



University of Zurich

**NON-STANDARD CONSTRUCTIONS IN SOUTHERN BURMESE
AS RESULT OF LANGUAGE CONTACT**

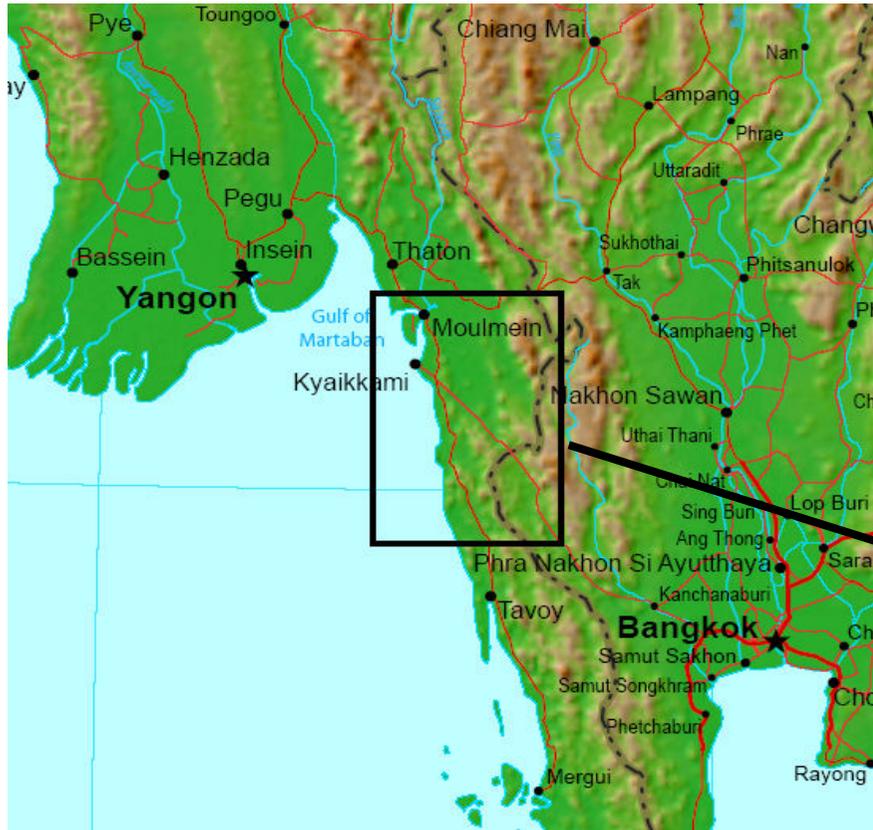
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Location of the language under investigation



phəyàθòunshu: Kayin/Mon State, Myanmar
wèŋkaʔ: Kanchanaburi Province, Thailand

Demographic and geographic situation of *phəyàθòunshu* (ဆုရားသုံးဆူ)

- 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 *wèŋkaʔ* (minibus); daily bus services to *təʔìnsheiʔtə̀ì* (Kayin State) and *θanbyuzəyaʔ* (Mon State) during dry season (8-12 hours), boat service to *təʔìnsheiʔtə̀ì* during rainy season (1-3 days); politically part of Kayin State, two adjacent villages part of Mon State (*pəlan cəpan, kù bao*)
- Others:** Easy access to Thai consumer goods, mobile phone network; Thai and Burmese radio and TV, hospital service, school

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

Thai influence - lexical replication in MATTER and PATTERN

Matter replication: *sanyan* ‘(phone) network coverage’

Thai: *sǎnyaan* ‘signal, coverage’

Yangon: *area (ʔeríya)*

tù-yin ‘fridge’

Thai: *tûu-yen* ‘closet-cool’

Yangon: *yegè-θiʔta* ‘ice-box’

Pattern replication: *lɛʔ-kain-phòun* ‘mobile phone’

Thai: *thoorəsàp-muuu-thiúu* ‘telephone-hand-carry’

Yangon: *hand-phone (hàn-phòun)*

ko-θouʔ-pəwa ‘towel’

Thai: *phâa-chét-tuə* ‘cloth-wipe-body’

Yangon: *towel (taunwɛ), dəbɛʔ* ‘shawl, towel’

