

Language Contact in Myanmar

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Myanmar - location



Over 130 languages spoken by a total of 60 million people

4 language families:

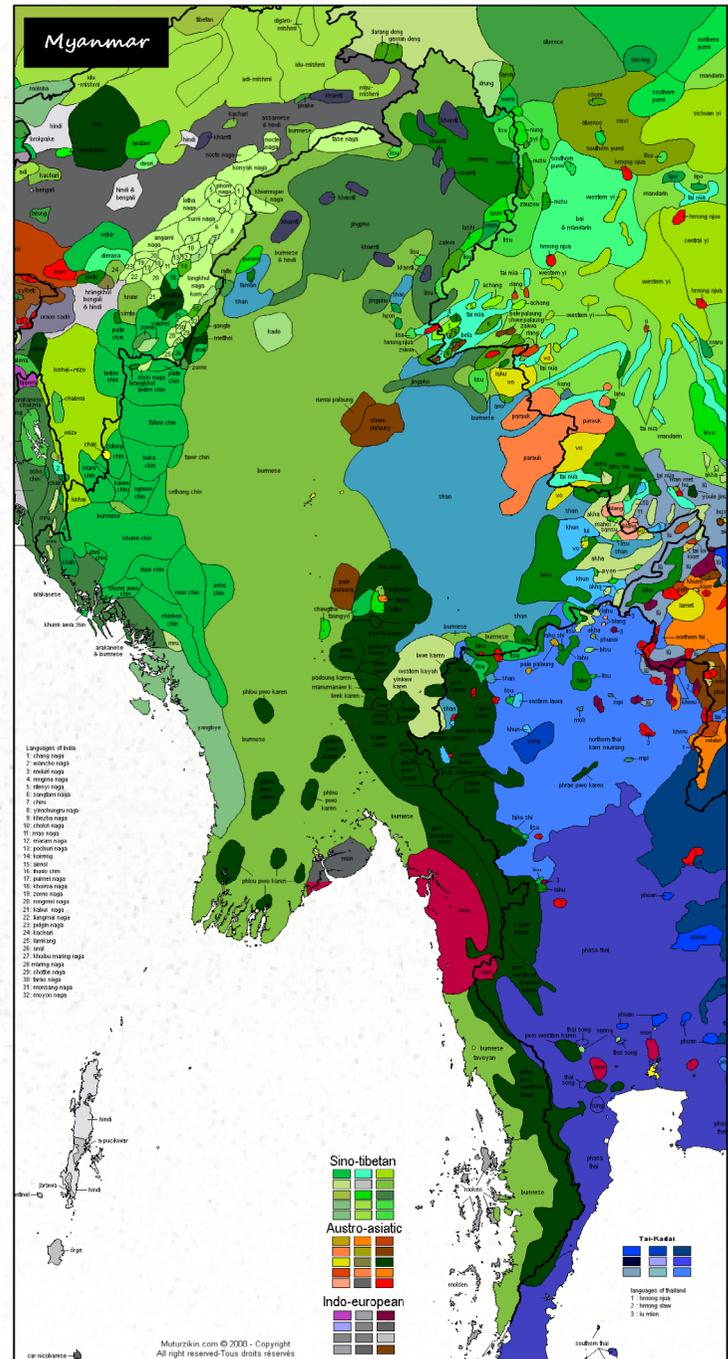
Sino-Tibetan

Austroasiatic

Tai-Kadai

Austronesian

+ **Indo-European (Indo-Aryan)**
Dravidian



Oldest documents

Pyu (Tibeto-Burman, extinct since the 12th c.):

ca. 7th century (?) in central Myanmar

Mon (Austroasiatic):

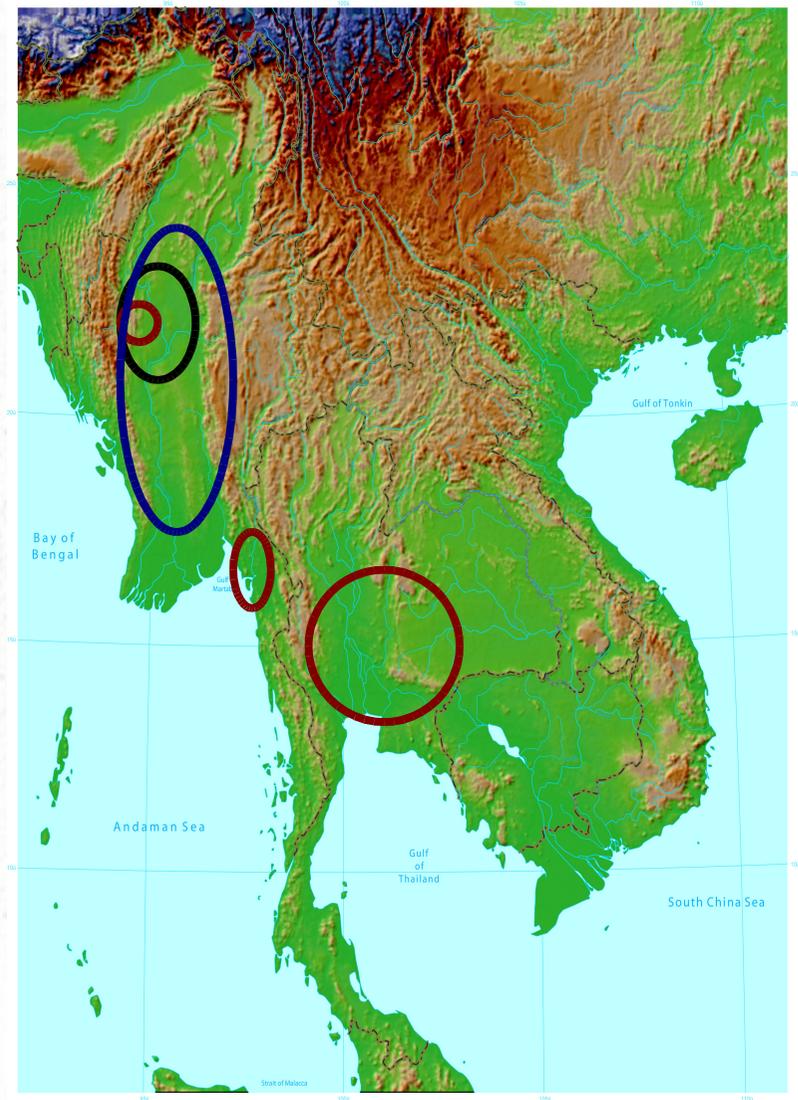
6th century in Thailand (Dvāravatī)

