BURMESE

F. K. L. Chit Hlaing

Language Name: Burmese (nowadays officially Myanmar). **Autonym:** *bama saka:* or *myamma saka:* In reality, 'Burma' is based on an old contraction form (*bəma*) of 'Myanma', so the ideologically motivated claim that they have separate referents, or that 'Burma' is a mere Anglicism, is not correct.

Location: Southeast Asia, between India and Bangladesh (on the west) and Thailand (on the east).

Family: The Burmese-Yi (Burmese-Lolo) subgroup of the Tibeto-Burman family of the Sino-Tibetan superfamily.

Related Languages: Arakanese (almost a dialect of Burmese—the State of Arakan is in the Union of Myanmar), Mru (a tribal language of the far North of Burma), more distantly the YI (Loloish) languages of the China-Southeast Asia borderlands.

Dialects: The only major dialect is, as above, Arakanese (Rakhain) and its variant, Marma (in the Chittagong Hills Tract of easternmost Bangladesh), but numerous, poorly recorded regional dialects within Burma proper abound, such as Yaw (west of the Lower Chindwin Valley; it comes closest to preserving the pronunciation indicated by the Burmese orthography, that approximating Old Burmese), Intha (in the Southern Shan State on the East of Burma Proper), Tavoyan (Dawe—in the peninsular Southern coastal strip in Burma), and Northern Burmese (Upper Irrawaddy/Ayeyawady Valley) are possibly other minor variants.

The Standard dialect in recent times, since the imposition of British colonial rule at the end of the 19th Century, is that of Lower Burma, specifically of the capital, Rangoon (Yangon). The more classical form of Modern Burmese is that of Upper Burma, the former home (until 1885) of the old Royal capitals in and around Mandalay. There is no mutual incomprehensibility between Standard Burmese and the dialects of any part of the whole Irrawaddy Valley, but as one goes east, west and south from this central core region of the country degrees of mutual intelligibility decrease, although nowadays few if any speakers of the more remote dialects (Yaw, Intha, Dawe, Marma and Arakanese) do not know Standard Burmese owing to two factors: within Burma, the increasing universality of national education, and in the case even of Marma, the fact the Buddhist monks tend to be trained in Burma monasteries where they learn Standard Burmese.

Number of Speakers: On the order of 40 million or more. Burmese is increasingly a second language for peoples of Burma whose native languages are distinct from Burmese, and this is in particular the case for those who speak SHAN (a Tai language) and live on the westernmost edge of the Shan State (the so-called *myei-lat* 'intermediate country' between the Shan State core and Burma Proper). Thus the uncertainty of the cited figure.

Origin and History

The oldest record of Burmese is some stone inscriptions dating back to approximately A.D. 1000, and these are in the oldest known form of Old Burmese. At this time the orthography was still incompletely standardized, so that it is not certain how much the very 'different' spellings tell us about the phonology of Old Burmese. They certainly allow us to demonstrate the close relationship of Burmese to its nearest relatives within Tibeto-Burman and give us a good bit of information on the historical phonology of the whole language family. It is thought that the Burmans (native speakers of Burmese, as opposed to 'Burmese', used nowadays to refer to the whole population of the Union of Myanmar regardless of native language) had only come into the Irrawaddy Valley in present-day Burma within a couple of centuries before these early inscriptions.

