The Journal of Burma Studies

Volume 4
1999

Featuring Articles by:
Jack Daulton
Charlotte Reith
Donald Seekins
Julian Wheatley
San San Hnin Tun
The Journal of Burma Studies

President, Burma Studies Group
F.K. Lehman

Editor
Richard Coolen
Center for Burma Studies
Northern Illinois University

Production Editor
Edwin Zehner
Center for Southeast Asian Studies
Northern Illinois University

Copy Editors
Bob Vore
Bonnie Adamson
Steve Delchamps

Manuscript Formatting
Marin Hanson

Publications Assistant
Mishel Filisha

Subscriptions
(815) 753-1981

Editorial Office
(815) 753-5790

E-Mail
seap@niu.edu

Fax
(815) 753-1776

The Journal of Burma Studies is an annual scholarly journal jointly sponsored by the Burma Studies Group (Association for Asian Studies), The Center for Burma Studies (Northern Illinois University), and Northern Illinois University’s Center for Southeast Asian Studies.

Articles are refereed by professional peers. Send five copies of original scholarly manuscripts to The Journal of Burma Studies, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL 60115.

Subscriptions are $15 per volume delivered book rate. Members of the Burma Studies Group (membership $25 per year) receive the journal as part of their membership. For air mail add $5 per volume. Send check or money order in U.S. dollars drawn on a U.S. bank made out to “Northern Illinois University.” Visa and Mastercard orders also accepted.

For abstracts of forthcoming articles, visit the website at:
http://www.niu.edu/cseas/jbs.html

The Journal of Burma Studies will be abstracted or indexed in the following:
America: History and Life; Bibliography of Asian Studies; Historical Abstracts; PAIS; MLA International Bibliography

© 1999 Northern Illinois University,
Center for Southeast Asian Studies. ISSN # 1094-799X

Printed in Canada
ARTICLES

Donald M. Seekins

POTTERY IN THE CHIN HILLS
Charlotte Reith

LANGUAGES IN CONTACT: THE CASE OF ENGLISH AND BURMESE
Julian Wheatley, with San San Hnin Tun

SARIPUTTA AND MOGGALLANA IN THE GOLDEN LAND: THE RELICS OF THE BUDDHA’S CHIEF DISCIPLES AT THE KABA AYE PAGODA
Jack Daulton
LANGUAGES IN CONTACT
The Case of English and Burmese

Julian Wheatley, with San San Hnin Tun

This article deals with the nature and the effects of the long period of linguistic contact between Burmese and English. Part 1 deals with general issues of contact and borrowing; part 2 provides examples of English loanwords in Burmese, and considers the processes of phonological and semantic accommodation that they reflect.

Introduction: Throughout their history, Burmese speakers have been in contact with speakers of other languages, or writings in other languages, and have made elements of these languages their own. Though a variety of features can be appropriated, ranging from meanings or ‘concepts’ to genres, the chief commodity is words, so much of our discussion will be about loanwords. An examination of almost any page of a modern Burmese dictionary will reveal English loanwords. Those sufficiently institutionalized to appear in dictionaries tend to belong to technical registers in subjects such as medicine, administration, or business. Yet dictionaries do not tell the whole story, for not only are there loans like the one that appears in our title, kunteq ‘contact’, which do not have a great deal of currency and do not appear in dictionaries, there are also many that are

* Julian Wheatley studied linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, specializing in the languages and linguistics of Mainland Southeast Asia. He is currently a senior lecturer in the Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures at MIT, where he is coordinator of the program in Chinese language and culture. San San Hnin Tun is Senior Lecturer in Burmese and French at Cornell University. The authors would like to thank John Okell for reading an early version of this paper, correcting errors, and suggesting additional examples. They also thank the three anonymous readers whose meticulous reading of the final version not only improved the argument but caught errors of detail. Errors that remain are, of course, the authors’ responsibility.

