Foreign influence in the Burmese language

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Abstract

Burmese has a documented history of one thousand years, and from the very first texts shows influence from foreign languages, especially in its vocabulary. Much less evidence of foreign influence is found in the grammatical structure of Burmese, though a closer look reveals some phrase structures that look rather un-Burmese and seem to be pattern replications from a non-verb-final language, such as Mon. The regular use of postpositional grammatical markers especially in the written language, probably in indigenous feature of Burmese, may have been reinforced by literary contact with Pali.

Foreign elements in Burmese are important indicators of the development of the language and contact with other cultures. They not only tell us something about which cultures Burmese was in contact with, but also about the period and kind of contact. Three main sources of foreign elements in Burmese can be identified, namely early Indian (Pali and Sanskrit), early Mon, English, together with various more recent sources, including new Indo-Aryan languages, Malay, Chinese varieties, and others. This study takes the linguistic evidence, together with what is known of the history of the involved languages and peoples, to draw a picture of contact scenarios into which the Burmese language and culture entered over the past one thousand years.

The *Myanmar-English Dictionary* by the Myanmar Language Commission (1993) identifies a large number of loan words in Burmese and indicates the source language, together with a more or less accurate transcription of the original form of the respective words, either in Burmese script (for Sanskrit, Pali, Mon, and Shan) or in Romanized transcription (for all other languages, including Hindi).

1. Burmese in contact

The Burmese language appears for the first time in the 12th century on the quadrilingual Myazedi inscription at Bagan (1113 CE), alongside Mon, Pyu, and Pali. This first appearance of the language can be taken as programmatic for its further development - as a language surrounded by and in close contact with other languages. Language contact as such is a common enough phenomenon, and hardly any language spoken today has evolved completely on its own. What makes the case of Burmese interesting is that we do know quite a bit about the past contact scenarios, and the linguistic evidence helps us better understand the kind and intensity of contact settings Burmese entered at different periods of its history. One enigma that remains in the

contact history of Burmese is the fact that the Burmese must have been in contact with the Pyu, a literate people with a high standard of culture, in the central plains of the Irrawady River, but they obviously did not take over the script from them (Yanson 1994). The Pyu appear to have been more or less closely related to the Burmese linguistically, so contact and mutual influence would be expected to be facilitated, but it was the Mon, with whom the Burmese came into contact only a few centuries later, that gave the writing system to the Burmese. Not much is known about the Pyu language, as most inscriptions, apart from the late Myazedi quadrilingual stele (1113 CE), are not well understood. This late Pyu text apparently contains a number of Burmese and at least one potential Mon loanword, so the status of Pyu at that time and the "pureness" of the language in this inscription is not clear. Therefore it is difficult to make definite statements about Pyu influence in early Burmese. One possible example Yanson (1994) mentions is the orthographic interchangeability of *o* and *u* in Old Burmese, which is also found in Pyu (as witnessed by Pali loans in this language), but not in Pali or Mon, though here both <oʔ> and <uʔ> are used to represent the rhyme /ɯʔ/. In later Burmese this interchangeability does not appear anymore. It is unknown to what extent sound changes in early Burmese can be attributed to Pyu influence, and whether irregular forms of Sanskrit words in Burmese are due to the mediation of Pyu.

The main contact languages that left traces in Burmese are all non-related to Burmese: Pali and Sanskrit, the classical Indo-European languages of Indian cultures and religions, Mon, an Austroasiatic language and carrier of one of the earliest Buddhist civilizations of Southeast Asia, and English, the language of the modern globalized world, omnipresent in the media, popular culture, and internet. each of these languages has had its own place in the history of Burmese, and has left different vestiges in the present-day language. The influence can be seen most prominently in the vocabulary, but also in the sound structure and morpho-syntax of contemporary Burmese. It is likely that a number of other languages have had their share in the make-up of modern Burmese, but the data at the present state of research do not allow an in-depth investigation on the influence of languages Karenic, Jinghpaw, Shan, and others in Burmese. Obviously, local varieties of Burmese show more influence from local ethnic languages as substratum or adstratum of some sort or other, and much more needs to be done in this field of research, linking the distinctive characteristics of local Burmese varieties to the surrounding languages (see Jenny 2013; Næss & Jenny 2011 for an example study).

One pattern that emerges when looking into language contact and its outcome in Burmese is that Burmese during the course its history assumes the role of the dominant language, reflecting the political dominance of the

Burmese people, hardly taking in loanwords from languages perceived as low-prestige. The social hierarchy and prestige of Burmese and its contact languages have changed over time, as can be seen in the case of Mon. While Mon was a language of literature and learning in 11th and 12th century Bagan, it is today seen as a low-prestige vernacular with restricted domains of use. It is certainly not seen as a source of lexical loans anymore, as it used to be in the early days of the Burmese state. Pali, on the other hand, retained its high-prestige status, though it may not be seen as the (only) standard for "good language use" anymore. Pali never was a spoken language, though, and not associated with a population group, but rather with the Buddhist Theravāda tradition, the dominant religion in Myanmar since the Bagan period.