The inscriptional corpus of **Old Burmese** extends at least throughout the era of the first Burmese imperial kingdom, that of Pagan (the name of the capital near the confluence of the Irrawaddy and Chindwin rivers), which 'fell' in A.D. 1228. Gradually thereafter the inscriptions show increasing changes in the phonology and grammar, changes which eventuate in what we may call **Middle Burmese**, a form of the language during the era from about 1400 to some time towards the end of the 18th century. Of course during this period we begin to get Burmese literature aside from the stone inscriptions: Buddhist religious works, chronicles and court poetry, for instance. However, we have no surviving palm leaf or mulberry paper manuscripts from those early times; possibly the oldest surviving manuscript is at most 500 years old and we have no more than a handful of comparable antiquity. All the rest of the literature from these early times exists now only in the form of copies, and copies of copies, so that we cannot tell how much scribal 'correction' may have crept in during copying. The temporal boundaries between the successive forms of the language are not sharp; for instance, older writers writing early in the 19th century still use archaic (late Middle Burmese) words and syntactic constructions. In any event, Middle Burmese shows little significant grammatical difference from **Modern Burmese**, the differences being mainly those of spelling and lexicon, but one generally refers to archaic words and phrases from both Old Burmese and Middle Burmese under the heading of *Porana* (archaic) Burmese, of which published dictionaries exist.

Orthography and Basic Phonology

The Burmese writing system is alphabetic-syllabic, and is derived from the ancient TAMIL scripts of South Eastern India. There are 33 consonant signs, 4 each in a velar series, a palatal series, a retroflex series (transcribed here with a dot under the consonant but pronounced identically with the dental series, and only used to transcribe borrowed Indian words), a labial series and then glides, liquids, 'h', a retroflex 'ḷ'(again only for the spelling of PALI and SANSKRIT words, and a glottal stop. All words begin with one of these, and, if no additional vowel signs are placed on, after, before or below the initial, it bears the inherent vowel *a*—hence it is often said that the last initial, the glottal stop, is the vowel *a* itself. There are five letters in each of the first five series (velar to labial); they are always in the order plain, aspirated, voiced, voiced, nasal (the second voiced letter represents the Indian aspirated voiced sound, but this is not pronounceable in Burmese). In Modern Burmese the palatal series is pronounced as a sibilant series except for the nasal, and the old sibilant, in the mixed series at the end, is now the *th* of English 'thing'; Old Burmese *r* is now, at least for most words, pronounced as *y* and for many speakers this shift from *r* to *y* is total.

Table 1: Consonants

	Labial	Dental	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stops	p ph b	t th d		k kh g	ʔ
Fricatives		th s	sh z		h
Nasals	m	n	ny	ng	
Liquids		l, r			
Glides	w		y		

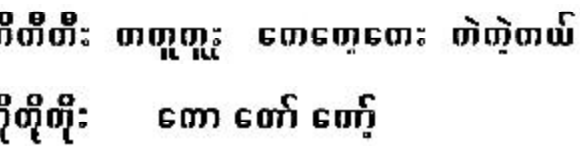
Burmese Script Samples

ka.	kha.	ga.	ga.	nga.	Velar
sa.	sha.	za.	za.	nya.	'Palatal'
ṭa.	ṭha.	ḍa.	ḍa.	ṇa.	'Retroflex'
ta.	tha.	da.	da.	na.	Dental
pa.	pha.	ba.	ba.	ma.	Labial
ya.	'ra.'	la.	wa.	θa.	ha. la. ʔa.

Vowels. The vowels of Modern Burmese are: a, i, u, ou, o, [ɔ], ei, e, [ɛ]. and the orthographically non-distinctive ə—the toneless vowel of syllables reduced as clitic 'light' syllables in the iambic-footed prosody of this language. Each syllable unless so 'reduced' or weakened, has one of four tones: a creaky tone (high, short, and rapidly falling) marked here with a subscript dot after the syllable, a level tone (mid-pitch, with a slight rise at the end (unmarked in this transcription), a heavy tone (high, long, breathy and falling), marked here with a 'colon' after the syllable, and a final glottal stop, which is how orthographic (and etymological) syllables ending in a final oral stop consonant are pronounced—final consonants are written with one of the initials above which a superscript mark is added to 'kill' the inherent vowel—for example:

လက် (hand) *la.* + 'killed' *ka.* i.e., orthographic *lak* is pronounced (with a predictable vowel shift for all syllables with final velar stops and no vowel signs added) *leʔ*. The rules for the vocalism of syllables closed with stops or nasals are complicated owing to vowels shifts between Old Burmese and Modern Burmese. They can be summarized (with minor exceptions) as follows: (1) a syllable with no vowel signs and a final velar stop takes the vowel *e*; but takes the vowel *ɪ* when closed with a velar nasal; (2) final dental or labial consonants (stops or nasals) do not change the inherent *a* vowel of a syllable; (3) a final palatal stop turns inherent *a* into *ɪ*; but a final palatal nasal (unpredictably) turns it into either *ɪn*, *e*, *ei*, or *i*. In addition, if a syllable begins with initial or medial *w*, the vowel *a* becomes *u*.