The Journal of Burma Studies
Volume 4, pp. 61-99
© Copyright 1999 by the Center for Southeast Asian Studies,
Northern Illinois University
common in colloquial speech. A young waiter in a Rangoon teashop, for example, might shout an order to the cook as follows:

蒂 c’o baw wàn, baleq wàn!
tea sweet light one black one
One tea, light [on sugar], and one black [coffee]!

蒂: 'tea', ကြက်း baleq 'black [coffee]', and ဝ: wän 'one' do not appear in dictionaries, yet it would be hard to claim the words are somehow English and not Burmese in this context. All three have been naturalized to the sounds of Burmese, and蒂:蒂 rests quite comfortably at the head of a noun phrase with its own modifiers.

ဝ: wän is more marked: it lacks the measure word, or counter, that usually follows numerals in this context (as in တစ္ဗဝက် ဗက်ဝဗ ‘one cup’), but it does appear in the expected Burmese position after the noun.

The use in this environment of the loanword蒂 rather than the ordinary Burmese word for tea, ကြက်း lap’eq-yë, may be an affectation that sounds hip or international, or it may simply be that the short, sharp sound of蒂 carries better through the hubbub of a cafe. Whatever the reasons, Burmese youths in Rangoon (at least) seem to enjoy larding their speech with words of English origin, and certainly no other foreign language enjoys the same popularity. If such words do not deserve a place in the dictionary, it is not because they are derived from English but rather because dictionaries are

---

'Most Burmese examples will be cited in both script and transcription. The transcription is, with some minor changes, that employed in Okell’s recently published series of textbooks (of which Okell 1994 in the reference list is one part). The following notes will assist readers unfamiliar with Okell’s new system: ဗ and ဗ = affricates (like the initials of English ‘char’, ‘jar’); ဗ and ဗ = aspirated consonants; ၬ, ၬ, etc. = voiceless ၬ, ၬ, etc.; ဗ = final glottal stop [ʔ]; ဗ, ဗ, and ဗ = open versus close mid vowels (comparable to the different vowels of English ‘let’ versus ‘late’ and ‘law’ versus ‘low’, respectively). As regards tones, the low is unmarked, the high is marked with a grave accent (’), and the creaky with an acute (‘). The vowel of unstressed (and untoned) syllables is written အ rather than the ဗ of Okell’s system. In general, transcriptions (representing pronunciation) are underlined while transliterations (representing spelling) are in italics.

62 The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
repositories for institutionalized language—often written language—while these words belong to a conversational register whose usage is in flux.

In this paper, we will be discussing various types of loanwords in Burmese as well as some other features deriving from contact with English. This is not intended to be a comprehensive study; in fact, field work in Burmese communities could provide much better data than we have cited in some cases—semantic shifts, for example. One reason for presenting data of this type is to draw readers' attention to topics that might otherwise be relegated to the peripheries of language study.

Much of our data on institutionalized English loanwords in Burmese is drawn from a recently published Burmese-to-Chinese dictionary, the ဗုဒ္ဓဟူး-ဗာဗာနာ မူဆောင်-သောင် အထောင် (BCD, hereafter). With 60,000 entries, it is probably the largest of all Burmese-to-foreign language dictionaries, and it seems more generous than others in the number of loanwords included.

Part I. BACKGROUND

1. Pali and Mon contact
2. Contact with English
3. Loan versus neologism
4. Burmese neologisms
5. Semantic accommodations

§1. Pali and Mon contact. Language contact may take many forms. It may take place directly through speech or in a displaced manner, as through written texts (and, nowadays, tape-recordings and films). It may be localized—in ports, urban centers, and universities—or widespread, as in conjunction with the spread of religious or secular

---

2 Some very interesting illustrations of recent English influence in both colloquial and literary contexts can be found in an article that I discovered too late to incorporate in this paper, but which should be cited not only for its examples but also for some pertinent references: Denise Bernot, “Evolution of Contemporary Burmese Language: Some Features,” in Uta Gartner and Jens Lorenz, eds., Tradition and Modernity in Myanmar (Berliner Asien-Afrika-Studien, 3/2), Münster, Hamburg: Lit, 1994.