More recently, English has taken over the role of main source of loanwords. English came into Burmese culture in two waves, namely the colonial period and then more recently as language of international communication. Both waves brought in large numbers of English loans, with an interruption after independence, when neologisms were increasingly coined with indigenous material. The time of technological inventions and their introduction to the Burmese society is reflected in the shape of the term, as can be seen from the following examples:

(1) Technological terms in Burmese

$tɛlip^hòun$	'telephone'	English	introduced in 1884
rediyo	'radio'	English	introduced in 1936
youʔ.myin.θan.dʑà	'television'	Burmese	introduced in 1979
ʔintanɛʔ	'internet'	English	introduced in 2000

It can be seen that technologies introduced during the colonial period and after the gradual opening of the country again in the late 1990s use English terminology, while neologisms created between 1948 and the 1990s use Burmese material. Television service was introduced in Myanmar in 1979 and started regular broadcasts in 1981. The word for 'television', *youʔ-myin-θan-dʑà* is made up from the Burmese words 'image-see-sound-hear'. More colloquially, the word is replaced by the English form *tibwi* 'TV'.

While the transfer of lexical material generally was from high-prestige to low-prestige languages, the influence on the structure of a language can be in the other direction. As speakers of subordinate languages speak the dominant language as L2 with varying proficiency, the Burmese spoken by ethnic minorities deviates from the "correct" standard in different ways. If the number of L2 speakers reaches a critical point, or if L2 speakers in an area outnumber L1 speakers, the "wrong" variety spoken as L2 may influence L1 speakers. This process, which is less conscious than the use of lexical loans,

eventually results in local varieties which show convergence with the surrounding non-Burmese languages. A number of socio-cultural factors are at play in the propagation of these local non-Burmese characteristics within and beyond a region. Much research in Burmese dialects and varieties needs still to be done in order to achieve a more complete picture of these mutual influences between Burmese and its contact languages.

Structural influence from high to low prestige language is common, and Burmese usage has influenced (and continues to influence) the syntactic structure of Mon since the 14th century (see Jenny 2011). Not much can be said at the present about structural influence from Burmese on other ethnic languages, as more detailed data as well as a thorough analysis thereof is still needed.

Burmese itself, at least the literary variety, may have been influenced by the high prestige contact languages, such as Mon (in the early Bagan period) and Pali. The latter may have influenced the grammatical structure of Burmese to some extent through direct translations and word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase glosses (*nissaya*), as will be presented in the following section, and, more recently, English.

2. Early Indian elements

The classical Indian languages Sanskrit and Pali as carriers of Hindu and Buddhist traditions naturally play a big role in the linguistic landscape of Southeast Asian lowland cultures, the exact nature and extent of which still need to be defined, though. Sanskrit and Pali words and phrases are abundant in Old Burmese (OB) inscriptions. Especially religious and ceremonial terminology is mostly of Indian origin, but also a number of everyday lexical items are Pali (or, less commonly, Sanskrit) loans. The shape of Indian loans in many cases indicates the time and path of the borrowing. Roughly three paths can be distinguished:

2.1 Early Indian loans

A number of words must have entered the language at some point before writing was introduced. These loanwords underwent the pre-Burmese sound changes seen in indigenous words from plain voiceless stops to aspirated voiceless stops, and voiced stops to plain voiceless stops.

(2) pre-Old Burmese sound changes

k, c, t, p $\quad\rightarrow\quad$ k^h, c^h, t^h, p^h

g, j, d, b $\quad\rightarrow\quad$ k, c, t, p

Examples of such early Indian loanwords are Old Burmese *phun* 'merit, power' from Sanskrit/Pali *puṇya/puñña*, corresponding to modern Burmese *pʰòun*, *chriyā* 'teacher', modern Burmese *sʰəya*, written <charā>, from Sanskrit *ācārya* (or Pali *ācariya*), and *tryā* 'doctrine, law', potentially from Sanskrit *dharma* (via forms such as *dharama, dhrama*), *təyà* <tarāḥ> in modern Burmese. The shape of the word *tryā* is rather far from the Sanskrit *dharma*, and the connection is not certain. It is also not known whether the form of the Burmese word could be due to Pyu influence. A form *tra:* is found in the Pyu text of the Myazedi inscription, but its meaning cannot be determined, though contextually 'law, dharma' seems to be possible.

2.2 Indian loans via Mon

Other words entered Burmese via Old Mon, such as Old Burmese *pucaw* 'worship' from Old Mon *pujāw*. The Burmese form of this word, ultimately from Pali *pūjā*, shows Old Mon phonology. One restriction on lexical content words in Old Mon was that they must end in a consonant. Vocalic codas were allowed only in grammatical function words. This rule was also applied to Pali and Sanskrit loans in Old Mon, but not in in Middle Mon, when numerous loanwords ended in vowels, and some indigenous final consonants (l, r, later also w) were gradually lost. Pali *pūjā* naturally became *pūjāw* in Old Mon by adding the default consonant *w*, which can also be seen in other early loans in Mon, such as *dewatāw* 'god, deity', from Pali *devatā*. The Pali word thus entered Burmese in its Old Mon form, with the final consonant, which was later dropped, leaving its trace in the quality of the vowel. The unexpected medial voiceless palatal stop instead of the voiced one found in Pali and Old Mon may be an early indication of intervocalic voicing of consonants, a prominent feature of modern Burmese. The spelling of modern Burmese *puzɔ* 'worship' is with the voiced palatal, corresponding more closely to the original form.

Other Pali loans in Burmese of which the phonological shape suggests Mon as intermediary language are the following. many more can be found in the language, and the ones given here are only meant to illustrate the phenomenon.