11th century in Myanmar (Thaton(?), Bagan)

Burmese (Tibeto-Burman):

12th century at Bagan, central Myanmar

Myazedi Inscription in Pali, Pyu, Mon, and Burmese (12th century, Bagan)



Typological profile of the languages of Myanmar

Tibeto-Burman - ex. Burmese, Kachin, Kadu:

- Verb-final, postpositions, possessor-possessed, RC-N
- Subordinate clauses preceding matrix, clause-final subordinators
- Finiteness marked by clause-final particles (status/tense)
- Use of classifiers
- Nuclear verb serialization
- Differential object marking (semantically and pragmatically based)

Karen (Pwo, Sgaw, Bwe, Pa-o, etc.):

- Verb-medial, possessed-possessor
- Prepositions and postpositional relator nouns
- RC preceding or following N, other subordinate clauses usually follow matrix
- Use of Classifiers
- Verb serialization

Tai-Kadai languages - ex. Shan, Khün:

- Verb medial, prepositions
- No finiteness marking on V
- Subordinate clauses usually following matrix
- Modifiers follow modified
- Use of classifiers

Austroasiatic languages - ex. Mon, Palaung:

- Verb medial, prepositions
- No finiteness marking on V
- Subordinate clauses usually following matrix
- Modifiers follow modified
- Classifiers not used regularly

Present socio-linguistic and political situation in Myanmar

Burmese only official language, spoken as L1 or L2 by almost all inhabitants

Use of local languages not prohibited, but not officially encouraged

Media only in Burmese (and English)

Use of local languages in some cases as political statement (Mon, Shan, Karen)

Use of local languages by children often discouraged by parents

Use of local languages in some schools officially allowed (Mon, Shan)

Some local languages with long literary tradition, some with literary activity

Local language maintenance through entertainment industry (Karaoke videos)

Many languages still very vital, but use decreasing in most cases

Increasing Burmese influence in vocabulary and grammatical structure

Language contact - some examples

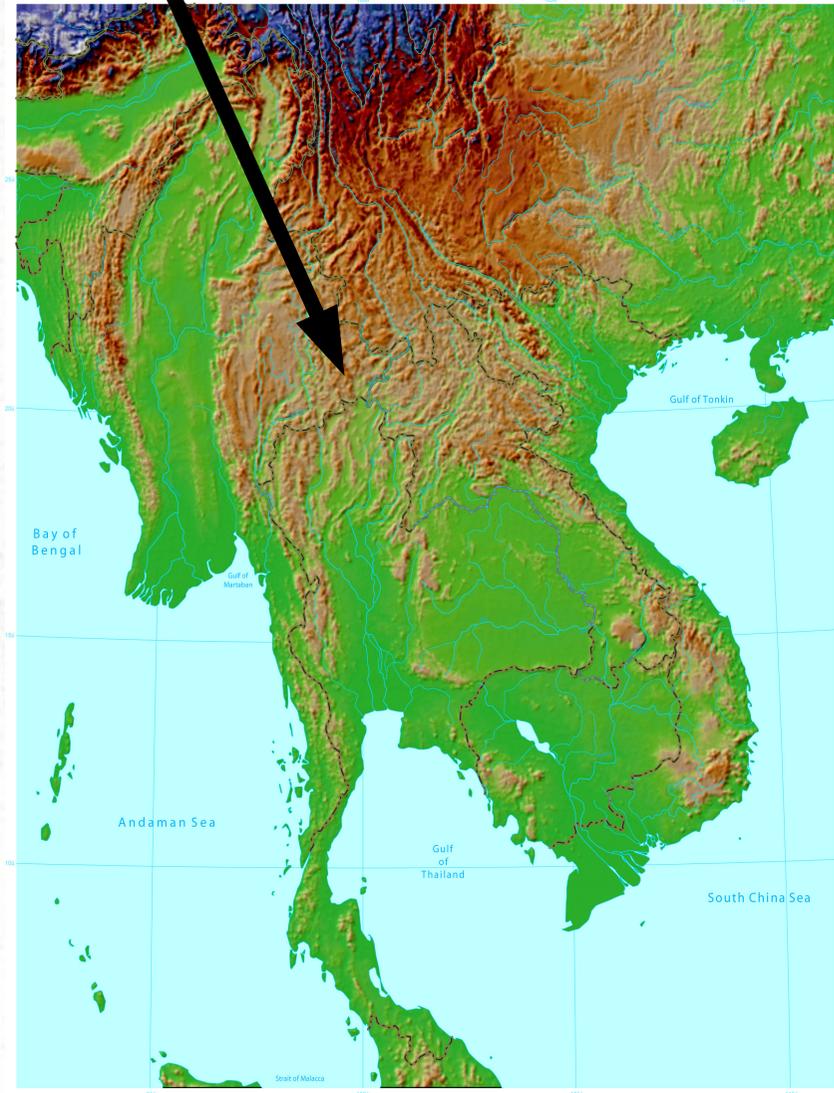
1. The Khün language in eastern Shan State (Kengtung)

