Language Contact in Myanmar

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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

http://www.muturzikin.com/cartesasiesudest/6.htm
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.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Khün</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
<th>Thai</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Orthography</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>láʔwaŋ</td>
<td>be careful</td>
<td>ráʔwaŋ</td>
<td>wáy sətiʔ</td>
<td>θətí thà</td>
<td>sati thāḥ</td>
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<td>vocabulary</td>
<td>kham sàp</td>
<td>kam pl. ṯəthiʔpǎay</td>
<td>ṭədeiʔpe</td>
<td>ṭadhippǎay</td>
</tr>
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<td>láʔ thíŋ</td>
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<td>láʔ thíŋ</td>
<td>pɛ̂t</td>
<td>pyiʔ</td>
<td>pac</td>
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<td>yàap cháa</td>
<td>kyaam</td>
<td>tćàn</td>
<td>kramḥ</td>
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<td>myò</td>
<td>myəḥ</td>
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<td>cencaa</td>
<td>sin.sà</td>
<td>caňhcăḥ</td>
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<td>chɔ̂ɔp</td>
<td>cɔ̂k</td>
<td>tɛaiʔ</td>
<td>krək</td>
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<td>mûn</td>
<td>happy</td>
<td>mùən</td>
<td>pyɔ̂</td>
<td>pyo</td>
<td>pyow</td>
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<td>dən taaŋ</td>
<td>travel</td>
<td>dən thàŋ</td>
<td>ṭək taaŋ</td>
<td>khəyì thweʔ</td>
<td>kharịh thwak</td>
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<td>Khün</td>
<td>Gloss</td>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Orthography</td>
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<td>result</td>
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<td>ئکرۥھ</td>
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<td>ئر۝وٰن</td>
<td>ئار۝م</td>
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<td>pupil</td>
<td>lûuk sit</td>
<td>تےپ</td>
<td>تےپ</td>
<td>تاپان؟</td>
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<td>amazed</td>
<td>ئاتسٓكان</td>
<td>ئاام، ئان.؟</td>
<td>ئان.؟</td>
<td>ئاٰم؟؟و</td>
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<td>hâan</td>
<td>shop</td>
<td>râan</td>
<td>سےٮ</td>
<td>شائن</td>
<td>چٮن</td>
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<td>sẳmdɛɛŋ</td>
<td>show</td>
<td>sẳmdɛɛŋ</td>
<td>پٯاٮ</td>
<td>پٯا</td>
<td>پرا</td>
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<tr>
<td>lûtdu</td>
<td>season</td>
<td>rû؟dụu</td>
<td>ئو؟توٮ، یااسي</td>
<td>یاٮثی</td>
<td>راٮی</td>
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<td>foot</td>
<td>fût</td>
<td>پٯ</td>
<td>پٯ</td>
<td>پ</td>
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<td>strange</td>
<td>plèek</td>
<td>تھٮہاان</td>
<td>ثٮ.ٮٰن</td>
<td>ثٮٰٮ.ٮٰن</td>
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<td>naay câan</td>
<td>mechanic</td>
<td>naay câan</td>
<td>سەٮا چٮک</td>
<td>ٮشٮیا</td>
<td>چٮک چٮرا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sŏmlît</td>
<td>succeed</td>
<td>sŏmrêt</td>
<td>ئٮٮی.ٮٮاٮٮ</td>
<td>ئاٮٮن.ٮٮیٮٮن</td>
<td>ئٮٮئٮٮن.مٮٮراٮٮن</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Khün: Burmese
Gloss: English
Thai: Thai
Explanation: Burmese
Burmese: Burmese
Orthography: English

Explanation:
- ئک۝و: result
- ئےے ٹی: important
- هّھحاو، ئر۝م: story
- تےپ: pupil
- ئاتسٓكان: amazed
- سےٮ: shop
- سẳmdɛɛŋ: show
- rû؟dụu: season
- fût: foot
- plèek: strange
- naay câan: mechanic
- sŏmrêt: succeed

Orthography:
- ئکرۥھ
- ئارھ کرۥھ
- ئار۝م
- تاپان؟
- ئاٰم؟؟و
- چٮن
- پرا
- راٮی
- پ
- ثٮ.ٮٰن
- ثٮٰٮ.ٮٰن
- چٮک چٮرا
- ئٮٮئٮٮن.مٮٮراٮٮن
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 dzoo? ?o.
book this 3S OBJ give IMP

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

‘Give him this book.’