3 The full citation can be found in the list of references under the authorship of the 'Burmese Teaching and Research Section'.

The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4  63
institutions. It may be intimate, involving intermarriage and extensive bilingualism, or more remote, involving business and political institutions. Under any of these circumstances, contact may leave traces, if only a few words of material or natural culture. But when a language comes into contact with another of high cultural prestige, such as Pali (the language of the Theravada scriptures) or Sanskrit, the results may be more profound. Dr. Hla Pe, in his article on Pali loanwords in Burmese (1960), listed around 500 examples—and that list was not intended to be, nor is it, exhaustive.

Pali loans have an advantage over those of other languages, for not only have they had, and do they continue to have, the sanction of government, academic, and religious institutions, but the Burmese script, which derives from an East Indian prototype by way of Mon, has preserved the means for reproducing the original spelling of Pali words. Furthermore, Pali words, though always polysyllabic in contrast to the predominantly monosyllabic native Burmese roots, are phonotactically similar to Burmese. Neither language allows initial clusters, such as br-, str-, or kl-, and both have very limited repertoires of final consonants. So Pali kamma ‘deed; karma’ becomes Burmese ကမ်း; Pali kicca ‘duty’ becomes Burmese ကြား; Pali keiras ‘business’; and Pali manigala ‘auspicious’ becomes Burmese မိန့်း. Occasionally, two versions of a Pali word coexist in the language, one close to the original and occurring in relatively specialized contexts, the other truncated and having a more mundane meaning. Thus, ဝိသေ 'affection' and ဓာတ် 'friend' (usually in a compound) are doublets that derive from Pali metta 'kindness'; and ဗား 'social graces' and လေး 'show of hospitality' both derive (with different degrees of truncation) from a compound of the Pali roots လွက် 'the world' and ဗား 'responsibility'.

Pali and Sanskrit loanwords form a specialized tier in the lexicon of Burmese, much like Greek and Latin roots in English. And like English neologisms, those in Burmese can be formed from material that matches that of the classical language, or from roots that are already incorporated in Burmese. For example, the word for

---

4 For an overview of the script, see Wheatley 1995; for a more detailed view, see Okell 1994.
‘spaceship’, အကွန်း ဗျူဟား akhá-yín, is formed, quite likely on the model of the English compound, from ဗျူဟား akhá ‘space’, corresponding directly to Pali akāsa ‘sky; heavens’, and ဗျူဟား ‘vehicle’, an early borrowing from the Pali root yāna ‘vehicle’.

Indic loanwords combine freely with (etymologically) native material to form new compounds. For example, အကွန်း yin combines with the Burmese roots လော le ‘wind’ and ကျွဲ pyan ‘fly’ to form အကွန်းဗျူဟား le-yín-byan ‘airplane’; the English derivative jet ‘jet’ can then be added to form ဗျူဟားဗျူဟား le-yín-byan ‘jet plane’.

ဗျူဟား jo-dú ‘artificial satellite’ (spelled grruhtu) makes use of two words, both of which have a long history in the language. The first derives from Sanskrit grāha ‘planet’ (the vowel distortion is probably due to transmission through Mon); the second is a common Burmese root meaning ‘be similar’.

As Hla Pe (1960:92) notes, the regularity of correspondence between Pali and Burmese spelling supports what must certainly have been the case: that the medium of transmission of Pali was written texts, not speech. The case of Mon, however, is different. Mon, a language in the Mon-Khmer family (and now spoken in the far southeast of Burma) served as a language of high culture for a considerable part of Burmese history. Mon texts may have been a source of Indian material for Burmese (as the case of grruhtu in the last paragraph suggests), but Mon loanwords found in Burmese are more likely to have been transmitted by speech. Historians tell us that Mon and Burmese speakers (along with others) coexisted in the same political and social sphere for hundreds of years, and in fact they continue to do so in the region around Moulmein. Burmese and Mon intermarried, and bilingualism must have been common.