Also: *tcàun-tcì-peiʔ* ‘summer holiday’, Thai *pìt-thɯɯm-yà* ‘close-term-big’

Summary of Thai influence in Southern Burmese

- Thai influence mostly in neologisms and cultural terminology (food, technology, administration), most commonly as **pattern replication**, i.e. calques of Thai expressions, less frequent as **matter replication** (direct loan)
- No obvious structural influence beyond the lexicon
- Rare (idiolectal) cases of Thai influence in functional categories, considered incorrect by most speakers:

ʔèindzi tə=kaun ‘a shirt’ instead of correct *ʔèindzi tə=thɛ*

cf. Thai *sûə nùŋ tuə* with CL *tuə* for animals, pieces of clothes, etc.

Thai influence due to **dominant status** of Thai in **certain domains of daily life**

Differences between *phəyàθòunshu* (PTS) and *Yangon*

A. Phonetics

1. Neutralisation of creaky tone (*ʔauʔ myiʔ*) with nasal vowel and final glottal stop

မြင့် *myín* ‘high’ ~ မြစ် *myiʔ* ‘river’ [myiʔ ~ myĩʔ]

ဆိတ် *sheiʔ* ‘pier, port’ ~ ဆီၤ *shéin* ‘rich in taste’ [seiʔ / sheiʔ ~ sēiʔ / shēiʔ]

Neutralisation also sporadically occurring in informal spelling, sometimes pleonastically as မြ်, ဆိတ်.

2. Realisation of /θ/ as [t̪], /t/ pushed backwards towards [t]
3. Voicing of clitics and auxiliaries less frequent than in Standard Yangon Burmese

Neutralisation of /s/ and /sh/ probably more widespread, but sometimes including also /ɕ/ in PTS: ရှိ [ɕí ~ sí] ‘exist’, သူ့ဆီ [θú=ɕi ~ θú=shi ~ θú=si] ‘to him’

Mon as source of phonetic differences

1. No (phonemic) nasal vowels or tones in Mon; Burmese loans in Mon with nasal vowel in third tone are regularly rendered with final *-t* (which stands for B *-ʔ*)
e.g. ခင်ညွန့် *khin nún* → ခေန်ညောတ် *khen nòt*
2. No interdental stop/fricative in Mon; Burmese loans with *θ* are either rendered by *s* (orthographic loan) သံလိုက် *θan-laiʔ* ‘magnet’ → *san-làc*
or *t* (approximate pronunciation) ပြဿနာ *pyaʔθəna* ‘problem’ → *pyattəna*
3. No voiced stops and fricatives in Mon (apart from *d*, *b*); no intervocalic voicing in Mon (but present in some more heavily burmanised dialects in Mon State);

L2 speakers of Burmese with Mon as L1 show Mon features in phonology, which may have spread to L1 speakers in contact situations with large numbers of L2 (and secondary L1) speakers.

Karen influence can be excluded at least for 1. and 2., probably also 3.

B. Syntax

Negation in auxiliary constructions

Yangon *tɛəŋə yòdəyà-zəgà mə=pyð ta? phù.* **NEG - V - AUX**
1m Thai-language NEG=speak able NEG

PTS *tɛəŋə ɛàn-zəgà pyð mə=ta? phù.* **V - NEG - AUX**
1m Thai-language speak NEG=able NEG

‘I don’t speak Thai.’

Mon *ʔuə hɔm ʔərə sem hù? lèp pùh.* **V - NEG - AUX**
1s speak language Thai NEG able NEG

☞ Note also the use of *ɛàn* (Shan < Siam, *syām*) for ‘Thai’ in PTS, *yòdəyà* (Ayudhyā) in Yangon; *thàin* (Thai) also used, but less common in PTS. In Mon only *sem*, in Thai only *thay*.

Non standard use of auxiliaries in PTS

A few postverbal auxiliaries are used differently in PTS from Yangon

1. *la mə=pyə̀ sà nɛ́.*
come NEG=speak EAT PROH
'Don't tell me about it!'

'eat' as AUX
2. *tə̀nɔ́ sa tə̀nɔ́ yè yu mə́.*
1m.ATTR text 1m write TAKE FUT
'I will write my text myself.'