Vowel signs are placed as follows (the initial *ka* is used in the examples):



ki. ki ki: ku. ku ku: kee kei. kei: ke: ke. ke kou lou. kou: ko: ko ko.

Note that pronunciation of syllables with these otherwise unmodified vowel signs follows a rule: the least marked high vowels take the creaky tone, the mid vowels take the level tone and the low vowels take the heavy tone. There are also letters representing vocalic syllables as such, not made by adding diacritic marks to the sign for the initial glottal stop, These are mainly used for the transcription of Indic loanwords or formal, high-flown literary words and formatives. Such letters are mostly called *eʔkhəya*, from the Sanskrit-Pāli word *akṣara/akkhara*, 'consonant' or 'letter'. For instance, the syllable *ei*, ordinarily written **ေအး**, can be written as **ဧ**, called *eʔkhəya*, *ei:*

As a general rule (the details are beyond the scope of this sketch), within a single surface word, a voiced syllable final causes an otherwise unvoiced initial following it to become voiced, e.g., the Realis modal ending for verbs in colloquial Burmese is *-te* but on the verb *θwa:* 'to go', it is *θwa:de* 'goes/went'. However, after many reduced (clitic) initial syllables, voicing may fail to occur; e.g., *ʔəkhu.* 'now', though many

speakers say *ʔəgu.* ; voicing is less likely, however, when the clitic weak syllable is a reduction of a stopped syllable. Thus, for instance, *tiʔ* 'one' + *khu.* 'instance of a class (generalized classifier for inanimates)' = *təkhu.* 'one [of some set of inanimate objects]'.

Finally, in isolation or utterance final position, a nasal syllable coda surfaces as just nasalization of the nuclear vowel. However, there are sandhi rules that assimilate this nasal to the position of articulation of a following syllable initial in the same word; similarly, a syllable final glottal stop followed in the word by an oral stop creates a geminate of the latter, whilst, at least in more rapid speech, a final nasal followed by a stop initial first voices the latter and then, again in rapid speech, forms a geminate of the preceding initial. A nice example of the way all these sandhi rules work is seen in the word meaning 'you' (man speaking), which is spelt *khinphya* but in fully colloquial speech becomes *khimbya* and then *khəmya* (assimilative voicing followed by gemination with weakening).

Basic Morphology

This discussion of morphology as well as the section on syntax, is limited to the colloquial style. Formal Written Burmese uses many forms and words not used in the Colloquial style but has comparatively only a few grammatical differences. It is beyond the scope of this sketch to deal with the latter.

Verbs and Adjectives. In the affirmative, the order of elements is V [one or more roots, possibly compounded] (+auxiliary verb) + aspect particle + modal ending. Preceding the aspectual element there may be inserted the element *pa* indicating explicitness, which serves to mark the utterance as 'polite', though not when it is used with an imperative: *thweʔ θwe: nei ba to. me* (exit go stay ! CHANGE.OF.STATE REALIS) 'will leave now/already', *θwa^{l}: ba to.* (go ! ASP) 'Go already!'.

Negation is marked by prefixing a clitic *mə* and suffixing an element (*phu:*) etymologically meaning 'ever': *mə θwa:bu:* 'doesn't/didn't go'.