(3) Pali loans via Mon

kəràin	<karuiṇ>	'articulation (in speech)'	Pali	*karaṇa*
kəθàin	<kasuiṇ>	'object of mediation'	Pali	*kasiṇa*
pouʔ, paiʔ	<pud, puid>	'word, verse'	Pali	*pada*

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2.3 Direct Indian loans

The bulk of Indian loans probably came into Burmese directly via Pali texts, and the Pali orthography was more or less retained and syllabified according to Burmese phonology, often with a lengthening of the final vowel. Of the Pali orthography is retained in both Mon and Burmese, there is no possibility to determine whether the loan into Burmese was directly from Pali or via Mon. Lacking further evidence, it is here assumed that these loanwords did not rely on Mon as intermediary. The following words are borrowings from Sanskrit, most of them more or less retaining their orthographic form.

(4) Sanskrit loans

gəbya	<kabyā>	'poem'	Sanskrit	*kāvya*
tɕəma	<krammā>	'deed, karma'	Sanskrit	*karma*
kan	<kan>	'Virgo (astrological)'	Sanskrit	*kanyā*
sɛʔtɕa	<cakrā>	'circle, chariot'	Sanskrit	*cakra*

Pali loans in Burmese make for the majority of Indian lexicon, covering a wide range of semantic domains, and including words of the every-day language. In some cases it cannot, from the form of a word, be determined whether it is Pali or Sanskrit. This is the case for example with *seiʔ* <cit> 'heart, mind' and *kəyúna/kərúna* <karuṇā>, which are *citta* and karuṇā, respectively, in both Sanskrit and Pali. As Pali is the language of Theravāda Buddhism, it can be assumed that Pali is the actual source, at least in Buddhist terminology. A number of words are found in both Sanskrit and Pali forms, in some cases with different meanings, as seen in *kan* 'Virgo' and *kəna* 'virgin, maiden', and *sɛʔtɕa* circle, chariot' and *sɛʔ* 'engine'. The word *cakra/cakka* in Sanskrit/Pali means 'circle, wheel'. While most Pali loans retain their original orthographic form more or less, some have undergone more dramatic changes, as seen in the last two items in the list, *ŋəyὲ* 'hell', presumably adapted from Pali *naraka*, and *ŋəyouʔ* 'chilli', in Old Burmese spelled *ṅrai* and *ṅrut* respectively. The meaning of *marica* changed from originally 'black pepper' to 'chilli' when the latter was introduced to the area from South America by the Portuguese in the 16th century. Also in other Southeast Asian languages, the same Pali (or Sanskrit) word has been borrowed and integrated into the vernacular, like in Mon *pərɔ̀c* <mrek> and Thai *pʰrík* <brik>.

(5) Pali loans

Burmese	Orthography	Gloss	Pali	Meaning
kəna	<kañā>	'maiden'	*kaññā*	'young girl'
gədí	<kati>	'promise'	*katikā*	'agreement'
kərúna/kəyúna	<karuṇā>	'compassion'	*karuṇā*	'compassion'
kayá	<kāya>	'body'	*kāya*	'body'
kəlà	<kulāḥ>	'Indian'	*kula*	'family, clan'

kan	<kam>	'deed, karma'	*kamma*	'deed, kamma'
kùn	<kwaṁḥ>	'betel, areca'	*kamuka*	'areca'
kʰiʔ	<khet>	'extent'	*khetta*	'field, plot'
kʰiʔtá	<khetta>	'moment'	*khetta*	'field, plot'
seiʔ	<cit>	'mind, heart'	*citta*	'mind'
sɛʔ	<cak>	'engine'	*cakka*	'wheel, circle'
yətʰà	<rathāḥ>	'train'	*ratha*	'chariot'
ŋəyὲ	<ṅarai>	'hell'	*niraya*	'hell'
ŋəyouʔ	<ṅarut>	'pepper, chilli'	*marica*	'black pepper'

The spelling of some Pali words in Old Burmese diverged from the Pali orthography, but was later reconciled with it. An example is Old Burmese *krunā* 'compassion' from Pali *karuṇā*, spelled *karuṇā* in Modern Burmese. This variation probably shows language internal irregularities in the early stages of adopting writing in Burmese, rather than foreign influence. Notably Old Mon regularly spells this word as *karuṇā*.

How well Pali lexical items are integrated in the Burmese language is shown by the possibility to combine Pali and Burmese elements, as in the adverbial *tʰawə.zin* 'eternally', made up from Pali *thāvara* 'eternal' and Burmese *sin* 'while', and in the noun *le.yin* 'airplane', from Burmese *le* 'wind, air' and Pali *yāna* 'vehicle'.

Interestingly, some Pali words entered Mon via Burmese in more recent times, inversing the former direction of transmission, when Mon acted as the intermediary. One such example is Mon *yətʰa* 'train' from Burmese-Pali *yətʰà* from *ratha*. A direct loan into Mon from Pali would have retained the initial *r*, which was chenged to *y* according to Burmese phonology.