'take' as AUX
3. *θú ko θwà mə=pyə̀ thí tó phù.*
3.ATTR OBJ go NEG=speak TOUCH CONTR NEG
'You don't have to go to tell him any more.'

**'touch' as AUX
(bound)**
4. *tə̀nɔ́ zè θwà mə=thí phù.*
1m market go NEG=TOUCH NEG
'I don't know the way to the market.'

**'touch' as AUX
(free)**

Possible Mon sources for PTS usage

1. *dɛh ləə ɛiə? kɔ ʔuə.*
3 tell EAT OBL 1s
'He told me.'

'eat' as AUX

2. *kəlon nɔʔ ʔuə klon ket noŋ.*
work PROX 1s do TAKE ASRT
'I will do this job myself.'

'take' as AUX

3. *ʔuə hùʔ tɛh hɔm raʔ.*
1s NEG TOUCH speak FOC
'I don't have to speak any more.'

'touch' as AUX
(bound)

4. *ʔuə ʔa phya hùʔ tɛh pùh.*
1s go market NEG TOUCH NEG
'I don't know the way to the market.'

'touch' as AUX
(free)

Omission of attributive (genitive) form of full NPs

“Induced creaky tone” used only with pronouns and some kinship terms

<i>θύ ρειν</i>	‘his house’
<i>τεανό ko</i>	‘me’
<i>ρამέ shain</i>	‘mother’s shop’

But

<i>τεω.θου ρειν</i>	‘Kyaw Thu’s house’	for	<i>τεω.θύ ρειν</i>
<i>θα.θα ko</i>	‘Tha Tha (OBJ)’	for	<i>θα.θά ko</i>
<i>shəya (yé) sa.ρου?</i>	‘the teacher’s book’	for	<i>shəyá sa.ρου?</i>

☞ Possessive in Mon formed only by juxtaposition (POSSESSUM before POSSESSOR):

<i>həp dɛh</i>	‘his house’
<i>chəŋ mɪ?</i>	‘mother’s shop’
<i>lòc ρəca</i>	‘the teacher’s book’

Contact induced structural change - some views

Meillet (1921):

Grammatical loan is possible only between very similar systems, especially dialects of a single language.

Givón (1979):

It is relatively unlikely for languages to ‘borrow grammar’, which would be disruptive for the interlocking, highly nonarbitrary part of the system.

Romaine’s (1995) borrowing scale:

lexical items > morphology (derivational > inflectional) > syntax

Thomason (2001):

It is not just words that get borrowed: all aspects of language structure are subject to transfer from one language to another, given the right mix of social and linguistic circumstances.

Winford (2003):

Despite the many claims concerning the “borrowing” of phonology, morphology, and even syntax, **there has been no convincing demonstration that such structural change occurs without mediation by some other medium or process.** [...] This tends to support the traditional wisdom that (maintained) **languages put up stiff resistance to importation of foreign structural elements.** (p. 61)

When structural features are transferred, it is rarely the result of direct borrowing. Rather, such transfer is **either mediated by lexical borrowing or introduced under the agency of speakers of the external source language.** In most if not all cases [...] the speakers who initiate such structural change are **bilinguals.** (p 62)

Structural replication is possible only with extensive lexical borrowing or through the introduction by bilingual speakers.

Aikhenvald (2006):

Inflectional morphology (form/function)

Core lexicon

Syntactic construction types

Discourse structure

Structure of idioms

More similar to genetic relatives



More similar to neighbouring languages

“Languages borrow forms and patterns. Borrowing patterns *does not* presuppose borrowing forms.” (Aikhenvald 2006:15)

Replication of structural features is enabled/facilitated by (*selection*)

- Pre-existing similar feature in TL (enhancement)
- Lexical/grammatical parallelism between SL and TL
- Pragmatic salience of construction
- Existence of perceivable gap in TL
- Existence of lookalike in TL
- Morphosyntactic transparency of construction in SL
- Prosodic saliency and syllabicity of structure
- Widespread bilingualism (symmetric, or TL speakers know also SL)
- Attitude towards own language of TL speakers
- Status of SL in contact situation