Nouns. Nouns may be compounded and a morphological compound need not be construed as such semantically. Thus, for instance, *mi.* ('mother') + *ba.* ('father') > *mi.ba.* 'parent'; such compounds are not conjunctive but disjunctive — a 'parent' is, after all, literally 'a mother or father'. But many such compounds are indeed transparent, such as *sa-ʔouʔ* 'book' > *sa* 'letter/writing' and *ʔəʔouʔ* 'a cover', indicating writings 'bound' together. Note that *ʔouʔ* is basically a verb root meaning 'to cover', prefixed with the clitic element *ʔə*, which serves to make a deverbal noun, and in such instances the first element of a compound replaces this clitic element. This is also how one compounds a noun with a succeeding adjective, because, in Burmese, adjectives are morphosyntactically ordinary stative verbs. Thus, *lu* ('person') + *ʔəkaun* > *lu-gaun:* 'good person'.

The noun can have a suffix indicating plurality. Suffixing *te* (spelt 'twei' and sometimes so pronounced) indicates definite plurality, whilst suffixing [*ʔə*]*mya:* (from *mya:* 'to be many') indicates indefinite plurality; thus, *lu-mya:* means 'people' (one or more thereof). Marking of number is not however obligatory and, in particular, if a noun is followed by a number-plus classifier indicating a plurality, the plural suffix is not used.

Manner Adverbs and Related Expressions. Ordinarily, a manner adverb is formed by reduplicating an adjective root, as in *myan-myan* 'quickly' from *myan* 'to be fast'. Note that in Burmese and many Tibeto-Burman and Tai languages, reduplication is ordinarily interpreted not as intensification of the root word but rather as having a disjunctive-distributive force; so 'quickly' here means something like 'more or less fast/fast to some degree or other'.

Adverbial expressions signifying intensification are formed by compounding the root for the noun 'strength' + the root for the adjective 'big' giving *a:ji:* meaning 'very much', or more exactly 'in full force' (with a null postposition), the surface form being simply a compound noun + adjective. *Ji:* may similarly be suffixed to a noun to indicate intensification (e.g., *ʔəmya: ji:* 'a lot'); with nouns indicating persons or relationships such suffixing may serve to indicate relative status or importance, or, with an adjective root indicating smallness, lesser status or importance. Thus *lu-ji:* is 'an important person' (also 'adult'), whilst *lu-nge:* (*nge:* = little') is 'an insignificant person'.

Postpositional Phrases and Case Markers. In accordance with the head-final order of the language, Burmese has postpositions. In ordinary colloquial usage there are only three: *kou* ('to', also a dative~oblique case-marker), *hma* (locative), *ne.* ('with', serving also to mark noun phrase co-ordination). For all the rest of what English marks with prepositions, Burmese uses subordinated noun compounding. Thus, to distinguish 'in' from 'on' or 'at', the noun *ʔəthet* is appended to the semantically main noun as in *ʔein-the:hma*, lit. 'at the interior of the house' (*ʔein*); English 'for' (benefactive sense) appends *ʔətweʔ* 'sake', as in *di lu ʔətweʔ* 'for this person', and so on. The indirect object (dative) of verbs such as 'to send' requires that the postposition *kou* be preceded by an 'appended' head noun meaning 'presence' *ʔəshi* (e.g., 'to him' in such contexts is *θu.(zi)gou*; note here that personal pronouns and related personal nominals commonly are subordinated to postpositions and the appended elements by taking the creaky tone even if they are on another tone in isolation: *θu-* = 'him'/'her' in isolation. (It should be noticed that this order does not violate the head-final order; the morphosyntactic head is indeed the 'appended' element.)