2.4 Structural influence from Pali

While Sanskrit and Pali elements in the Burmese lexicon are evident and in most cases easily traceable to their origin, structural influence from Pali is much more difficult to demonstrate. The most prominent study of this topic is certainly John Okell's *Nissaya Burmese* (1965). Nissaya texts are Pali texts accompanied by word-by-word or phrase-by-phrase translations into Burmese. These direct translations of parts of sentences rather than whole sentences certainly required some adjustment of Burmese language use. Pali as a heavily inflecting language expresses grammatical relations and verbal categories such as tense and mood by morphological processes, while Burmese operates with particles (grammatical, semantic, and pragmatic) and secondary verbs, respectively, to express similar notions. In natural speech or loose translation, the exact meaning is often expressed by the construction of the whole clause or sentence, which makes the direct translations of words in context rather difficult. The existing markers available in Burmese were used

to express the needed specific functions, allowing one-to-one correspondences between the Pali and Burmese words and phrases. Judging from the modern colloquial language as well as related Sino-Tibetan languages, Old Burmese probably used various particles to express pragmatic functions on noun phrases, rather than grammatical cases. When these particles came to be associated regularly with specific grammatical functions in Pali, Nissaya Burmese converged structurally with Pali as a matter of course, making the Burmese particles looking like Pali inflectional affixes.

When Nissaya translations were introduced around the mid-15th century, Pali was highly regarded as standard of a correct language and main language of literature. Though never used as a spoken language, knowledge of Pali was certainly widespread among the male population, as traditionally all men spend some time of their life in a monastery as ordained novices or monk. During this period, which may be anywhere between a few months to many years, the novices and monks have to recite and learn by heart Pali and Nissaya texts. With the high status and prestige of Buddhism, Pali texts naturally occupy a high place in Burmese culture. Nissaya translations thus came to be considered good grammatical style, and was applied also in free translations of Pali texts, and, to a lesser extent, in original compositions.

Interestingly, while Nissaya Burmese was created to replicate the morphological complexity of Pali in Burmese, in some cases it exhibits more complexity than the Pali original; the accusative is rendered as *-ko* 'object' and *-θó* 'goal', where Pali has only one form. Colloquial Burmese collapses the two forms in *-ko*, though in the latter function it is more frequently dropped.

It is noteworthy that Nissaya translations show only pattern replication, that is, Pali grammar is replicated in Burmese using indigenous material. Matter replication, that is, borrowing of Pali grammatical morphemes, has been suggested from time to time, though not with any serious impact in most cases. The most detailed study of Pali grammatical morphemes borrowed into Burmese is done by Yanson (1994, 2002, 2005).

According to Yanson, the nominal or attributive suffixes in Old Burmese <so> *θɔ̀* and <sa> *θa/θə* are taken from the Pali demonstratives or third person pronouns *so* and *sa*, which overlapped in meaning with the indigenous Burmese third person pronoun <sū> *θu*, which can be used in the same function, at least in some contexts. These forms, suffixed to a verb, correspond to Pali participles, for which no derivational process was available in Burmese. Apart from the functional and semantic similarity of the Burmese morphemes with the claimed Pali source forms, Yanson adduces phonological considerations to support his argument. Most importantly, the lack of *o* in open syllables in indigenous words in Old Burmese.

It is conceivable that Pali structures may enter colloquial Burmese via Nissaya translations and Literary Burmese, though there are few obvious

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cases. Indeed, one of the most marked differences between Literary and Colloquial Burmese is, besides the form of grammatical markers, the much looser application of these markers in the colloquial style. Case and number marking in Colloquial Burmese depend on a number of semantic and pragmatic factors, while they are much more systematically (grammatically) applied in the literary language. The only obligatory grammatical elements in colloquial Burmese are the verbal status markers, indicating notions like 'future', 'non-future', 'negation', 'new situation', and others. Theoretically they are necessary to form a finite clause, though non-finite clauses can take the place of finite ones in many contexts in casual speech, making this rule less absolute, too. Pali structural influence is certainly present in high literary styles, but hardly any traces of it can be found in the colloquial language. With the increased use of Colloquial Burmese also in writing, it seems unlikely that Pali constructions will enter this style in great number in the future.

3. Mon elements

3.1 Mon lexicon in Burmese

Mon was the main literary language for a few decades from the beginning of the 11th century at the Burmese kingdom of Bagan. During this time, not only was the Mon writing system introduced to Burmese, but also a number of lexical loans entered the language, mostly from the domain of architecture, arts, and administration. Mon was also the vector for many Indian words, as can be seen from their shape in Burmese (see section 2.2). Hla Pe (1967) presents a long list with possible Mon loan words in Burmese, arranged according to semantic domains. Hla Pe takes the fact for granted that Mon was a high prestige language in Bagan, and must therefore have been the source for lexical borrowings in Burmese, especially vocabulary relating to the state, court, and culture, including technologies and architecture. According to Hla Pe, the social bounds between Burmese and Mon must have been much closer than suggested by the documented political rivalry of the two peoples competing for the same economic resources. The Mon were seen by the Burmese as old civilized (= indianized) people with a high standard of culture and Buddhist tradition, which led the almost whole-sale takeover of Mon culture by the Burmese. According to Hla Pe, not only were Mon words taken into the Burmese lexicon, but also most Pali words passed through Mon before becoming part of the Burmese vocabulary. Apart from loanwords, Burmese and Mon also share a large number of idiomatic expressions, which are apparently the result of lexical calques, if they are not taken from a common third language such as Pali.

Hla Pe applies a number of criteria to determine whether a word is a loan in Burmese or part of the indigenous lexicon. Points he cites are the

following (Hla Pe 1967).