Tai-Kadai, ca. 120'000 speakers

Very close to Lanna (Kammueang) spoken in northern Thailand and Lü spoken in Xishuangbanna (Yunnan), probably originally dialects of the same language. Same script as Lanna and traditional Lü.

Historically and culturally close relation with northern Thailand.

Heavy influence from dominant Shan and Burmese replacing Thai/Lanna influence.



Word explanations in Khün Readers 3 and 4

Khün	Gloss	Thai	Explanation	Burmese	Orthography
<i>láʔwaŋ</i>	be careful	<i>ráʔwaŋ</i>	<i>wáy sətíʔ</i>	<i>θətí thà</i>	<i>sati thāḥ</i>
<i>sap kam</i>	vocabulary	<i>kham sàp</i>	<i>kam plě. ʔəthíʔpǎay</i>	<i>ʔədeiʔpe</i>	<i>ʔadhippāy</i>
<i>láʔ thín</i>	abandon	<i>láʔ thín</i>	<i>pēt</i>	<i>pyiʔ</i>	<i>pac</i>
<i>yàap cáa</i>	rude	<i>yàap cháa</i>	<i>kyaam</i>	<i>tə̀an</i>	<i>kramḥ</i>
<i>cáʔnít</i>	sort	<i>chə̀nít</i>	<i>myo</i>	<i>myò</i>	<i>myəḥ</i>
<i>kráʔniŋ cǎy</i>	consider	<i>khə̀nuŋ</i>	<i>cencaa</i>	<i>sìn.sà</i>	<i>cañḥcāḥ</i>
<i>sôp</i>	like	<i>chôp</i>	<i>cḥk</i>	<i>tcaiʔ</i>	<i>krək</i>
<i>môn</i>	happy	<i>mûə̀n</i>	<i>pyô</i>	<i>pyə̀</i>	<i>pyow</i>
<i>dʒn taə̀ŋ</i>	travel	<i>dʒə̀n thaə̀ŋ</i>	<i>ʔòk taə̀ŋ</i>	<i>khə̀yì thwə̀ʔ</i>	<i>kharīḥ thwak</i>