---

5The internal structure of compounds cited in this paper is marked by a system of hyphens, with ‘-’ separating elements of a first order constituent, ‘=” separating those of a second order constituent, and so on. An example from English would be: ‘black market rate’ whose first order constituents are ‘black and market’ and whose second order constituents are ‘black market and rate’. Hence, ‘black-market-rate’.

6With internal voicing of p to b as a result of ‘close’ syllable juncture; see §9.

7Burmese transliterations (as opposed to transcriptions which follow Okell) are given in the Duroiselle system, which, where possible, assigns Indian values to the script. See J. Okell, A Guide to the Romanization of Burmese, James G. Forlong Fund Vol. 27 (London: Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland, 1971).
Though the evidence may be harder to unearth—in part because
Mon loanwords do not stand out the way polysyllabic Pali loans
do—such contact is, at least, the source of a number of loanwords
having to do with the natural and man-made environment (see Luce
1950, esp. pp. 3-4; Hla Pe 1967; and Tin Htway 1975).

§2. Contact with English: English, first as the language of a colonial
power and later as the language of technology, business, and, even
more significantly, of a world-wide popular culture, has held a
position entirely different from that of other languages in contact
with Burmese. Like Pali, but unlike Mon, it has been studied
formally as a second language, and like Pali, its literature has been
translated into Burmese. It has not commanded the aesthetic and
cultural prestige of the Indian languages, but as a functional
language of advancement it has contributed to Burmese a large
lexicon of technical terms as well as many words related to popular,
secular culture.

The sociolinguistic relationship between English and Burmese
prior to 1947 must have been complex and would make an
interesting study (see Allott 1985). English was embraced by some
and stigmatized by others. The author and playwright Saya Lun (U
Lun), who wrote under the name of Maung Hmaing (after the
philandering protagonist of one of the first novels to be written in
Burmese, U Kyi's The Roselle Leaf Seller) rued the Rangoon he found
around the turn of the century, where residents were adopting
Christian names and affecting English manners, and where even the
rickshaw pullers refused to speak Burmese (Zeya Maung 1974:14).
Saya Lun spent his life skewering such pretensions.

Apparently, an astounding number of words of English origin
were being incorporated into the speech of the time, for
commentators expressed the fear that the Burmese language was in
danger of being 'swallowed up'. George Orwell, in
his novel Burmese Days (1967:10), writes of his character U Po Kyin
that he talked “in the base jargon of the Government offices—a
patchwork of Burmese verbs and English abstract phrases.” That
might have been typical of the speech of administrators, but it is
hard to imagine that the language of stories told by, say, workers in
the dyeing factories of Amarapura would have shown any effects.

\footnote{John Okell once provided me with a tape-recording of just such a story.}

66 The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
from contact with English, then or now. To be sure, there would have been other reasons for Saya Lun to have been concerned, for foreign influences in the colonial setting suppressed developments within Burmese that would have allowed the language to adapt more quickly to the social changes then taking place.

After independence was restored in 1947, Burmese resumed its position as the language of administration, and knowledge of English declined (Allott 1985:141-143), a trend that became accelerated after the military coup in the early 1960s. However, there was always some access to English, if only through radio broadcasts and clandestinely circulated copies of popular magazines. Access must have grown in the 1980s as tourist traffic increased and television and VCRs made their appearance. Certainly, by the mid-80s, young people in Rangoon were well-informed about pop songs, Hollywood scandals, and American politics.