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

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

‘Will you let him read this book?’

(3) shi n-dzoo? sha ai.
3S NEG-give eat SP

shi n-dzoo? sha.
3S NEG-give eat

‘He doesn’t let me eat it.’
Kachin Muhse/Myitkyina

(4) ści phe dzɔʔ sa na kun?
3S OBJ give go FUT Q
‘Will you let him go?’

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

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

ści 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 nēi ‘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 wɛ̀ŋkaʔ (minibus); daily bus services to tɛaʔinsheiʔtɛi (Kayin State) and θanbyuzəyaʔ (Mon State) during dry season (8-12 hours), boat service to tɛaʔinsheiʔtɛi during rainy season (1-3 days)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Language</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Language of administration, religion and education, daily communication, lingua franca, overall dominant language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Karen</td>
<td>Language of daily communication among Karen, religion (Christian), restricted use in education and administration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mon</td>
<td>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)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thai</td>
<td>Language of cross-border trade, Thai services (medical, TV, phone, etc.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**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:

Sesquisyllabic (also phrase level in southern dialects)

bhurañ  >  bəyin  ‘king’
sūkhiuh > þəkhò  ‘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.ci.mauñ  θi  ʔè.nèin  ko  ʔəpyin  thweʔ  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**

\[\text{pèin.dzi \ pé \ mə=sho \ né.}\]

shirt GIVE NEG=wet PROH

‘Don’t let the shirt get wet.’

**Permissive**

\[\text{θú \ ko \ pè \ mə=θwà \ phù.}\]

3.ATR OBJ GIVE NEG=go NEG

\[\text{θú \ ko \ mə=pè \ θwà \ phù.}\]

3.ATR OBJ NEG=GIVE go NEG

‘I didn’t let him go.’

**Jussive**

\[\text{θú \ ko \ mə=θwà \ khàin \ phù.}\]

3.ATR OBJ NEG=go order NEG

‘I didn’t tell him to go.’
‘Give’ in Mon

1. Ditransitive verb (Recipient > Theme)

\[ \text{deh} \ \text{kv} \ \text{?uə} \ \text{hloə}. \]
3  give 1sg  money

‘He gave me money.’

2. Preverbal causative marker

\[ \text{deh} \ \text{kv} \ \text{?uə} \ ?a. \]
3  give 1sg  go

‘He let me go.’

3. “Dummy causative” (Enfield 2009:811)

\[ \text{?uə} \ \text{məkɔ?} \ \text{kv} \ \text{deh} \ ?a. \]
1sg  des  give 3  go

‘I want him to go.’
Spread of causative construction from Mon into Burmese?

(Mon)

deh kn ʔua ?><.
3 give lsg rice → ʔua k rè? ?><.
‘He gave me rice.’ 1sg get rice

‘I got some rice.’

deh kn ʔua eio?.
3 give lsg eat → ʔua k rè? eio?.
‘He let me eat.’ 1sg get eat

‘I got to eat.’

(Burmese)

θu tenô ko thêmîn pè te.
3 lm.attr obj rice give nfut → lm rice get nfut

... → tenô sà yá te.

lm eat get nfut
Negation in complex predicates

Burmese

θu ’yə̀də̀yà-zə̀gà  mə=pyò  tɔhin  bù.
3 Thai-language  NEG=speak  DES  NEG
‘He doesn’t want to speak Thai.’

θu ’yə̀də̀yà-zə̀gà  mə=pyò  taʔ  bù.
3 Thai-language  NEG=speak  skilled  NEG
‘He cannot speak Thai.’

Southern Burmese

θu  cà̃n-zə̀gà  pyò  mə=taʔ  (bù).
3 Thai-language  speak  NEG=skilled  (NEG)
‘He cannot speak Thai.’
Mon

dèh hù? mòc hom ?ərè sem.
3 NEG DES speak language Thai

dèh hom ?ərè 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.’

tɕənc  θwà  mə=thí  bù.
1m  go  NEG=TOUCH  NEG
‘I don’t know the way.’
Mon

pèh hù? tèh ?a ra?.
2 NEG TOUCH go FOC
‘You don’t have to go any more.’

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

(yal keit sak ṇah ma yām.
if die not.exist person rel weep
‘If they die, there is no one to weep for them.’