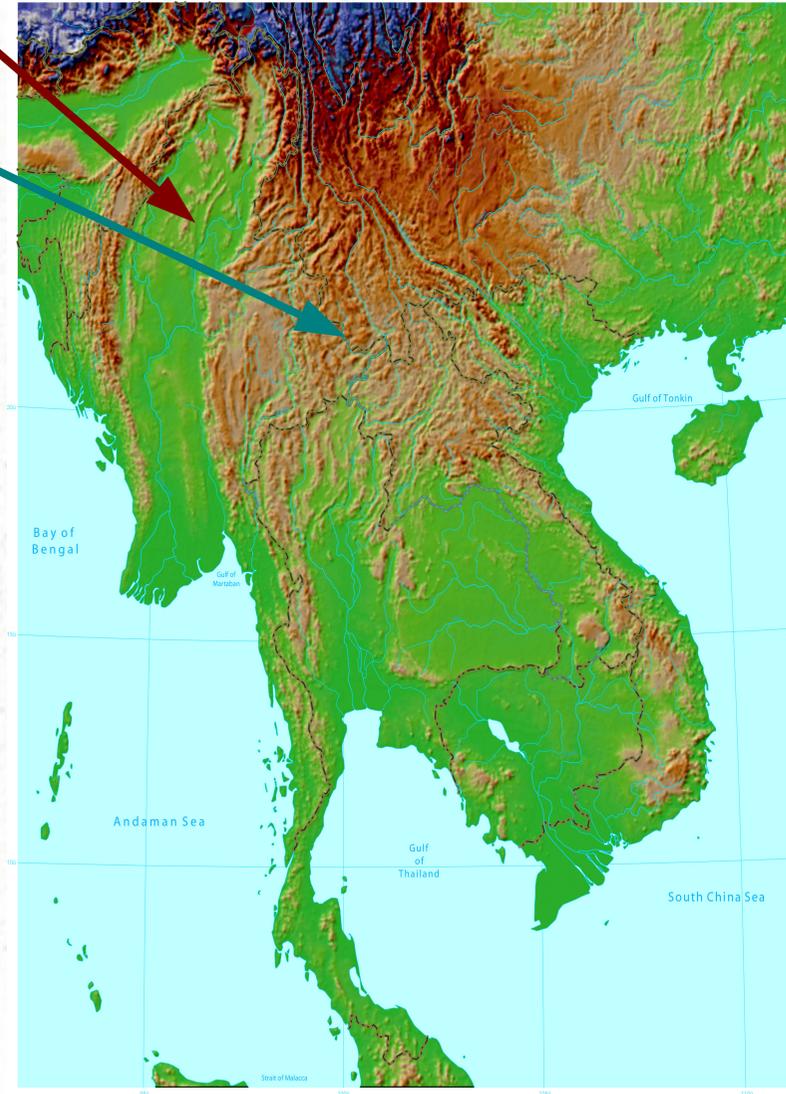
Khün	Gloss	Thai	Explanation	Burmese	Orthography
<i>phǒn</i>	result	<i>phǒn</i>	<i>ʔakyo</i>	<i>ʔatcò</i>	<i>ʔakrah</i>
<i>sǎmkhan</i>	important	<i>sǎmkhan</i>	<i>ʔaye yàʔ</i>	<i>ʔayè tci</i>	<i>ʔareh krih</i>
<i>níʔyaay</i>	story	<i>níʔyaay</i>	<i>hŕŋhaaw, ʔapùm</i>	<i>ʔapoun</i>	<i>ʔapum</i>
<i>lûk sít</i>	pupil	<i>lûuk sít</i>	<i>təpɛ</i>	<i>təpé</i>	<i>tapañʔ</i>
<i>ʔatsəcǎn</i>	amazed	<i>ʔàtsəcan</i>	<i>ʔaam, ʔâan.ʔɔ</i>	<i>ʔán.ʔô</i>	<i>ʔamʔ.ʔo</i>
<i>háan</i>	shop	<i>ráan</i>	<i>sêŋ</i>	<i>shain</i>	<i>chəñ</i>
<i>sǎmdɛŋ</i>	show	<i>sǎmdɛɛŋ</i>	<i>pyáʔ</i>	<i>pyá</i>	<i>pra</i>
<i>lótdu</i>	season	<i>rúʔduu</i>	<i>ʔuʔtuʔ, yâasi</i>	<i>yaθi</i>	<i>rasī</i>
<i>fút</i>	foot	<i>fút</i>	<i>pè</i>	<i>pe</i>	<i>pe</i>
<i>pèk</i>	strange	<i>plèɛk</i>	<i>thusaan</i>	<i>thù.shan</i>	<i>thūh.chan</i>
<i>naay câaŋ</i>	mechanic	<i>naay châŋ</i>	<i>səlàa câak</i>	<i>sɛʔ shəya</i>	<i>cak charā</i>
<i>sǒmlít</i>	succeed	<i>sǎmrèt</i>	<i>ʔòŋ.myâaŋ</i>	<i>ʔaun.myin</i>	<i>ʔoñ.mrañ</i>

2. Kachin (Jinghpo) of Muhse and Myitkyina

Tibeto-Burman language, 900'000 speakers

Main language spoken in Myitkyina,
Burmese L2.

One of a number of languages spoken in
Muhse: Chinese (Yunnanese), Shan,
Burmese, Kachin.



Kachin Muhse/Myitkyina

(1) *laika* *ndei* *shi phe* *dzɔʔ* *ʔo.*
book this 3S OBJ give IMP

ndai *laika-buk* *shi phe* *dzɔʔ* *ya* *re.*
this book-paper 3S OBJ give give(?) SP

'Give him this book.'

(2) *laika* *ndei* *shi phe* *dzɔʔ* *thi* *na* *kun?*
book this 3S OBJ give read FUT Q

ndai *laika-buk* *shi phe* *dzɔʔ* *thi* *na* *i?*
this book-paper 3S OBJ give read FUT Q

'Will you let him read this book?'

(3) *shi n-dzɔʔ* *sha ai.*
3S NEG-give eat SP

shi n-dzɔʔ *sha.*
3S NEG-give eat

'He doesn't let me eat it.'

Kachin Muhse/Myitkyina

(4) *shi phe dzɔʔ sa na kun?*
3S OBJ give go FUT Q
'Will you let him go?'

shi phe sa shəkhu(n) na i?
3S OBJ go CAUS(?) FUT Q
'Will you let him go?'

(5) *shi phe n-kam dzɔʔ sa ai.*
3S OBJ NEG-want give go SP

shi phe n-kam sa khu(n) na ai.
3S OBJ NEG-want go CAUS (?) FUT SP
'I don't want him to go.'

Shan influence in Muhse Kachin?

laika ndei 'this book' - Shan *lîk nĕi* 'book this' (Burmese, Chinese: DEM-N)