- *un-Burmese characteristics:*   irregular spelling

                                      rhymes *-aiʔ, -ain, -ein*

                                      polysyllabic words

                                      words without Tibeto-Burman cognates

                                      existence of homonymous counterpart in Burmese

- *occurrence of the word in Old Mon*

- *Pali loans that entered Mon before the wane of Mon culture*

- *foreign words from overseas entering through Mon State*

- *cultural terms related to Mon culture:*   architecture

                                        Buddhism

                                        professions

                                        water craft

                                        weapons and tools

                                        food

- *geographical terms relating to Lower Burma*

It can be seen from the list of criteria given by Hla Pe (1967) that a more detailed study is needed, and indeed possible today, with much more comparative material available in both Tibeto-Burman and Austroasiatic. The mere occurrence of a word in Old Mon can not be taken as evidence that it is not borrowed from Burmese into Mon, unless it appears in the few and rather short Mon inscriptions of Dvāravatī, which were written centuries before Mon came into contact with Burmese. The bulk of Old Mon lexicon is known from the inscriptions at Bagan, where Burmese influence cannot be excluded. Another problem with Hla Pe's approach are the pre-defined categories of Mon culture. Whenever a term denotes an element belonging to one of these categories, it is taken to be borrowed from Mon into Burmese, rather than the other way round. This approach does not allow for insights into the interplay between language and culture, as Mon is a priori taken as the source. In spite of these shortcomings, Hla Pe presents an impressive list that is still more or less valid in big parts. The following examples illustrate the range of Mon lexical items in Burmese. Different sound correspondences point to different periods or paths of borrowing, like Mon *knu* (spoken Mon *kənaoʔ*) 'shellfish', which appears in Burmese as *kənú* and *kʰəyú*.

(6) Mon lexicon in Burmese

Burmese	Gloss	Mon
mə-ká	'not less than'	kaḥ (OM 'lack, be without')
ká	'fish'	ka
gənàn	'crab'	khətāṁ
kəma	'oyster'	kamā
kənú.kəma	'oyster shell'	knu-kamā
kʰəyú	'shellfish, snail'	knu
tɕà	'tiger'	kla
gəduʔ	'k.o. fig tree'	kadot
gədaʔ	'k.o. yam'	kadāt
kauʔlànti	'k.o. flower'	kao-lòṅ-ti
tɕɛʔθun	'garlic, onion'	kasuin
mədʑì	'tamarind'	maṅglan
gənàin	'forest'	gniṅ
kəlan	'chief of village'	kalan
gədɔ	'wife of official'	kindar, kandar
kənà	'pavilion'	knā
səmyin	'gallery, official'	camraṅ
səniʔ	'system'	cnat
taʔ	'army'	dap
səlàun	'lamp shade'	cloṅ
pəlɛ̀	'pearl'	blay
tɕɛʔ.θəye	'glory, grace'	kyāk.srī
gədɔ́	'pay respect'	kindoʔ
tʰaiʔ	'suitable'	thek

Once Mon words were borrowed into Burmese, they became part of the lexicon and could be compounded with indigenous words, as in *kʰɔ́za* 'food offered to spirits', from Mon *kʰɔ* 'small vessel for food offerings' and Burmese *ʔəsa* 'food.'

In some cases, the direction or source of a loanword cannot be determined. A number of lexical items appear in similar form in various languages of Southeast Asia, as seen in the following examples.

(7) Shared vocabulary in Southeast Asian languages

Burmese	Gloss	Mon,	Thai
taiʔ <tuik>	'building'	*tɒc* <tuik>	*tùk* <tuuk>
tin <taṅ>	'put on'	*taŋ* <taṅ>	*tâŋ* <táṅ>
tʰɛ <thai>	'plow'	*thuə* <thoy>	*tʰǎy* <thai>
ʔìn <ʔaṅḥ>	'pond, lake, basin'	*ʔaŋ* <ʔaṅ>	*ʔà:ŋ* <ʔầṅ>
ʔɔ <ʔow>	'bay'	*ʔao* <ʔao>	*ʔà:w* <ʔầw>
zùn <jwanḥ>	'spoon'	*cɔ̀n* <jan>	*cʰɔ́:n* <jɔ́n>
sʰin <chaṅ>	'elephant'	*coɲ* <ciṅ>	*cʰá:ŋ* <já́ṅ>

Some of the above words are likely to be old Chinese loans, which may have entered the languages of Southeast Asia independently. Compare Chinese *àng* 'basin, jar', *ào* 'bay', and *xiàng* 'elephant'.

3.2 Structural influence

While Hla Pe (1967) looks exclusively at (cultural) lexical items, Bauer (2006) is interested in the mutual influence Mon and Burmese had on each other in their grammatical structure. He presents a list of six grammatical particles common to Mon and Burmese. Four of these occur in Old Mon and are taken to be Mon loans in Burmese, while the other two are not found in Old Mon, and therefore the direction of borrowing is seen as from Burmese to Mon. Again, Mon is by default taken as source, though no linguistic justification is offered for this. Bauer's (2006) list is the following.