Notice above that one postposition can also serve as a case-marker—*kou*. Most commonly it marks a dative argument, but really this is basically an oblique case, as can be seen from the fact that pronouns and nouns denoting animate beings (including human persons), when they are direct objects also require this marker. We may say technically that in fact *kou* is always a marker of oblique~dative case (which of the two is governed by the main verb of the clause), and that it never literally means 'to' at all. On that view, we can say that there is really no distinction between case markers and postpositions: the distinction is imposed only by the need to translate from languages such as English, and it is simply a fact of the language that case markers follow the noun phrases (more correctly, demonstrative phrases—see below) they mark. As for *ne.*, when it serves as a noun-phrase conjunction, it comes between the conjoined nouns, but, even with conjoined nouns, when it serves as the postposition 'with', it comes after the conjoined noun phrase. For instance, 'pencil and paper' is *khe:dan* <u>*ne.*</u> *sekku* but 'with pencil and paper' is *khe:dan* <u>*ne.*</u> *sekku* <u>*ne.*</u> Analytically this is no great difference; in reality when serving as 'and'

ne. still means 'with', but is then postposed to the first conjunct only. As will be seen shortly, semantic categories represented by other prepositions in English and other such languages are rendered in Burmese by the demonstrative system.

Demonstratives and Classifiers. Given the strictly head-final order of Burmese, we are obliged to adopt the Demonstrative Phrase (DP) hypothesis for the language: the noun phrase is properly embedded in a superordinate Demonstrative Phrase. We note that a 'complete' nominal expression generally consists of an 'article' (superficially *the* demonstrative itself), followed by a noun, then by an enumerative expression (number + 'classifier'), followed in turn by case-marking postpositions (see above), and ending with elements that are sometimes partial copies of the article, although these last sometimes serve semantically in place of what English etc. does with prepositions.

The written Burmese element *θi* (equivalent to colloquial *di*) meaning 'this' can come both before and after a noun. If it is only after the noun it generally 'points' to an already mentioned or understood antecedent for the noun (discourse anaphora). And because Burmese is a strictly head-final language, we see that the post-nominal one is the true demonstrative, with the pre-nominal one 'specifying' the 'space' in which the one is pointing (technically the specifier of the encompassing Determiner Phrase within which the Noun Phrase is properly contained). One may prefix to this specifier the particle *e:* which intensifies the specification, as in *e: di-lu*, 'this very person', or the *e:* alone. Note that in such simple colloquial expressions the actual determiner is commonly omitted, but may be filled with elements such as *ha*, as in *e:di- lu- ha* , which in effect 'points' to the 'space' of conceptual categories—*ha* meaning 'thing' in the sense of an entity of some named category.

Some common classifiers include: *khu*. ('unit instance') for objects of complex shape or abstractions, *kaung* for animals, *yauʔ* for ordinary human beings, *pa:* for more honored persons (teachers, kings, and so on), *hsu* for sacred things and persons (pagodas, Buddhas), *chaung:* ('stick') for long things (rivers, sticks, trains, etc.), *loun:* ('round') for round, globular things or, more generally, things perceived as enclosing space, and *si:* ('to ride on') for vehicles. There is really no fixed list; one may be fairly inventive in 'choosing' a Burmese classifier, by referring to various different ways of thinking about or looking at something. For instance, one may count houses with the classifier 'house' (*ein*) meaning just 'house', or the classifier *hsaung* 'structure'.

Numeral expressions immediately follow the noun and consist of a number + classifier, as in *lu təyauʔ* (person 1+classifier) 'one person'.

The prenominal specifier of the demonstrative phrase houses '*wh*'- words, understood as question words only when the utterance ends with the content-question marker *le*, as in *be θwa:məle:* (where go future ?) 'Where you you going?' Lacking this sentence final marker, a *wh*-word marks the nominal expression as non-specific, as in *be-θu məshou* (wh-person not-specified) 'whoever'.

Basic Syntax

The most basic fact of the syntax is that Burmese is a Head-final language: the verb and its inflections follow all arguments (subject, object, indirect object) and all adjuncts (adverbials and pospositional phrases); and within a phrase likewise.

