context. Below, I add more suggestions and emphasize the implications from this study.

Translanguaging: an alternative for English language learners

In this study, the utilization of translanguaging (García, 2009) functions as a tool to connect the meaningful concept to the learner's repertoires. As demonstrated in Chapter 6 and 7, the participants' practice of using a code that makes sense to them is shown to be an effective strategy. The 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 the English language learners in the classroom make sense of their bi/multilingual repertoires and appreciate their primary language. Though the teacher may not know the students' primary language, s/he

can activate the learners' prior knowledge by utilizing visual aids, media, and multimodal materials.

Digital literacies in schools and curriculum

Multimodal literacies have been integrated in the participants' everyday life. As demonstrated in Chapter 7, playing video games and using digital technologies have greatly influenced 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 & Mendiz, 2003). The process of learning and literacy development when playing videogames 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 21st 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 21st century, when number of immigrants around the globe is rising and technology is advancing at a high speed.

Future Directions

Future work in literacy studies should continue to examine the connections between home and school and how those connections might be investigated more strategically. Future work might also devote more time to observing the children in formal educational contexts (e.g., school) in order to gain and understand how language and literacy experiences change when participants move across contexts. To better understand the specific ways that transnational experiences, flows, change, or continuity influences the language and literacy practices of the Karenni refugees, it would be helpful to design and execute a longer ethnographic study. Alternatively, a comparative study can be conducted among the Karenni refugees living in different host cities (or countries). Also, this similar research model can be utilized to study immigrant groups who are originally from other countries.

Although the main focus of this study was to document the three recently-arrived Karenni refugee families' multilingual repertoires and literacy practices in the receiving nation, generational differences appear to be a core variable. Further research should pay more attention to generation specific patterns of linguistic repertoires and literacy practices, including the nature of the relationship between learning and literacy development, video gaming among young children or Karenni adults, and social identification in the United States. I am particularly interested in the practice of texting among Burmese refugee youth who are already in middle or high school. I would like to explore how they incorporate their primary languages with the English language in texting and other (virtual)

social media as an arena for language and literacy practices and the construct of their identity.

EPILOGUE

After May 2011, I regularly checked on and caught up with my participants by calling, e-mailing, or texting them. After having been in the United States for more than two years, Teh Reh said, “We are very happy in Phoenix Arizona with Karenni families who come from THAILAND and BURMA.” The statement shows that The Reh has maintained strong ties to his Karenni community even as he has lived far away from his homeland. The good news from Teh Reh’s family was that a new baby girl was born to Teh Reh and Loh Meh in September, 2011. His other children, Gu-Gu and Ngee-Ngee, still enjoy playing video games and have become 2nd graders. See Meh, his oldest daughter, is currently in the 11th grade and hopes to do well on the AIMS test. In April, she started a direct sales business (Amway) to help her family. She said that she liked this business because she was not afraid of talking to new people. Drawing on her computer literacy, she has been able to open and maintain an online store as well.

Ka Paw’s family continues to live at the same apartment complex and remains good neighbors of and friends with Teh Reh’s family. Ka Paw has continued working as a janitor at the local shopping mall for the night shift. His wife, Sherry, decided to stay at home with their children and to be the one responsible for the household chores, grocery shopping, and paying bills. Both Sherry and Ka Paw feel comfortable living here now. Ka Paw said, “There’s no problem right now. Before, we had a lot of problems.” Their daughter, Daw, is currently in the 10th grade. Je Ru, who is now 10, has not attended Bible classes

on Saturdays since the instructor, originally from Shan, moved to another state. The family recently purchased a laptop, and Daw and Je Ru are the primary users.

In July 2011, Nway Meh's family moved to Iowa where Nway Meh's husband works and lives. While they face an extremely different winter climate, especially for the seventy-year-old Boe Meh, they are happy to be together. They want to move back to Phoenix because they have more Karenni friends there, but the moving expenses and the challenges of establishing a new home (and figuring out where the post office, bank, and support agencies are), finding a new job, and enrolling the children in a new school have deterred them. Hla Meh has recently acquired a new mobile phone and is still fond of texting. She has texted me on special occasions and holidays.

In late November 2011, the U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton visited Burma. Clinton was the first ambassador to visit Burma since 1990, and she had a personal meeting with Aung San Suu Kyi, the pro-democracy leader in Burma, to show her support for political change. In April, 2012, Aung San Suu Kyi won 43 seats in the Burmese parliament, while the ruling party (backed by the Burmese military government) won only one seat. This encouraging news has heartened my Karenni participants and they now have high expectations that this historic incident will bring democracy, peace, and an end to Burma's ethnic-cleansing war in the near future. This hope also strengthens their motivation to maintain their ethnic languages. They often said that they have had a long civilization and they wish to return to it to live once again.