(8) Mon-Burmese grammatical morphemes

Function	Burmese	Mon	Notes
Plural	*tuiwʔ*	*toʔ*	(OB, OM)
Dative	*kui*	*kuʔ, koʔ, ku*	(OB, OM)
Subject/Topic	*hmā*	*mā*	(not in OB)
Restrictive	*hma*	*maʔ, ma*	(not in OB)
Additive	*le, lañ*	*ler, lew*	(not in OM)
Frequentative	*hlyaṅ*	*heṅ*	(MM and MB)

The plural marker OM *toʔ* appears as nominal suffix, an atypical position for Mon nominal markers. The voiceless nasal of *hma* of the Burmese Topic marker is difficult to explain if it is indeed a borrowing from Mon, while there is no difficulty the other way round. As Old Mon lacked voicelss nasals, they are naturally replaced by plain nasals in loanwords from Burmese. The same is true for the restrictive marker. The additive particle *le, lañ ~ ler, lew* seems

to be widespread in Southeast Asia with similar form and function, so the ultimate source of this word is unclear. Compare Thai *lɛː, lɛ́ʔ, lɛ̀ʔ* and Shan *lɛ* with similar functions. Note that the tones of the Burmese, Thai, and Shan forms do not match, so that direct borrowing from one language into the others is very unlikely.

Apart from these function words with possible Mon origin, not much of Mon influence seems to be there in the structure of Burmese. The sentence structures remain very different, and there seems to be hardly any deviation from original Burmese syntax even in the earliest inscriptions, where one might expect some convergence towards the Mon model. Only a few features of the phrase structure of Burmese may be due to Mon influence. One example are the numerous names of fish and some bird species, which show the atypical word order modified-modifier, as in *ŋə.kʰu* 'k.o. catfish'. Burmese would be expected to have modifier-modified, or specific name-generic term, as seen in *ɕwe-ŋà* 'goldfish'. The latter formula is in fact the productive one in Burmese, the Mon-like pattern being restricted to lexicalized compounds. Conceivably, the Mon, living on the southern coastlines of the kingdom, introduced fishing terminology to the landlocked Burmese. This is supported by the fact that many fish names are actually direct replications of Mon lexical items, as seen in the use of the prefix *ká/kə-* from Mon *kaʔ* 'fish'.

More Mon influence on the structure of Burmese can be seen in Burmese varieties spoken in Lower Myanmar, especially Mon and Kayin States. Most of these structures, like the placement of the negation in complex predicates, as in (9), and the special use of secondary verbs (e.g. *tʰí* 'come in contact with sth.' for 'know how to V; have to V') are restricted to the Southern Burmese dialects (see Jenny 2013).

(9) Negation in complex predicates

Southern Burmese	**Standard Burmese**	
V NEG-AUX	NEG-V-AUX	
pyɔ̀ mə-taʔ	*mə-pyɔ̀-daʔ*	'cannot say'
NEG-V-DIR	V-NEG-DIR	
mə-kʰɔ-ðwà	*kʰɔ-mə-θwà*	'don't take along

At least one construction of Mon origin has made its way into other Burmese varieties, including colloquial Yangonese. This is the preverbal use of 'give' as causative marker, widely used in colloquial Burmese, but not accepted as good standard by many educated speakers, and hardly found in Upper Myanmar (see Okano 2005).

3.3 Phonology

Bradley (1980) claims that Burmese phonology is influenced by and converged towards Austroasiatic (that is, Mon) patterns. This influence, according to Bradley, can be seen in vowels, consonants, as well as suprasegmentals and word structure. One major point Bradley makes is that the original Lolo-Burmese tones of Old Burmese were replaced by a phonation-type system, as found in Mon. The original pitch and contour contrasts may have been associated with phonation, duration, intensity, and other factors, but in Burmese, unlike other closely related languages such as Lisu and Lahu, the distinction modal-breathy-creaky became prominent. This is similar to the distinction made in Mon and most other Austroasiatic languages between modal and breathy.

The second characteristic that is of Austroasiatic origin in Burmese is the sesquisyllabic word structure. A full syllable is preceded by a weak syllable with reduced possibilities in its phonological structure.

A few remarks must be made to Bradley's (1980) assumption of Mon influencing the sound system of Burmese.

Regarding the change from tone to phonation system, a number of factors must be presupposed, most importantly that Old Burmese actually had tones and that Old Mon had register distinctions. Both facts are not evident from the available data. Indeed, the spelling of Old Burmese suggests a non-tonal language, possibly with phonation distinctions (syllables spelled with final *-ʔ* and *-h* for creaky and breathy phonation, respectively), though the spelling is rather inconsistent. Tones found in the modern Tibeto-Burman languages do not appear to go back to a common origin and are seen as independent developments from the loss of onset distinctions (voicing, aspiration, clusters) and final consonants. Old Mon, on the other hand, does not show any evidence for register distinctions, which probably arose only around the 15th century, when onset voicing distinctions were lost. If we take the modern languages as reference, the systems do not really match. Burmese, at least the standard variety spoken in Upper Myanmar, makes a distinction between modal and creaky voice, but does not show any breathiness. In Mon, the difference is between modal and breathy, with creakiness not being phonemic but rather a concomitant of syllables with final glottal stop. Southern Burmese varieties, spoken in close vicinity to Mon, on the other hand, make the same distinction by pitch difference. The situation in Burmese and Mon is summed up in (10).