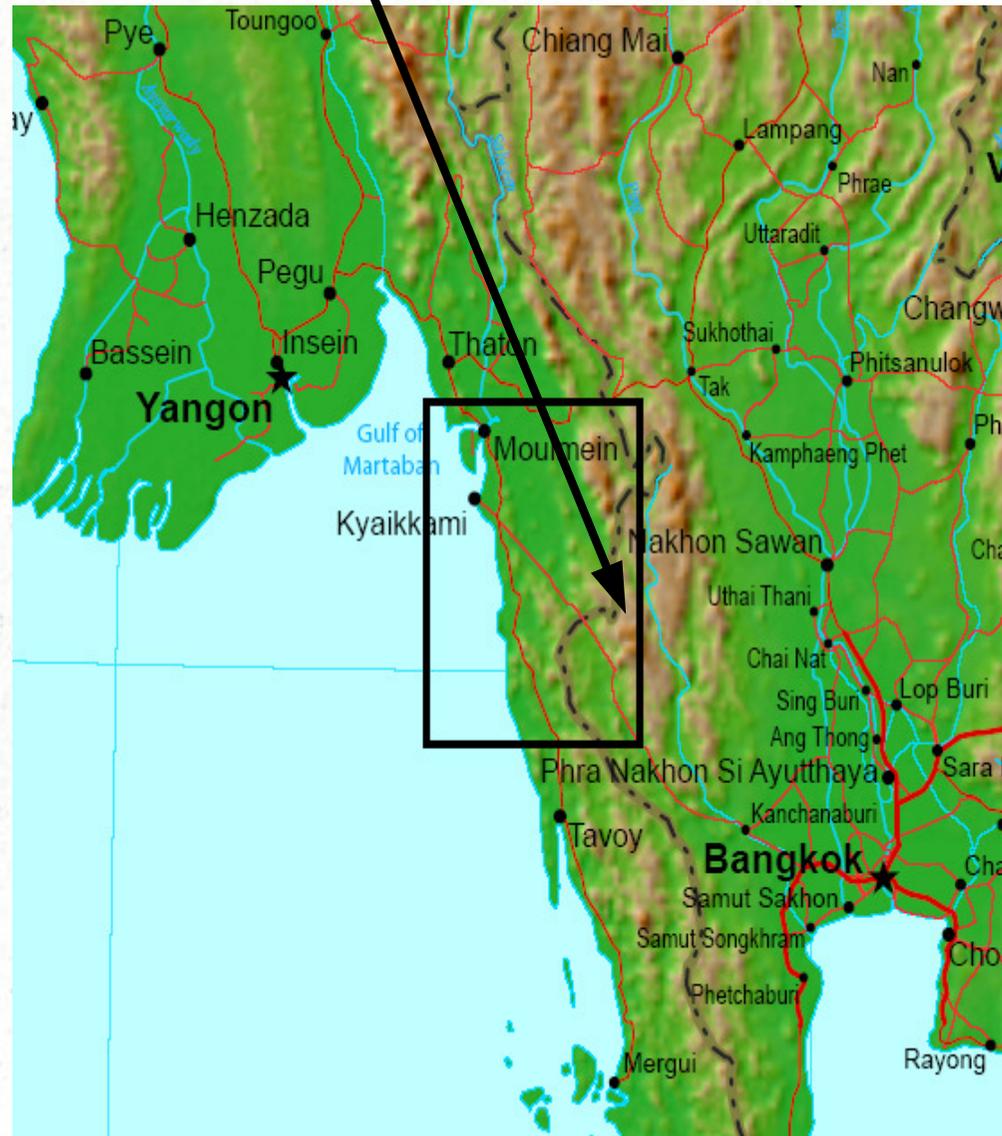
dzɔʔ 'give = let' - Shan *hêw* '*give > let' (or Chinese influence? Hardly Palaung)

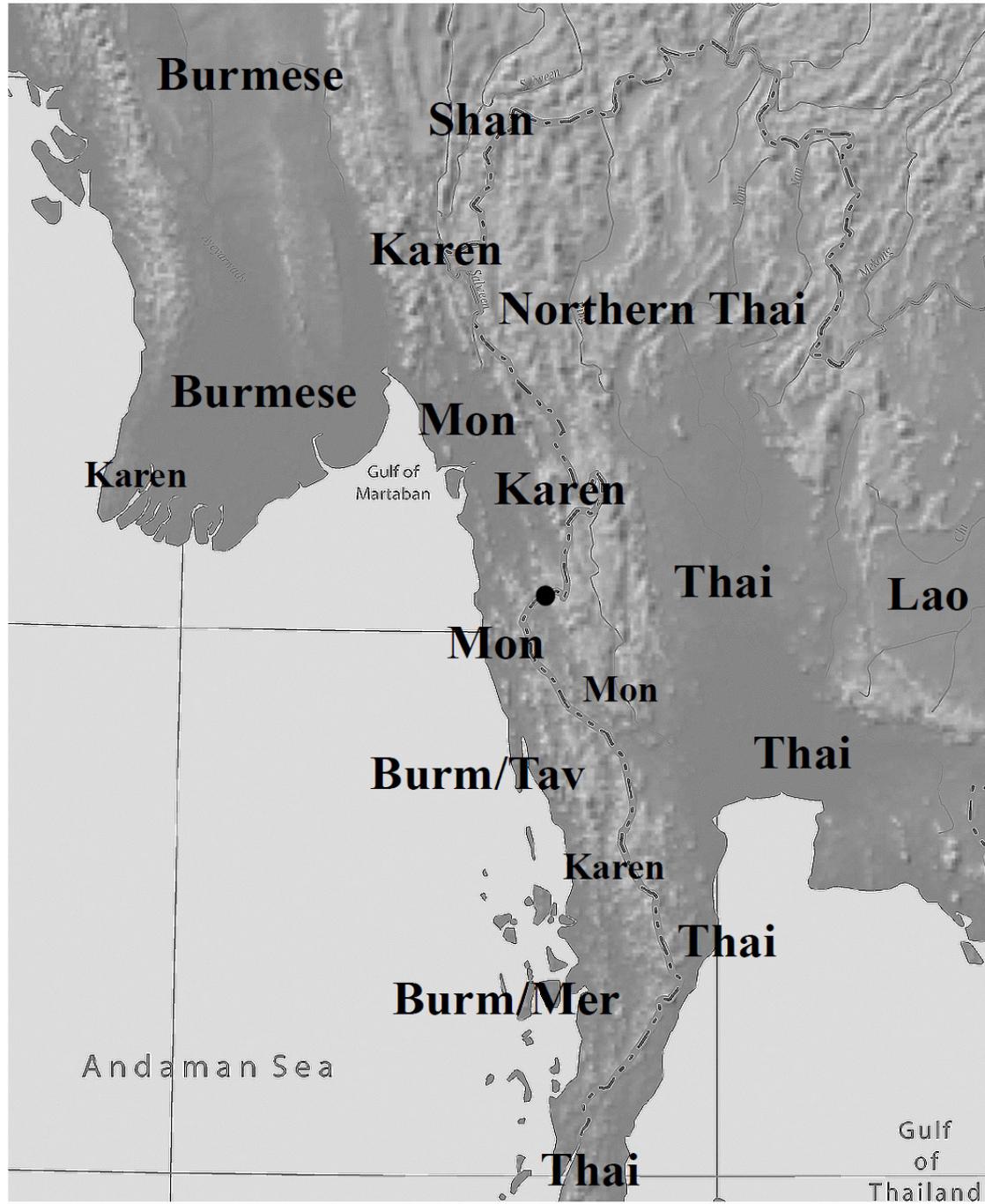
3. Mon and Burmese in southern Myanmar (Hpayathounzu)

