1. INTRODUCTION

This volume of short papers provides basic overviews of several linguistic phenomena in Lutuv (also known as Lautu), a member of the Maraic sub-group of the South Central branch of the Tibeto-Burman (TB) language family. This branch of TB, formerly called Kuki-Chin, will be referred to throughout this volume as Chin, consists of approximately 50 languages spoken mainly in Chin State in Western Burma/Myanmar, in neighboring areas of Bangladesh and Eastern India (Eberhard et al. 2021), and in diaspora communities worldwide. Indianapolis, for example, is home to a Burmese refugee community of over 20,000 people who hail mainly from Chin State in Western Burma (Lotven 2021; Salaz & Raymer 2020). Dozens of Chin languages are spoken in Indianapolis, almost all of them under-resourced and many wholly undocumented.

The combined language knowledge of the Indianapolis Chin community, in which dozens of under- and un-documented Chin languages are spoken, could keep a team of linguistic researchers busy for several lifetimes. As in any diaspora community, there are many language needs. Communication challenges regularly arise in both urgent (e.g., emergency room visits) and daily (e.g., buying a car) situations. To better support collaboration between scholars, Chin students, and community members, and to foster a work ethos of pursuing research, education, and service in tandem, we have formed the Chin Languages Research Project (CLRP). The CLRP prioritizes student mentorship and works to produce novel linguistic resources and products of practical value (learn more at chinlanguages.org).

As noted, Chin languages are uniformly under-resourced. Many of them, including Lutuv, are largely or entirely undocumented. Thus, while our work is ongoing, and more comprehensive linguistic investigation of the topics addressed herein will be undertaken in the future, the 2021–22 IU field methods class decided to publish a volume of squibs after the first semester of work. We have been influenced by our own desires for descriptions, however brief, of various linguistic phenomena in related languages. Therefore, although the observations collected herein are preliminary and will need to be refined in future work, we share them as a base that we and others can build from moving forward.

We use the term squib with Haj Ross in mind. He described squibs as “short notes about some facet of language,” and went on to say:

*Squibs are short notes about kinky facts of language. They may occasionally be welcome, in that they provide evidence for someone’s pet theory. Most frequently, however, they are rambunctious, insolent, nose-thumbing bazookas, taunting theoreticians of every stripe, daring them to stretch their minds enough to wrap around the damned facts the squibs call to our attention […] But with luck, squibs become seeds (https://squibnet.ci.unt.edu/).*

Many of the thousands of languages on the planet are not represented in the scholarly literature. Lutuv has been one of them. We created the following volume of squibs to begin changing that—to share “short notes about some facets of” Lutuv. The data are not kinky, but we do hope that they are welcome, and we hope fervently that they become seeds.
The remainder of this introduction presents demographic background information about our primary language consultant (and second author) Sui Hnem Par, followed by brief facts about Lutuv. The volume then moves into overviews of the phonetic, morphological, and syntactic topics which are described in the squibs in this volume.

2. SPEAKER INFORMATION AND LUTUV LITERACY

Language data in this volume have been collected in collaboration with Sui Hnem Par, second author of this introduction. Ms. Par belongs to the Lutuv community in Indianapolis and is a long-time member of the Chin Languages Research Project. Ms. Par was born in Burma in 1998. Both of her parents are from the town of Hnaring, and she grew up speaking Hnaring Lutuv and Burmese. The family lived near Mandalay and in Hnaring until 2009. They moved to Malaysia in 2009, to Atlanta, Georgia in 2010, and to Indianapolis in 2012. Ms. Par began learning English in Georgia and Hakha Lai—a lingua franca in Chin State and in the U.S.—in Indianapolis. At home, she speaks Lutuv with her parents and Lutuv and English with her younger sister and two younger brothers. She attends a Lutuv church and is active on the church language and culture committee.

Ms. Par is passionate about Lutuv literacy as a tool for combatting the loss of language and culturally important knowledge. Though a Lutuv writing system does exist, it is not widely used. The only written Lutuv materials currently available are the Bible, a hymn book, and ten children’s stories that she has created (available at chinlanguages.org/lutuv-literacy). She is pursuing a graduate degree in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education in the Indiana University School of Education.

Ms. Par’s passion and priorities have infused and influenced the work that we are doing. Accordingly, the IU Linguistics 2021-22 field methods class has pursued language documentation, linguistic analysis, and the creation of practical literacy and language learning materials in tandem. In Summer 2022 a small group of us will undertake a project to document Lutuv folklife via ethnographic interviews conducted in Lutuv. The resulting conversational corpus will be transcribed, translated, and archived on CoRSAL (https://corsal.unt.edu/). It will also be linguistically annotated, meaning that the resulting product will feed both practical and linguistic endeavors moving forward.

3. A BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF LUTUV

As noted, Lutuv is a member of the Maraic sub-group of the Chin branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family. It is spoken in 15 villages and one town in Matupi, Thantlang, and Hakha townships in Chin State in western Burma, and in diaspora communities worldwide. The Ethnologue estimates approximately 15,000 speakers (Eberhard et al. 2021), though these data are from 2005 and do not account for ongoing displacement. At the time of this writing, there is an ongoing military coup in Burma which began in February of 2021, and stories about military violence in Chin State are abundant in outlets like The New York Times and NPR.¹ ² These facts must be mentioned in work focused on Lutuv, as they have very real human consequences. One such consequence is that Lutuv is now also spoken by approximately 1,000 people in the Chin community in Indianapolis (community estimate).

Lutuv was the language of focus for the Indiana University Linguistics department’s Fall 2021-Spring 2022 Field Methods class. Little linguistic work on Lutuv existed prior to this

course, although linguists at IU have produced a simple word list (Lotven et al., 2019) as well as working papers on sound change evolution (Lotven 2020), adpositions (Haza & Wagner 2020), and demonstratives (Matthews & Wamsley 2020) in Lutuv. Co-author Par has also produced a number of children’s books in Lutuv, as part of her efforts to support and promote Lutuv literacy (https://www.chinlanguages.org/lutuv-literacy).

2.1 Basic linguistic facts about Lutuv
Like many related Chin (and indeed, Tibeto-Burman) languages, Lutuv is verb-final. It is also tonal, though our analyses of tone are in their infancy. With regards to the phonemic inventory, Lutuv consonants exhibit voicing and aspiration contrasts in most stops and voicing contrasts in sonorants, as is common for Chin languages. The most notable feature of the vowel inventory is a very dense high vowel space. Additional characteristics of Lutuv described in this volume include a complex nominal argument marking system that appears to be influenced by a variety of syntactic and semantic factors (generally referred to as differential marking in the TB literature and beyond). Verbal agreement for subject and object is usually pre-verbal, with the presence of a set of distinct post-verbal subject agreement markers triggered by a number of factors (e.g. negation, subordination). Additional topics addressed in the following pieces include negation, formation of relative clauses and questions, causatives, middle voice, directional particles used to convey associated motion, and psychocollocations.

4. REFERENCES