(10) Tone vs. phonation in Burmese and Mon

Standard Burmese	**Southern Burmese**	**Modern Mon**
modal vs. creaky	low vs. high	modal vs. breathy

Sesquisyllabic word structure, on the other hand, is a common feature of Austroasiatic languages and has spread into other language families, such as Tai-Kadai (Thai, Lao), Sino-Tibetan (Karenic), and Austronesian (Chamic). It is well possible that Burmese acquired this feature from Mon or another Austroasiatic language at some point. Sesquisyllabicity goes together with iambic word or phrase stress, which is a widespread feature in Southeast Asian languages, though only partly shared by Burmese. Interestingly, Arakanese has more sesquisyllabic words than standard Burmese, so the process, if initiated by Mon, must have gone on in this variety, which is spoken far away from the nearest Mon settlements in the last few centuries. At the same time, Southern Burmese of Mon and Kayin States, exhibits sesquisyllabicity also in phrases where Standard Burmese does not have it, as in *θəsà-mɛ* 'will go to eat', for Standard *θwà-sà-mɛ*.

A general question that arises with respect to Mon influence on the Burmese sound system is how this should have happened. According to all available evidence, Mon was not a language widely spoken by any sizeable parts of the population at Bagan, but served as literary language and carrier of Buddhist culture, together with Pali. As such, Mon was hardly in a position to change the phonology or phonetics of Burmese during that time. The situation is different in later centuries in Lower Myanmar, where large parts of the population were originally Mon speaking and shifted to Burmese, first as L2, then as L1. To find Mon substrate influence in the Burmese varieties spoken in this area is therefore to be expected, and it can indeed be shown in numerous examples, the sesquisyllabicity illustrated above being just one.

4. English elements

The most recent source of foreign elements in Burmese is English, which increasingly enters colloquial urban Burmese and spread from there to rural areas. Indigenous words are frequently replaced by English elements, which are integrated into the Burmese phonology to a greater or lesser extent, often with individual variation. These new Anglicisms in Burmese complement the established English lexicon introduced during the colonial time.

Like in Indian English, English loans in Burmese show some phonological peculiarities, especially the deaspiration of stops. Aspirated initials appear sometimes in more recent loans, especially when followed by *r*, as in *tʰi* 'lottery', from English *(lot)tery*. English initial *s* is frequently, but not invariably, rendered as aspirated *sʰ*. English *p* is generally rendered as unaspirated *p*, while *f* is represented by the aspirated *pʰ*, which tends to be pronounced increasingly as *f* in loanwords (see below). Tone assignment of English loans in Burmese is irregular and does not appear to follow any pattern.

Apart from lexical elements, English does not seem to influence the Burmese language in any significant way. The syntactic structure remains unchanged. One structural change that English has effected in Burmese is the addition of a contrast in the phonological system, namely the emerging contrast between p^h and *f*, the latter a sound originally unknown in Burmese. This contrast is seen in the minimal pair *fòun* 'phone' vs. *p^{h}òun* 'glory', at least for some speakers. Un-Burmese final consonants are introduced by popular expressions like *facebook*, which is prounced as *fésbuʔ* or *fébuʔ*, *p^{h}ébuʔ*, according to the English skills of the speaker. The pronunciations closer to the English original are spreading also to people who do not speak English otherwise, thus introducing new sound patterns into Burmese.

The following list gives some examples of English loans in Burmese.

(11) English loans in Burmese

Burmese	Gloss	English
kərɛʔ	'carat'	*carat*
kərèin	'crane'	*crane*
kəliʔ	'clip'	*clip*
kəlaʔ	'club, clutch'	*club, clutch*
kilogəran	'kilogram'	*kilogram*
kilomita	'kilometer'	*kilometer*
kupùn	'coupon'	*coupon*
kɛ̀kúlá	'calculus'	*calculus*
kɔ̀leiʔ	'college'	*college*
bido	'chest'	*bureau*
kɔpi	'copy'	*copy*
kɔp^{h}i	'coffee'	*coffee*
kəp^{h}ì	'tea shop'	*café*
kaʔ	'card'	*card*
kant^{h}əraiʔ	'contract'	*contract*
s^{h}aiʔkà	'trishaw'	*side-car*
s^{h}aʔkaʔ	'circus'	*circus*
t^{h}i	'lottery'	*lottery*
keiʔ.móun	'cake'	*cake+móun*
kodá.ʔúbəde	'law code'	*code+upadesa*

The last two items on this list show examples of English-Burmese compounds. In the case of *keiʔ-móun* the order of the components is as expected, namely modifier-modified, while in *kodá-ʔúpəde* 'law code' we would expect the reverse order.

English, short of influencing the grammatical structure of Burmese, occurs increasingly in code-mixing and code-shifting discourse. It remains to be seen whether English will make its way deeper into the language, affecting more than the vocabulary and, marginally, the sound system. Especially in the latter, more convergence can be expected through increased spread of English-language media, though for the majority of Burmese speakers English is not a language of spoken contact.

5. Other elements

Words and expressions from numerous other languages have entered Burmese throughout the centuries. Some of these elements can be identified, e.g. *paun-móun* 'bread' with the first part from Portuguese *pão*, *bəgan* 'plate' from Malay *pinngan* (ultimately from Persian), and *θənaʔ* 'gun' from Dutch *snaphaan* 'k.o. rifle' (maybe via Mon *sənat*), but much research in Burmese lexicography is still needed to get a full picture. In addition, a detailed study of Burmese inscriptions is necessary to better understand the historical development of Burmese syntax and eventually detect foreign elements in different periods of the language. A few cultural terms from Thai and Shan are found in Burmese, together with loans from Chinese, Arabic, Malay, and modern Indo-Aryan languages. No structural influence from these languages can be detected in Burmese at the present stage of research.