Burmese is, however, not a tense-marking language but a mode-cum-aspect marking language. Basically there are two modal endings: *-te* 'realis' (ranging over past and present 'tense') and *-me* 'irrealis' (future and subjunctive). There is, in addition an evidentiary system in Burmese which forces modification of the irrealis modal ending as follows. A distinction is drawn between a 'future' representing what one knows by direct evidence or experience and one representing a prediction made on the basis of only indirect or conventional knowledge. Thus, for instance, if I want to indicate that I will go somewhere, I say (knowing directly my own intention) *cun-no ɵwa:me* (I go IRREALIS/FUT). But if I want to tell you that the train will leave at five o'clock (assuming I am not in charge of the trains and their schedules), I will say: *mi:yətha: nga: na-yi htweʔlein.me* (train 5 hour leave INDIRECT IRREALIS) 'The train will (supposedly) leave at five o'clock', where *lein*. (contraction of *lei*, an emotive-emphatic particle, and *an*. an archaic irrealis-future ending) has to precede *-me*. The composite future modal *lein.me* has sometimes been rendered in English as 'probably will', but this misses the evidentiary character of the matter. The other major evidentiary element, sometimes called 'quotative', is the particle *te*. suffixed to a finite modal ending, as in *ɵwa:te-te* ([one] goes *te*) indicating that what one has just said is based on what someone else has told you, or on general knowledge—essentially that you are simply relaying someone else's information.

Unstressed (non-contrastive) pronouns in Burmese are absent in discourse: *hou-go ɵwa: me* (there to go FUT) 'I'm going there'. Moreover, pronouns of reference and address are often replaced by 'pronoun substitutes' such as the word for 'teacher' (*hsəya*), or kinship relations, e.g., *əphei* 'father' (used in reference to one's actual father) or *u:lei:* 'uncle' (used to address or refer to any older, respectable man). What characterizes a pronoun substitute is that when I use, say, *əphei* in speaking to my father it serves as 'you'; when he uses it in speaking to me it serves as 'I', and when I use it to refer to him, it serves as 'he'. This is to be distinguished from such words as *cun-no* (more carefully, *cun-do*—literally 'royal [*to* an honorific suffix] subject'), which has come to be the ordinary word for specifically the first person singular pronoun, replacing the etymological 'true' pronoun *nga*, which is more informal because it fails to carry any implications of personal status.

Burmese has no passive sentences, save in the literary genre where it is necessary to use a somewhat artificial way of rendering the Pāli or Sanskrit passives (Burma is largely a Theravāda Buddhist nation and those are its 'classical' languages, both Indo-European). Burmese also has no true coordinate conjunction of clauses. Instead it employs participial subordinate conjunction. Thus, the equivalent of English 'I went and she remained' is *cun-no ɵwa: bi: ɵu nei-de* (I go finish she remain-REALIS) 'I having gone, she remained' where a bare verb root (here *pi:* 'finish') is always participial, and where the third person singular pronoun *ɵu* is gender-neutral.

Since Burmese is a head-final language and since, as stated, functional phrases head substantive phrases, we find that mark-

ers of sentence type are clause-final. *Wh*-questions are marked with a sentence-final *le:* and a yes/no questions by sentence-final *la:*. Similarly, the final element of a declarative clause is the modal ending, and a negative declarative, having no semantic modality save itself (no realis-irrealis contrast), ends instead with postposed *hpu:* even though the basic negation morpheme is the preverbal clitic *mə* 'non-finite'. Subordinate clauses are likewise marked with clause-final 'complementizers', the complementizer phrase being the ultimate functional phrase as usual informal syntax.

Two remarks about the complementizers are necessary here. First, they are at least commonly cliticized to any immediately preceding 'tense' inflection, which then itself becomes a reduced syllables, as in *ɵwa: mə la:* (go FUT?) 'Will [you] go?' Second, a distinction is to be drawn between finite and non-finite subordinate clauses and their complementizers. In the former case, the complementizer is cliticized to an inflectional ending; in the latter, to the bare verb root/participle.