(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)
(yòra?) nèh ʔa məkəh ʔuə pək ʔon.  
(person go  if  1s follow ASRT)

(sm)
(yòra?) dəh ʔa teh ʔuə pək ʔon.  
(3  go  if  1s follow ASRT)

‘If he goes, I’ll go along.’

LM məkəh <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

\( \text{pèh hù? kə məkəh hù? kə? ciə? kəh, ʔuə tem məŋ raʔ.} \)

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

\( θu \ la \ θi \ ko \ teənou? \ θi \ θi. \)
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)

ṭek 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 smiṅ 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)

\[ s \text{mi} \text{n} \quad daddharāja \quad dewearāw \quad gumloñ \quad ma \quad siw \]
\[ \text{king} \quad \text{Daddharaja} \quad \text{god} \quad \text{ATTR.many} \quad \text{REL} \quad \text{attend} \]

‘King Daddharaja whom the gods attend’

**Common pattern in OM:**

**HEAD REL [S V]**

**Less common:**

**HEAD [S REL V]**
ceti 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 həm
word god REL speak
‘the words that the gods spoke’
also
dhar ma ey go? gran ket wo?
doctrine REL Is 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:

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th></th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ma gloñ</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>guinloñ</strong></td>
<td>‘many’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ma yās</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>yimās</strong></td>
<td>‘shining’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ma nom</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>lnom</strong></td>
<td>‘having’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ma tīm</strong></td>
<td>-</td>
<td><strong>ma-tīm</strong></td>
<td>‘knowing’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
(sm)

ḥəndəy pèh mə ?a
place 2 REL go
‘the place you are going’

More common:

ʔərè pèh hvm (kɔh)
language 2 speak (TOP)
‘the things you said’

kəʔ tεʔ bɛʔ kən ñəa həkəʔə kləʔ kɔh.
get HIT REF child frog body seek TOP
‘He got the little frog he was looking for.’
Common pattern in SM:

**HEAD [S V]** kəh

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:

\[ [S \text{ V.ATTR}] \text{ HEAD} \]

*la tê lu*

come \text{ NFUT.ATTR} person

‘the person who came’

*mìn teənò ko pè tê saʔouʔ*

2 \text{ lm.ATTR OBJ} give \text{ NFUT.ATTR} book

‘the book that you gave me’

*ʔu ne tê ne-yə*

3 stay \text{ 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**: *ma-* → Ø

→ **Non-pred/topic** marker *kɔh* takes over function of **relative** marker (Probably discourse pragmatic function, not grammaticalised)
Interrogative fronting in Mon

\[ \text{who} \quad \text{child} \quad \text{What are you doing?} \quad \text{return} \quad \text{When are you coming back?} \]

Burmese:

\[ \text{who} \quad \text{son} \quad \text{what do} \quad \text{when return} \quad \text{future} \]
Already in OM cleft constructions and fronting of attributive ‘what’:

\[
\text{mu} \quad \text{het} \quad \text{man} \quad \text{ti}\text{l}a? \quad \text{gru}n\text{h} \quad \text{yo}.
\]

what reason REL lord laugh Q

‘Why did you laugh, lord?’

Fronting in modern Mon with

- Attributive interrogative (‘whose house, what language’)
- \( \text{mu}\text{h} \) ‘what’ as \text{OBJECT}
- Adverbial interrogative (‘when, why’)

\textbf{No fronting with} \( \text{nèh.kòh} \) ‘who’ as \text{OBJECT}:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{chan nèh.kòh.} & \neq \quad \text{nèh.kòh chan.} \\
\text{love} & \quad \text{who} \\
\text{‘Who do you love?’} & \neq \quad \text{who} \quad \text{love} \\
\text{‘Who loves you?’}
\end{align*}
\]

cf. Burmese \( \text{bəθu ko tehi? lè.} \) \text{vs.} \( \text{bəθu tehi? lè.} \)
Cleft constructions with interrogative fronting already present in OM (and probably earlier stages of Mon-Khmer):

**INTERROGATIVE + RELATIVE CLAUSE in SM**

\[
\text{mù?-mù?} \quad \text{dèh (mə)} \quad \text{həm.}
\]

what-\text{rdpl 3 (rel)} speak

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

\[
\text{chəlo?} \quad \text{dèh (mə)} \quad ?a.
\]

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?