5.1 Thai and Shan

During the later periods of Burmese history, frequent wars with their neighbors to the East, the Thais of Siam, a number of Thai cultural concepts were taken over, sometimes with the Thai lexical items, such as *kənouʔ-pàn* 'rinceau, flower design'. Shan words relate mostly to food items and typical Shan culture, and apart from the omnipresent *kʰauʔ.sʰwὲ* 'noodles', are not part of the everyday vocabulary. Thai and Shan, unlike Mon, have had surprisingly little influence on the Burmese lexicon. Apart from a few cultural loans, not much Thai influence is seen today in Standard Burmese, though in areas near the Thai border local Burmese dialects show larger numbers of Thai borrowings, both as matter replication, such as *sanya* 'signal, phone reception' from Thai *sǎnyaː*, and pattern replication, as in *ko-θouʔ-pəwa* 'towel' literally 'body-wipe-cloth' for Thai *pʰâ-cʰét-tuə*, literally 'cloth-wipe-body'.

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(12) Thai and Shan loans

kʰɔ̰	'rice' (in compounds)	Shan	*kʰɛw*
kʰauʔ.sʰwɛ̀	'noodles'	Shan	*kʰɛw sɔ́y*
kʰɛ̰.lan	'glutinous rice in bamboo'	Shan? Thai?	*kʰɛw lǎm*
kənouʔ	'floral design'	Thai	*kənòk*
ŋàn	'duty, work'	Thai	*ŋaːn*
kʰənoun.douʔ	'stuffed omelet'	Thai+Burm	*kʰənǒm+tʰouʔ*

5.2 Hindi

Especially during the colonial period, when Burma was for some time a province of British India, large numbers of words entered Burmese from Hindi and other New Indo-Aryan languages. These words mostly belong to everyday life (e.g. *loundʑi*, *ʔèindʑi*). Some of these loans are ultimately from Persian, but probably found their way into Burmese through Indian languages. Unlike early Indian loans from Pali and Sanskrit, new Indo-Aryan words in Burmese show much less regularity in sound correspondence, suggesting various times and paths of entering the language. Some words seem to be borrowed as written forms, others from the spoken languages. This is not surprising, given the fact that Lower Myanmar, and especially the city of Yangon, was and still is home to large Indian communities speaking different Indian languages. The following list gives a few examples of Hindi loans in Burmese.

(13) Hindi loans

Burmese	Gloss	Hindi	Meaning
kətɕʰəla	'worthless	*kacarā*	'trash, junk'
kəliza	'inner parts'	*kalejā*	'heart'
kantɕʰa	'glass marble'	*kamce*	'glass marble'
gaiʔ	'yard'	*gaj*	'yard'
tɕabuʔ	'whip'	*cābut*	'lash'
tɕʰəlan	'bank receipt'	*calān*	'bank receipt'
dʑoun	'wheat'	*gehūṁ*	'wheat'
bəli	'mosque'	*pallī*	'parish'
paiʔsʰan	'money'	*paise*	'money'
məlain	'cream'	*malāī*	'cream'

5.3 Malay, Arabic, Chinese

A number of words can be assigned to Malay origin, mostly relating to plants and fruit. One fruit name, *maləka* 'guava' is taken from the Malay port town Melaka, which was apparently seen as origin of this foreign fruit. The same port town gave the name to another fruit in Thai, where *máʔláʔkɔ:* means 'papaya'. Words of Malay origin are given in (13).

(14) Malay loanwords

Burmese	Gloss	Malay	Meaning
kaləmɛʔ	'k.o. sandalwood'	*kelembak*	'rhubarb'
bəgan	'plate'	*pinggan*	'plate' (from Persian)
maləka	'guava'	*Melaka*	name of a port town
mìnguʔ	'mangosteen'	*manggustan*	'mangosteen'
dùyìn	'durian'	*durian*	'durian' ('the one with spikes')

Arabic loanwords, apart from terms relating to Islam, entered Burmese through merchants from the west, in many cases probably via Persian or a New Indo-Aryan language.

(15) Arabic loan words

Burmese	Gloss	Arabic	Meaning
kaʔpəli	'negro'	*kāfir*	'non-Muslim'
kəlaun	'pen'	*qalam*	'pen'
mouʔθoun	'monsoon'	*mawsim*	'season'
zəbyiʔ	'grapes'	*zabīb*	'raisin'
ʔəlan	'flag'	*ʕalam*	'flag, sign'
ʔəyɛʔ	'liquor'	*ʕaraq*	'sweet'

Chinese loans in Burmese are mainly found in the domains of food, gambling, and business, like *pʰɛ̀* 'playing card' from Chinese (Mandarin) *pái*, *kɔ.pyán* 'spring roll' from South Min *pɔpiǎ́*, and *pʰɔ.lan.pʰà* 'flatter', from South Min *hû-lāŋ-pʰa*, obviously an important term in business transactions.

6. Summary and conclusion

Throughout its history, Burmese was exposed to foreign influence, being the official language of a large empire, later state, with many different ethnicities

and languages. This led to Burmese appearing today as a language with a very mixed lexicon, while at the same time it retains most of its original grammatical structure. Some structural influence from foreign languages can be seen, especially Pali, but this is mostly restricted to the written genre and hardly affects the spoken language.

Overt external influence, as seen in lexical borrowings and calques, are only one side of the process of language contact, though. Language contact can also lead to the loss of a feature, or to the retention of an original feature in a language. These losses and retentions are much more difficult to find, though, and much more research is still needed in this field.

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