Population: Ethnic Karen (Sgaw and Pwo), Mon, Burmese, Thai

Political situation: Under Burmese control since 1990, earlier Karen/Mon; border to Thailand officially closed since 2006; sporadic fighting between Burmese and Karen, rarely Mon

Geography: 250 km from Kanchanaburi, 400 from Bangkok, regular buses to Bangkok (5-8 hours), 4-5 hours by private car on surfaced road to Bangkok, 30 minutes to *wèŋka?* (minibus); daily bus services to *təaʔinsheiʔtəi* (Kayin State) and *θanbyuzəya?* (Mon State) during dry season (8-12 hours), boat service to *təaʔinsheiʔtəi* during rainy season (1-3 days)





Language situation

Burmese	Language of administration, religion and education, daily communication, lingua franca, overall dominant language
Karen	Language of daily communication among Karen, religion (Christian), restricted use in education and administration
Mon	Language of daily communication among Mon, religion, restricted use in education and administration, lingua franca in cross-border trade (with Thai-Mon speakers from central Thailand)
Thai	Language of cross-border trade, Thai services (medical, TV, phone, etc.)

Widespread asymmetric bilingualism, some symmetric bilingualism:

Most **Burmese** speak only Burmese, some also Thai for trade

Most **Mon** and **Karen** speak also Burmese, many also Thai

Many **Thai-Mon** speakers trading in the area are fluent in Thai and Mon

Some **Thai** in the area speak also (rudimentary) Burmese

Mon influence in Burmese:

Sesquisyllabicity (also phrase level in southern dialects)

bhurañ > *bəyin* 'king'

sūkhiuh > *θəkhò* 'thief'

'give' as PERMISSIVE marker (more common in southern dialects)

(FB) PERMISSIVE (Okell and Allott 2001:53)

ʔənauʔ dəgà.pauʔ ká shìn se pa θi.

behind door SRC descend CAUS POL NFUT

'(The conductor) lets (the passengers) off by the rear door (of the bus).'

JUSSIVE (Okell and Allott 2001:28)

bá.cì.maun θi ʔè.ɲèin ko ʔəpyin thwεʔ ywé zè yàun mə=khàin.

BGM SBJ AN OBJ outside exit SEQ market sell NEG=order

'Ba Gyi Maung didn't make Aye Nyein go out and sell.'

(CB)

PERMISSIVE

ʔèin.dzi pè mə=sho né.
shirt GIVE NEG=Wet PROH

CAUSATIVE

ʔèin.dzi mə=sho se né.
shirt NEG=Wet CAUS PROH

‘Don’t let the shirt get wet.’

PERMISSIVE

θú ko pè mə=θwà phù.
3.ATTR OBJ GIVE NEG=go NEG

θú ko mə=pè θwà phù.
3.ATTR OBJ NEG=GIVE go NEG

‘I didn’t let him go.’

JUSSIVE

θú ko mə=θwà khàin phù.
3.ATTR OBJ NEG=go order NEG

‘I didn’t tell him to go.’

‘Give’ in Mon

1. Ditransitive verb (RECIPIENT > THEME)

dɛh kɔ ʔuə hloə.

3 give 1SG money

‘He gave me money.’

2. Preverbal CAUSATIVE marker

dɛh kɔ ʔuə ʔa.

3 GIVE 1SG go

‘He let me go.’

3. “DUMMY CAUSATIVE” (Enfield 2009:811)

ʔuə məkɔʔ kɔ dɛh ʔa.

1SG DES GIVE 3 go

‘I want him to go.’

Spread of CAUSATIVE construction from Mon into Burmese ?

(Mon)

dɛh kn ʔuə pɔŋ.