Mon and Burmese in Southern Burma

- Mon is SL, Burmese TL in cases under discussion
- Mon not dominant language, rather stigmatised, no Mon mass media
- Asymmetric bilingualism, Mon speaking Burmese, Burmese not speaking Mon
- Hardly any (recent) lexical borrowings from Mon in Burmese
- Normative standard Burmese grammar and lexicon

- Replicated structures pre-existing in Burmese (marginal, e.g. 'eat' as V2)
- Similar structures pre-existing in Burmese (e.g. free postverbal AUX)
- Replicated constructions fit overall structure of Burmese
- Replicated structures syntactically transparent

Conclusions (preliminary) - hypotheses

Increasing number of Burmese settlers in PTS from south and central Burma after Burmese take-over in 1990

- Influx of standard Yangon Burmese and southern dialects (Mon and Kayin States)
- Burmese settlers come as “superiors”, Burmese dominant, prestige language

MATTER borrowing from Mon largely blocked by standardised Burmese grammar and lexicon (formal education, media)

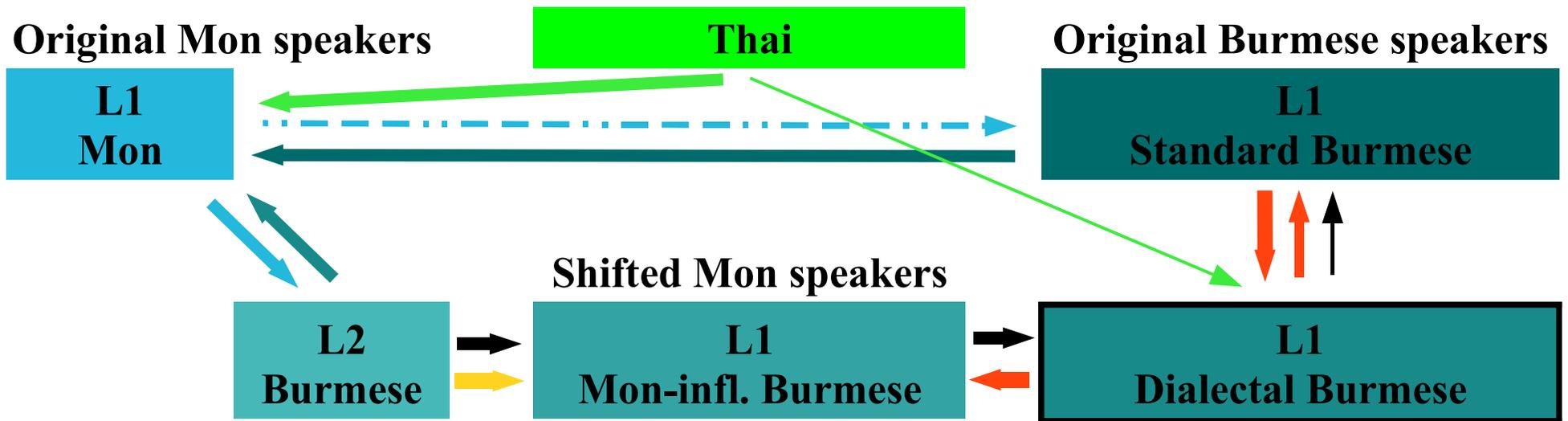
Many Burmese speakers not result of language shift, but original speakers

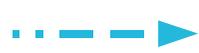
Some Mon shifting to Burmese, L1 Mon, L2 Burmese → L1 Burmese with Mon substrate
Original Mon speakers dominant in number, therefore Mon-influenced Burmese as prestige language at least in some segments of society and contexts

Mon-influenced Burmese spreads to original L1 Burmese speakers by unconscious “infiltration”; PATTERN replication less obvious than MATTER replication, therefore less stigmatised; MATTER replication from Thai accepted in some domains

Position of Burmese dialects (Tavoyan, Mergui; present in small numbers in PTS, felt markedly different from “standard” Burmese) further south, and Karen needs further study.

Summary of dialect situation in *phayàθòunshu* (without Karen)



- | | | | |
|---|--------------------------|---|--------------------------------|
|  | earlier Mon influence |  | language shift |
|  | Mon influence on Burmese |  | dialectal/idiolectal influence |
|  | Burmese influence on Mon |  | felt "different" |
|  | Thai influence | | |

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