Consider the complementizer *lou.*. It can bound a finite 'that' type clause, as in the full form of the colloquial question 'where are you going?' [*be ɵwa: mə lou. le:*], *viz.*, *be ɵwa: mə lou. sin:za:ɵə le:* (wh go FUT COMP intend REALIS-?) 'Where do [you] intend that [you]will go?' But it can also take a non-finite complement clause, where it can be rendered in colloquial English as 'because of' or 'for', sometimes (depending upon the verb of the main clause) simply as participializing the verb of the subordinate clause, or even as 'for' or 'in as much as': *ci.lou. kaun:de* (look-at for good-REALIS) 'good to look at'; *sa:lou. kaun:de* (eat for good-REALIS) 'good to eat [good when or as you eat it—not purposive]'; *di keiʔsa.ne. paɵəʔlou. mə twei.ya.bu:* (this affair-with concern -ing not find-get-to) '[I] couldn't find anything concerning this business [in the newspaper]'.

There are other complementizers, but they can take *only* non-finite complement clauses. e.g., *yin* ('if'), *hpou.* 'for' and so on: *ša yin twei.me* (seek-if find FUT) 'if one seeks one will find [something]'; *sa:bou. kaun:de* (eat-for good-REAL) 'good to eat [purposive]'. The complementizer *yin* is commonly used for clauses functioning as topical, sentence adverbial clauses, as in: *di hsou-lou-yin* ... (this say want if ...) 'As for this [lit. if this is what you want to say/have in mind to say...]'.

Note that this leads to a superficial distinction concerning head-attribute order. Ordinarily one expects a rigid modifier-head order, as in such examples as *lu-gaun:* (person-good) 'good person'. However consider the expression *θauʔyei* (drink-water) 'drinking water'. This seems on first view an exception to the usual order, but is not because it is actually a contraction (here a lexicalized contraction) of a relative-clause construction, where *yei*, 'water', is the head noun and *θauʔ* 'drink' is, in open form, *θauʔ bou.* 'for drinking', so that the construction is really 'water [that is for] drinking'. Adjectival attributes, however follow the expected surface order, as we have seen, and are *not* readily paraphrased as reduced relative clauses. For the expression *lu-gaun:* ('good person') means an *inherently* good person, whereas *kaun:de. lu* ('a person who is good') signifies one who is good in a given context only, e.g., who is behaving properly for the time being. Such attributive 'compounds' are actually noun-noun compounds with the expected order; in this example *lu + ɔkaun:* (person + goodness/good-one), the latter really the head of the construction, formed with the clitic prefix *ɔ* that serves to make a deverbal noun. This leads us directly to a consideration of relative clauses and noun-phrase complement clauses.

First, relative clauses prepose the finite subordinate clause to the head nominal by marking the clause-final modal endings, normally on the level tone, with the derived creaky tone, the general marker of genitive subordination, including possession. Thus we may compare the following: *cun-no. sa-ouʔ* (I GEN book) 'my book ('I' is inherently level tone, *cun-no*)'; *ɵwa: de. lu* (go REALIS GEN person) '[the] person who goes/went'(the realis ending is inherently level tone *-te*)'.

It will be noted already above that sentential word order is (almost) invariant under question formation, and the same is true, here, for relative clauses—the nominal in the clause controlled for reference by the head nominal of the relative construction is never displaced. As to whether there is any sort of 'relative pronoun', that is anything in the complementizer phrase containing the relative clause, in a way there is, as can be seen from the fact that, once again, the dependent-genitive creaky tone can be, instead, on the 'item' element, presumably itself in the complementizer position: *ɵwa: de-ye. lu* 'the person who goes/went'. Although this is very stilted usage, it shows that there is something equivalent to the 'that' of 'the man that went', and we can conclude that what happens more ordinarily is that the creaky tone inherently associated with the complementizer, when the latter is phonologically null, is conflated morphologically with the modal ending of the subordinate clause.

Equational sentences are verbless; 'this is a book' is, ordinarily, *di-ha sa-ouʔ* (this-thing [a] book) where *di-ha*, commonly contracted to *da*, is a 'demonstrative noun'. Using this form, one negates an equational expression by embedding the affirmative in a negation of the verb 'to be so' (*houʔ*), as in *di-ha sa-ouʔ məhouʔphu:* (this book not.so) 'this is not a book'.