§3. Loan versus neologism. The second article of the declaration of goals of the ‘All Burma Students’ Democratic Front’ (circa 1990) reads:

\[\text{dimokaresi lú=ak’wín-ayè yá-shí yè}\]

democracy and human rights get thing

Achieving democracy and human rights.

The neologism \[\text{lú=ak’wín-ayè ‘human-rights’,}\] as well as the loanword \[\text{dimokaresi,}\] are modeled on the English terms. But the first is a neologism that has been constructed from Burmese material, while the second is a loanword adopted from English, though presumably it too could have been constructed from Burmese roots along the lines of the Chinese word for democracy, 民主 \[\text{mín zhū ‘people+master’}.\] It is interesting to contrast the two options: the first being that a loan comes ready-made in both phonological substance and meaning, and the second being that a neologism must be intentionally created. The English compound ‘human rights’ may in fact have served to suggest a Burmese compound more readily than the simple ‘democracy’.

which he had recorded himself during a stay in Amarapura.

*The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4*  67
Neologisms and loanwords may also differ in their connotations. Thus, a name for the chemical compound known in English as ‘alcohol’ can be coined on the basis of the ordinary word အိုးပိုး အိုး ‘spirits; liquor’ (originally from Persian အိုး), and one does in fact exist: အိုးပိုး အိုး-ပိုး ‘spirits-fly’, although this term is also associated with the commercial product called ‘rubbing alcohol’, or ‘spirits’ (အိုးပိုး အိုး-ပိုး), as well as with ‘liquor’. So the English loan အိုး-ပိုး စား၍ စား စား ‘chilokhaw’ is retained for the scientific sense.

Ultimately, affective factors, both positive and negative, probably play a large role in the choice between loan and neologism. A foreign word may sound hip or modern to the young, but nationalism and the perception that English (unlike Pali) is the vehicle of a distant and disruptive culture have resulted in government prohibitions against the use of English derivatives in print. Contrary factors such as these may lead to the appearance of two versions of a word, one a loan and one a native neologism, the latter of which may be an official creation used more in print than in speech. This is the case with ‘television’, where the elegant periphrasis ဖူး စား စား ‘yous-myin-than-ça ‘image-see-sound-hear’ loses out in speech to the direct borrowing စား ‘tibi’ (or စား). Since neologisms based on Burmese roots receive official sanction, there is probably a tendency for words adopted as loans to be re-formed, in time, with native material. Forbes (1967:57) gives a number of examples of such replacement, such as နိုးပိုး နိုးပိုး ဗိုလ် ‘hohlikawpata’ being replaced by ဗိုလ် ‘yabag-yin’ (that is, Hindi ‘reel’ plus Burmese ‘vehicle’), and ဗိုလ် ‘yunisasati’ being replaced by ဗိုလ် ‘tegkatho’ (from Pali takkatisa, the name of the ancient university town in the Punjab).10

4. Burmese neologisms. It is not surprising that composition remains a favorite means of adding words to the lexical stock of Burmese. The following are all fairly recent neologisms, composed solely of Tibeto-Burman roots:

---

*Also pronounced အိုး-ပိုး စား စား စား, without the creaky tone.

*45 Tin Htway (1975) also notes the opposite tendency: အိုး စား စား စား ‘yediyo has replaced the earlier စား ‘athan-p’an=seq ‘sounds-catch=machine’.

68 The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
kangaroo
thà-baìq=kaun ‘child-hug=animal’
shower (bath) လမ်းခံ
ve-bàn ‘water-flower/spray’
revolution (govt.) စိန့်ဖျင်ကြည်မှု
taw-hlan=yè ‘be proper-overturn=affair’
loanword မြင်ရှူး အသားစုံ
mwe-zà=zagalùn ‘adopt=word’

skyscraper နော်ဆိုက်ကျောင်
mò-t’ò=taiqta ‘sky-thrust=building’
hula hoop ဗားဗားဖြင်ပါး
p’in-lein=kwìn ‘buttock-twist=hoop’

Together with the last example above, Tin Htway cites several others that “reflect Burmese attitudes to some Western culture” (1975:53): ဖျင်ဖျင်ချင်မှု seicdežà-baj ‘mental illness-art’; abstract art’ (Pali cittajà ‘mental’); and the exuberant အောင်လော်ကျက်အောင် ayû=c’h-bàn=— အက် ‘lunatic= excrement-sprinkle (itself a compound meaning ‘haphazard’)=—dance; rock and roll’.