3 give 1SG rice

‘He gave me rice.’

→

ʔuə kɔʔ pɔŋ.

1SG get rice

‘I got some rice.’

dɛh kn ʔuə ɛiəʔ.

3 GIVE 1SG eat

‘He let me eat.’

→

ʔuə kɔʔ ɛiəʔ.

1SG GET eat

‘I got to eat.’

(Burmese)

θu tɕənoʔ ko thəmìn pè tɛ.

3 1m.ATTR OBJ rice give NFUT

→

tɕənoʔ thəmìn yá tɛ.

1m rice get NFUT

→

tɕənoʔ sà yá tɛ.

1m eat GET NFUT

Negation in complex predicates

Burmese

θu yòdəyà-zəgà mə=pyò tchin bù.

3 Thai-language NEG=speak DES NEG

'He doesn't want to speak Thai.'

θu yòdəyà-zəgà mə=pyò ta? bù.

3 Thai-language NEG=speak skilled NEG

'He cannot speak Thai.'

Southern Burmese

θu çàn-zəgà pyò mə=ta? (bù).

3 Thai-language speak NEG=skilled (NEG)

'He cannot speak Thai.'

Mon

dɛh hù? mòc hɔm ʔə̀rè sem.
3 NEG DES speak language Thai

dɛh hɔm ʔə̀rè sem hù? lèp (pùh).
3 Speak language Thai NEG skilled (NEG)

Secondary verbs

Southern Burmese

θwà mə=pyò thí tó bù.

go NEG=speak TOUCH CONTR NEG

‘You don’t have to go to tell him anymore.’

tɕəno θwà mə=thí bù.

1m go NEG=TOUCH NEG

‘I don’t know the way.’

Mon

pèh hù? tɛh ʔa ra?

2 NEG TOUCH go FOC

'You don't have to go any more.'

ʔuə ʔa hù? tɛh.

1sg go NEG TOUCH

'I don't know the way.'

- ▶ **Hardly any lexical loans from Mon in southern Burmese (lexical loans more conscious)**
- ▶ **Some of the constructions marginally found in Burmese (reinforcement by contact)**
- ▶ **Position of negation varies to some degree in standard Burmese (reinforcement by contact)**
- ▶ **All constructions are fully transparent in Mon and in Burmese (ease of transfer)**

Mon speakers (speaking Burmese as L2) outnumber Burmese L1 speakers → structural influence

Burmese is standard/prestige language in most segments of society → no lexical loans

Burmese influence in Mon

Development of SUBORDINATORS in Mon - CONDITIONAL clauses

(OM)

yal kcit sak ñah ma yām.
if die not.exist person REL weep
'If they die, there is no one to weep for them.'

(MM)

yar tdek ma gah ...
if wet REL say
'if it is wetted ...'

yow dah mā ...
if be TOP
'if it should be the case that ...'

(LM)

(yò.raʔ) jèh ʔa **məkèh** ʔuə pèk roŋ.
(if) person go if 1s follow ASRT

(SM)

(yò.raʔ) dèh ʔa **teh** ʔuə pèk noŋ.
(if) 3 go if 1s follow ASRT

‘If he goes, I’ll go along.’

LM *məkèh* <ma gaḥ, mgaḥ> lit. ‘which is said, speaking of’ (= TOPIC)

cf. Burmese *sho yin, sho tó* ‘if one says’

SM *teh* of unknown origin, also TOPIC marker

Conditional clauses optionally marked with topic marker since MM

→ TOPIC MARKER > CONDITIONAL MARKER

COMPLEMENT clauses

ɲèh hù? kɔ məkèh hù? kɔ? ɛiə? kəh, ʔuə tɛm mən̩ ra?
person NEG give if NEG GET eat TOP 1s know STAY FOC

‘I know that I cannot eat anything if they don’t give me [food].’

Complement clause marked as NON-PREDICATIVE, TOPICAL by *kəh*

cf. formal Burmese

θu la θi ko tɛnɔu? θi θi.
3 come NFUT OBJ 1 know NFUT

‘I know that he didn’t come.’



Burmese *ko*: marker of SPECIFIC, TOPICAL OBJECTS

Development and loss of RELATIVE marker

(OM)

dek mun jun ta kyāk

slave REL make.OVER BEN sacred

‘the slaves which he made over to the shrine’

row min kyek buddha tirley byādes goḥ

manner REL sacred Buddha lord.1s foretell that

‘as the Lord Buddha had foretold’

pun dān ma smiñ pa

merit donation REL king do

‘the acts of merit and charity which the king performed’

“rarely following subject of relative clause” (Shorto 1971:281)

smin daddharāja dewatāw gumloṅ ma siw
king Daddharaja god ATTR.many REL attend
‘King Daddharaja whom the gods attend’

COMMON PATTERN IN OM:

HEAD REL [S V]

LESS COMMON:

HEAD [S REL V]

(MM)

cetī dhāt swok kyāk tray min tapussa bhallika ma thāpanā lar
stupa relic hair sacred holy REL Tapussa Bhallika ATTR enshrine DEPOSIT
'the stupa of the hair relics of the Buddha which tapussa and Bhallika built'

“When antecedent noun denotes goal or locus of action, *ma* usually follows subject of relative clause.” (Shorto 1971:282)

galān dewatau ma hām
word god REL speak
'the words that the gods spoke'

also

dhar ma ey go? grañ ket wo?
doctrine REL 1s GET understand TAKE this
'the doctrine which I came to understand'