Finally, concerning sentence types, one must note the existence of a large class of nominalized sentences. These are extremely common in running conversation, where there may be few if any 'verbal' declarative sentences at all, and nominalized sentences are especially common in the context of exclamatory emphasis. One nominalizes a sentence by contracting the modal declarative ending with the generalized noun *ha* 'thing': [*θu*] *θwa:da po.* ([he] go real.+thing certainly) 'He goes, of course'.

In this connection, there is also a fairly large class of formatives that make deverbal nouns (but do not serve to nominalize finite clauses). Perhaps the most common one in colloquial usage is the abstract noun formative *ɔhmu.* 'deed', 'matter', 'case', as in *win-hmu.* 'the fact or act of entering'. It is somewhat difficult to distinguish this way of forming abstract deverbal nouns from the use of the clitic prefix *ɔ.* but the latter means something more abstract still, in particular not factive—'going' as an intentional concept.

Contact with Other Languages

Pali and Sanskrit have provided both a considerable corpus of loanwords at all levels of vocabulary (religious and philosophical words, of course, but also common words such as *ding-ga*:

for 'coin' from general India *tangka*) and a model for various construction types in at least the literary register (see remarks on 'passive', above), functioning as 'classical' languages for Burmese culture. Then, because of the position of Burma in the Indian Ocean trading region, vocabulary items have come into Burmese from, for instance, PORTUGUESE, ARABIC and, in particular TAMIL (e.g., the generic Burmese word for a sarong, *loun-ji* from Tamil *lunghi*). ENGLISH has provided a considerable array of words because Burma was under British colonial rule, particularly from 1885 to 1947. Examples are *main* from English 'mile', or even such words as *sain-boʔ* from 'sign-board', which are in common use though they do not appear in any known Burmese dictionary. Many loanwords from Burmese have entered into minority languages within Burma, although Burmese words have not made their way into neighboring languages, nor do they appear in any European languages.

Common Words

man:	yaunʔca
woman:	mein-ma.
water:	yei
sun:	nei
three:	θoun:
fish:	nga:
big:	ci:
long:	hye [ɕe]
small:	nge
yes:	houʔke. (There is no general 'yes'; this means 'right!'. To say 'yes' to, e.g., 'is it good?' one replies 'is good')
no:	məhouʔphu: (There is no general 'no'; this means 'Not so'; one must negate whatever verb is asked about)
good:	kaun:
bird:	hngeʔ
dog:	khwei:
tree:	θiʔpin (lit. 'wood-plant')
house:	ein (lit. 'dwelling')

Example Sentences

(1) bəθu hma. mɒla: bu:
who even not come
'No one came.' (lit., 'even whoever didn't come')

(2) bəθu ma phyu ka. [Maun Maun myin:de lou.] pyo: θəle:
who [name,f.] subj.emph. [Name,m] see [real.comp] say real-Q
'Who did Ma Phyu say that Maung Maung saw?'

(3) ša yin twei.me
seek-if find.FUT
'If one seeks one will find [something].'

Efforts to Preserve, Protect, and Promote the Language

After independence from colonial rule was achieved in 1947, Burmese became the official language of the country and of the education system. Following the military coup of 1962, in particular, and especially since the imposition of military rule in 1988, Burmese has become the only allowed medium of educational instruction at all levels, even in minority ethnic regions, and an attempt has been made to purge the language of Anglicisms (e.g., the common word *nam-baʔ* from English 'number' has been officially replaced with the Burmese etymon *əhmaʔ* 'mark; indexical signifier', although common usage often results in the compound *əhmaʔ nam-baʔ* when one is referring to item number such-and-such). Along with these language 'reforms' have come increasing attempts to impose a reformed standard of spellings for many words, largely the work of the Language Commission and its several quite excellent dictionaries.

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