‘Skyscraper’ is such as picturesque metaphor that it often appears in other languages as a ‘loan translation’ in which the elements are translated from the donor language. The classic example is French gratte ciel ‘scrapes-sky’, based on English ‘skyscraper’. Chinese has created a similar compound: 戰天樓 mó-tiàn=lóu ‘rub-sky=building’. The meaning of Burmese တာ, however, has to do with ‘thrusting’ rather than ‘scraping’, so the Burmese compound is not a perfect calque, and, indeed, even when the elements are a perfect match, one cannot completely rule out the possibility of independent creation. The best candidates for

---

1Meanings for the constituents of compounds are given only to the relevant level, thus, for mwe-zà, whose parts mean, literally, ‘be born’ and ‘eat’, only ‘adopt’ is given, but the equals sign remains to indicate that there is a compound within the compound.

2The semi-colon here and below is used to separate literal glosses from the meaning of the whole.
structural loans are probably technical terms with culturally distant elements. The following seem to qualify:

- **Icebox**
  - လက် လေးကြညင်း
  - *ye-gēh-thiēq-ta* ‘ice=box’

- **Light year**
  - အလင်းပေါင်း
  - *ghlin-hniq* ‘light-year’

- **Glove compartment**
  - ကြားချက်ပြောင်းသွားခြင်း
  - *leq-eiēq=t'ēh=gān* ‘glove=put=—room’ (automobile)

- **Windshield**
  - အလင်းပေါင်း
  - *le-ka=hman* ‘wind-shield=glass’

- **Scissors jack**
  - သြားစက်မှု
  - *kaq-ci=jaiq* ‘scissors=jack’

- **Mine-sweeper**
  - ရောဂါဝင်
  - *māin-shin* ‘mine-sweep’

Forbes (1967:61) provides some other examples:

- **Airport**
  - အလင်းပေါင်း
  - *le-zeiēq* ‘air-port’

- **Cold war**
  - သြားစက်မှု
  - *siq-e* ‘war-cold’

In the first of these, as Forbes notes, the Burmese word *siq-eiēq* has undergone the same shift of meaning as the English word ‘port’, from ‘sea’ to ‘air’ port. Forbes also notes the convergence of the English word for ‘muscle’, from the Latin *mūsculus* ‘little mouse’ and the Burmese *cweq-thā* ‘mouse-flesh’.

§5. **Semantic accommodations.** The compounds cited in the previous section involve some degree of extension of native material to new concepts. But as we noted earlier, words carry a history in their connotations, and the extension of Burmese words to comprehend foreign concepts must involve some refitting.

Take the case of *pweh*, originally a ‘feast’ or ‘festival’, particularly a religious festival: *pweh* 
- *shin-pyū=pweh* ‘novice-
make=pwêh; initiation ceremony’; ဗမာ  naq-pwêh ‘spirit festival’; and ဗမာ  te-menêh-bwêh ‘merit making festival, at which sticky rice mixed with coconut and other ingredients is eaten’. To these are now added the secular ဗမာ  s’aqqaq-pwêh ‘circus-pwêh’ (based on the English loanword); ဗမာ  sa-mê-bwêh ‘letter-ask=pwêh; examination’; ဗမာ  s’we-nwê-bwêh ‘discuss=pwêh; seminar’; and ဗမာ  pya-bwêh ‘show-pwêh; exhibition’.