COMMON PATTERN IN MM:

HEAD [S REL V]

LESS COMMON:

HEAD REL [S V]

Some degree of interchangeability between RELATIVE and ATTRIBUTIVE forms (historically connected); originally perhaps with **relativised function = S**:

<i>ma gloñ</i>	-	<i>gumloñ</i>	‘many’
<i>ma yās</i>	-	<i>yimās</i>	‘shining’
<i>ma nom</i>	-	<i>lmom</i>	‘having’
<i>ma tīm</i>	-	<i>ma-tīm</i>	‘knowing’

(SM)

hənà y pèh mə ʔa
place 2 REL go
'the place you are going'

More common:

ʔərə̀ pèh hɔm (kòh)
language 2 speak (TOP)
'the things you said'

kɔ̀ʔ tɛ̀h bɛ̀ʔ kon ɲèə həkaoʔ klà y kòh.
get HIT REF child frog body seek TOP
'He got the little frog he was looking for.'

COMMON PATTERN IN SM:

HEAD [S V] *kòh*

LESS COMMON (MOSTLY LM):

HEAD [S REL V], HEAD REL [S V]



No overt RELATIVE marker in SM

Where does Burmese come in?

Relative constructions in Burmese:

[S V.ATTR] HEAD

la té lu
come NFUT.ATTR person
'the person who came'

mìn tɕənõ ko pè té sa.ʔou?
2 1m.ATTR OBJ give NFUT.ATTR book
'the book that you gave me'

θu ne té ne-ya
3 stay NFUT.ATTR stay-NML
'the place where he lives'

**RELATIVE marker (= ATTRIBUTIVE form of FINITE VERB MARKER)
always adjacent to HEAD, similar to attributive form in
Mon**

- Enhancement (and expansion) of use of ATTRIBUTIVE *ma-* in MM
- Merging of RELATIVE and ATTRIBUTIVE forms
- Extension of attributive form from REL. FUNCTION = S to **OBJ and OBL**
- Loss of ATTRIBUTIVE/RELATIVE form: *mə-* > \emptyset
- **NON-PRED/TOPIC** marker *kəh* takes over function of RELATIVE marker
(Probably discourse pragmatic function, not grammaticalised)

Interrogative fronting in Mon

jèh.kòh *kon* (*rao*) ‘whose child’
who child (Q)

mù? *pa?* (*rao*). ‘What are you doing?’
what do (Q)

chəlɔ? *cao* (*rao*). ‘When are you coming back?’
when return (Q)

Burmese:

bəθú *θà* *lè.* *ba* *lou?* *lè.* *bətó* *pyan* *mə=lè.*
who.ATTR son Q what do Q when return FUT=Q

Already in OM cleft constructions and fronting of attributive ‘what’:

mu *het* *man* *tirla?* *gruñ* *yo.*
what reason REL lord laugh Q

‘Why did you laugh, lord?’

Fronting in modern Mon with

- Attributive interrogative (‘whose house, what language’)
- *mù?* ‘what’ as OBJECT
- Adverbial interrogative (‘when, why’)

No fronting with *jèh.kòh* ‘who’ as OBJECT:

<i>chan jèh.kòh.</i>	≠	<i>jèh.kòh chan.</i>
love who		who love
‘Who do you love?’		‘Who loves you?’

cf. **Burmese** *bəθú ko tchi? lè.* vs. *bəθu tchi? lè.*

**Cleft constructions with interrogative fronting already present in OM
(and probably earlier stages of Mon-Khmer):**

INTERROGATIVE + RELATIVE CLAUSE in SM

mùʔ-mùʔ dɛh (mə) hɔm.

what-RDPL 3 (REL) speak

‘What did he say?’ (‘What is it that he said?’)

chəlɔʔ dɛh (mə) ʔa.

when 3 (REL) go

‘When will he go?’ (‘When is it that he will go?’)

Loss of RELATIVE marker → CLAUSE INITIAL (ADVERBIAL) INTERROGATIVE



PROBABLE EXPLANATION:

Mon internal development, enhanced by similar constructions in Burmese.

There are cases of Burmese influence in Mon as ‘pattern loan’ or ‘structural replication’.

The replica constructions are found also in older stages of Mon and in other Mon-Khmer languages, maybe as ‘minor use patterns’.

Burmese influence in Mon syntax can account for the enhancement of pre-existing patterns and constructions (or activation of internal ‘drift’).

The replication is not complete (interrogative fronting, conditional/complement clauses) or leads to results differing from the matrix language (relative clauses).

Conclusions and outlook

Burmese as the sole official language influences local languages, both in terms of matter and pattern replication.

In multilingual settings, Burmese is only one source of contact induced change. Other languages can be locally dominant.

The influence is not always a one-way affair from the politically and economically dominant language to the subordinate idioms. Burmese varieties show clear cases of structural influence from local languages.

Hardly any lexical loans from local languages seem to occur in Burmese varieties. This goes against the perceived knowledge that lexical loans precede structural borrowings.

Much more work needs to be done on local languages of Myanmar and Burmese varieties. Most languages in the country are poorly described or not described at all.

Further questions to be investigated:

Is Myanmar a linguistics area?

What features do the languages of Myanmar share with South and Southeast Asia?