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APPENDIX A
SYMBOLS USED IN TRANSCRIPTION

- [] The texts in the blanket are the English translation from Thai. The texts in the blanket may be 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 their responses.
- ,
- A comma indicates a continuing, or slight rising intonation.
- ?
- A question mark indicates question.
- !
- An exclamation mark indicates a loud and abrupt expression.
- CAPITALIZED** A capitalized word indicates that the word is stressed.

APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL FORM

To: Doris Warriner

br From: Mark Roosa, Chairsm
Soc Beh IRB

Date: 01/11/2011

Committee Action: **Expedited Approval**

Approval Date: 01/11/2011

Review Type: Expedited F7

IRB Protocol #: 1012005841

Study Title: A Study of Accumulated Literacies and Multilingual Repertoires: Three Karenni Families Living in Arizona

Expiration Date: 01/10/2012

The above-referenced protocol was approved following expedited review by the Institutional Review Board.

It is the Principal Investigator's responsibility to obtain review and continued approval before the expiration date. You may not continue any research activity beyond the expiration date without approval by the Institutional Review Board.

Adverse Reactions: If any untoward incidents or severe reactions should develop as a result of this study, you are required to notify the Soc Beh IRB immediately. If necessary a member of the IRB will be assigned to look into the matter. If the problem is serious, approval may be withdrawn pending IRB review.

Amendments: If you wish to change any aspect of this study, such as the procedures, the consent forms, or the investigators, please communicate your requested changes to the Soc Beh IRB. The new procedure is not to be initiated until the IRB approval has been given.

Please retain a copy of this letter with your approved protocol.

APPENDIX C

CONSENT FORM AND PARENTAL PERMISSION

Dear Family _____:

I am a graduate student under the direction of Professor Doris Warriner in the Department of English at Arizona State University. I am conducting a research study to understand more about 1) your family's multilingual abilities (English, Burmese, Karenni, Thai, etc), reading and writing activities in your households, and your use of multiple languages and modes that include print texts, writings, drawing, and electronic device/materials; and 2) how you keep connections with the Karenni communities both inside and outside the U.S.

Procedures:

I will observe you and your family regularly, interview you occasionally, and take pictures of written objects in your home, including print texts, drawing, and electronic device and materials such as mobile phone, DVD/VDO/CD, and the computer.

The project would entail 1- 3 household visits and observations a week in the evening and/or on the weekends. I would also conduct 8 interviews between January and May 2011. The observations will be between 1-3 hours each and interviews will be between 45-90 minutes each. I will schedule observations and interviews at a time that is convenient for you. During the observations, you and your family can do your daily errands and routines as usual. During the interviews, I will audio-record your answers. I will ask you the questions about your family's history before coming to Phoenix, Arizona, your experiences of working and studying in the U.S. in general, your language use related to your life's experiences and daily activities, your connections to the Karenni communities, and how you keep in contact with the communities both inside and outside the U.S.

Your child or children will be given a camera and asked to take pictures of their reading & writing activities and materials, including what they do for fun, in the households. Your child or children are allowed to participate on their terms, choosing for themselves when and in what situations to take pictures, including the materials they use in the situations. With your permission, I would also like to shadow (follow and observe) your child or children while they are at school for 1 or 2 days in order to understand their language use and learning experiences on a daily basis. Your child/children's participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you choose not to have your child/children participate or to withdraw your child/children from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. Likewise, if your child/children choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time, there will be no penalty. The results of the research study may be published, but your name and family members' names will not be used.

Risks:

There are no foreseeable physical or emotional risks involved with your participation in this study.

By signing below you are giving permission for your child (child's name _____) to be part of the study.

Name

Signature

Date

By signing below you are giving permission for your child (child's name _____) to be part of the study.

Name

Signature

Date

If you have any questions about you or your child's rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you or your child have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

APPENDIX D
WRITTEN CHILD ASSENT FORM

**A Study of Accumulated Literacies: Three Karenni Families Living in
Arizona**

I have been told that my mom/dad has let me be in a project about my family's language, reading, and writing.

I can do whatever I want while Chatwara Suwannamai is at our house. I will be asked to talk to her about my family, my day, and what I do for fun. Also, I will be asked to take pictures of what I do with my family in the house. Chatwara Suwannamai will also go to school with me for 1 or 2 days and watch me there.