Similarly, the word ဗမာ  daq, derived from Pali dham ‘basic element; property’, has a long history in Burmese terms deriving from the Indian philosophical and medical tradition: ဗမာ  daq-taw ‘daq-royal; Buddha relics’; and the older ဗမာ  daq c’ouq ‘daq constrict; be constipated’, now more commonly expressed as ဗမာ  win c’ouq ‘belly constrict’. Daq was extended to cover ‘basic elements’ of power and energy, as in ဗမာ  daq-kêh ‘daq-hard; battery’, ဗမာ  daq-hu ‘daq-bottle; thermos’, ဗမာ  daq-hle ‘daq-stairs; elevator, lift’, ဗမာ  daq-pou ‘daq-picture; photograph’, and ဗမာ  daq-sî ‘daq-oil; gasoline’.

The extension of the word ဗမာ  wuq-t’u, a loan from Pali (Pali: vañça ‘story; narrative’) that originally applied mostly to sacred stories of the Buddha, to denote the newly introduced secular form of the novel did not save that genre from the disdain of those who thought it too preoccupied with worldly matters. Or did the use of the name undermine the new genre by creating expectations of the same didactic tone of its predecessors? Could it be that film stars in Burma are also held to higher standards because the terms ဗမာ  youg-shin=bin-dha ‘film=prince’ and ဗမာ  youg-shin=bin-dhami ‘film=princess’ incorporate the worcs for ‘prince’ and ‘princess,’ respectively?

---

8No hyphen is used here because this example is not a compound but a combination of noun and verb.
9See Thein Han 1973:18-19.
Part II. LOANWORDS:

6. Semantic categories of loans
7. The semantic field of car parts
8. Semantic shifts
9. Phonological adjustments
10. Verbs and intrusions

§6. Semantic categories of loanwords. The BCD contains over a thousand English loanwords, the majority of which are technical terms associated with special registers of educated speech and scientific writing. Those with more currency in speech include terms for the artifacts and institutions of Western culture—for clothing and food, administration and politics, education and business, music and sports, and religion and the arts. The examples listed below show the range of these loanwords and reveal some of the features of Western culture that have been salient to the Burmese.¹⁵

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mile</td>
<td>မိမိးမေ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volt</td>
<td>အင်္ဂ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gallon</td>
<td>ကြာချ်</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sports</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>billiards</td>
<td>လိုက်ရို</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>basketball</td>
<td>ဘရိုးကျော်လိုက်</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>free kick</td>
<td>ကြာရင်</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>final (match)</td>
<td>မျဉ်းစေ့း</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sure tip</td>
<td>ကြာရင်းသတ်</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹⁵Most of these examples are culled from the BCD. No attempt has been made at this point to find out how current they are in the spoken language. It is likely that for some, synonymous neologisms composed of Burmese material also exist. One example from technical language: along with p’alinhwi, one finds အပါသဲမေ၀ ‘energy-hold=wheel’.

72 The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
Education

diploma  ငိုင်ပွဲ  dipaloma
highschool  အထွေထွေကို  haiqsekiu

Household

stereo  စူးသူဖ်  satiriyo
cushion  ဆောင်းတို့  kushin
carbolic (soap)  ကျော်လွ်င်ဖ်  kabawleiq

Music and Art

museum  အနောက်  myuziyam
banjo  ပန်း  binjo
band  ပန်း  bin

Technology

bulldozer  ဘုတ်စ  budoza
flywheel  ပန်းလှပ  p'elainhiw
machine gun  ပန်းလှပ  mashingan