I know that I can stop at any time if I want to and it will be okay if I want to stop.

Signature of Subject

Printed Name

Date

APPENDIX E
PARENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Information: This protocol is a modification of I.E. Seidman's (2006) 3-part interview series, with the 3 parts condensed into a single 45- to 90-minute interview.

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants' Experience in Context

Please tell me a little about you and your family background.

- Where born and grew up?
- Parents' language, culture, education, professional background?
- Language(s) raised in?
- Important people/teachings in your life?
- Language(s) spoken now?
- Your schooling experiences?
- Memories of language learning?
- Number of children/grandchildren?
- Language used with children/grandchildren?
- Other experiences that were/are important to you?
- When did you and your family come to the U.S.?
- Current position/job?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants' Experiences

Please tell me about your experience prior to coming to the U.S.

- Where were you?
- What did you do prior to coming to the U.S.?
- What language(s) used on a daily basis?
- What brought you and your family to the U.S.?

Please tell me about your experience in the U.S.?

- Your daily life/routine? Weekday/weekend?
- Language, mode, tool used in your routine?
- What is your favorite activity? With whom? Where? Language(s) used?
- What kind of activity you do with your family/children/grandchildren (e.g. assist your children with homework, family dining, watching TV)?
- Where and when does the activity take place?
- Explore language, mode, tool used in the activity.
- Problems/challenges in any stage of your daily life/routines?
- Problems/challenges with language(s)?
- How do you solve the problems?

Please tell me about your friends and community?

- Friends and relatives in Phoenix, in a different city within the U.S., in other countries?
- Where from?
- How often do you contact them?

- How do you contact them? In what language?
- What kind of activity do you do with your friends? When? Where? How often?
- Language, mode, tool used in the activity?

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to Practice(s)

Given what you have said about..., you...

- able to read Burmese/Karenni/Thai/ English?

Anything/any language you might want to improve tell me a little bit about that?

- What do you think about...?
- How is it important to you?
- What does it mean to you to be able to speak Burmese/Karenni/Thai/English?
- What does it mean?
- How? Why?
- What does it mean to you to keep in touch with your friend and relatives inside the U.S./in other countries?
- Given what you have said that you use... (language/mode) to communicate with your friends and relatives, can you please tell me a little bit why? What are the benefits?
- Will you continue to use Burmese/Karenni/Thai/English? Why?
- Will you continue to use ... (mode/tool such as cell phone, texting, etc)? Why?

Based on what I have observed that ..., can you tell me a little bit about that?

- What do you think about...?
- How does it support you and your family in living here?

Let's talk about your plans.

- What is your future's goal?
- Where do you plan to live?
- What do you plan for your children?
- Suggestions to other people?
- Anything else you would like to add?

APPENDIX F
CHILDREN INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Information: This protocol is a modification of I.E. Seidman's (2006) 3-part interview series, with the 3 parts condensed into a single 30-minute interview.

Part I: Focused Life History – Placing Participants' Experience in Context

Let's talk about you and your family.

- How old are you now? Grade in school?
- Where born and grew up?
- What do parents do?
- Number of brothers/sisters?
- First language learned as a baby?
- Language/s you speak now?
- Language(s) parents/grandparents speak at home?
- Language spoken most often at home? School? With friends?

Part II: Details of Experience – Concrete Details of Participants' Experience with the Promising Practice(s)

Let's talk about your day.

- Your daily life/routine? Weekday/weekend?
- Explore language, mode, tool used in each routine?
- What is your favorite subject at school? Why?
- Kinds of activities you do for fun? When? Where? With whom?
- Explore: language and mode used in the activity
- Kinds of activities you do with your family/brothers/sisters?
- Explore: language and mode in the interactions in the activity

Let's talk about friends.

- Friends at school, friends in the neighborhood?
- Where from (Burma/Thailand/the U.S.)?
- Kinds of activities you do with your friends?
- When and where does the activity take place? How often?
- Explore: language, mode, tool in the interactions.

Part III: Reflections on Meaning – Intellectual and Emotional Connections to the Promising Practice(s)

Given what you have said about... can you tell me a little bit about that?

- What do you think about it?

Given what I have observed that..., can you tell me a little bit about that?

- What do you think about it?

Let's talk about the pictures you have taken.

- What is it?
- What's happening in the picture?
- Materials/tools used? How? Why?
- What do you think about it?
- Did you enjoy it? Why?
- Do you want to do it again? With whom? Why?
- What language(s) are being used in the activity? How? Why?