Politics and Administration

socialist  ပါးပုလှိုင်  s'oshehliq
bonus  ပါယာ  bonaq
municipal  ပါးပုနီ  myunisipeh
budget  ပါ  bagieq
passport  ပါ  paqsepo
police  ပါ  paleiq
visa  ပါ  biza
postman  ပါ  pospelin
manager  ပါ  manneja
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Food and Drink</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>margarine</td>
<td>မိုးင်းနား</td>
<td>majein</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer</td>
<td>ဝါးအုံ</td>
<td>biya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rhubarb</td>
<td>ရေးဝါပါ၀</td>
<td>rubaq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>sherry (wine)</td>
<td>ရောင်ပါး</td>
<td>shariwain</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clothing</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>bodice</td>
<td>သီးဝါကြား</td>
<td>bawli</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bikini</td>
<td>ပူကိုနွေး</td>
<td>bikini</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brassiere</td>
<td>ဝါးဒါသာစားဗား</td>
<td>berasiya</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religion</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>mission</td>
<td>မိုးင်းလုပ်</td>
<td>miqshin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>protestant</td>
<td>ပူးဗားကြားနားဗားဗား</td>
<td>paroteqsatin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christian</td>
<td>အိမ်စိအိမ်စိဗလုပ်</td>
<td>k'eriqyan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Other</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer</td>
<td>လူတိုင်းမိုးဗားဗားလုပ်</td>
<td>bawlantiya</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>picnic</td>
<td>ပူးဗားကြားဗား</td>
<td>pyiqleniq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>modern</td>
<td>မိုးဗားဗား</td>
<td>mawdan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>turf club</td>
<td>သီးဝါနားဗားဗား</td>
<td>taqkaqaq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>millionaire</td>
<td>မိုးဗားဗား</td>
<td>milyanna</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The words listed above have remained ‘free forms’ after having been borrowed, but this is not usually the case: once adapted, loanwords generally behave like the rest of the lexical stock and participate freely in compounding. One particularly salient pattern of compounding makes use of a generic or ‘classifying’ word as base and a variable word as a specifier. Some examples are shown below. In the first two sets, both specifier and generic are in almost all cases loanwords (ja of ja-ga is not); in the other sets, loans and non-loans are mixed together.

74  The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
Based on kà ‘vehicle’

mawtaw-kà  ‘motorcar’; car
saiq-kà  ‘side-car’; trishaw (3 wheeled rickshaw)
lain-kà  ‘line-car’; bus (i.e., follows a route, or ‘line’)  
baq-sakà  ‘bus-car’; bus
t’araq-kà  ‘truck-car’; truck
law-ri=kà  ‘lorry=car’; lorry
jig-kà  ‘jeep-car’; jeep
jà-gà  ‘between-car’; private passenger trucks

Based on keiq ‘cake’

p’insi-keiq  ‘fancy-cake’
palèin-keiq  ‘plain-cake’; sponge
c’awkaleq-keiq  ‘chocolate-cake’
p’aru-keiq  ‘fruit-cake’
keiq-móun=myò-zou  ‘cake-snack=kinds’;  
generic for ‘pastries’

Based on bòun ‘bomb’

mài-bòun  ‘mine-bomb’; mine
tài-bòun  ‘time-bomb’
napàn-bòun  ‘napalm-bomb’
anú-myu=bòun  ‘atomic=bomb’
thenaq-pyi=q=bòun  ‘gun-throw=bomb’; grenade
as’eiq-bòun  ‘poison-bomb’
as’eiq=pò-hmwa=—bòun  ‘poison=insects=—bomb’; germ bomb
mye=ye=yo=—bòun  ‘tear=leak=—
bomb’; tear-gas bomb
Based on ʾinji ‘upper garment’, a Burmese ‘base’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Teddy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᶷိုင် ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>shaq=ʾinji</td>
<td>‘shirt-garment’; shirt</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>ye-gu=ʾinji</td>
<td>‘water-cross=garment’; swimsuit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>kouq-ʾinji</td>
<td>‘coat-garment’; coat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷေင်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>taw-poun=ʾinji</td>
<td>‘brick building[?]-form=garment’; Burmese men’s jacket</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>bema-ʾinji</td>
<td>‘Burmese-garment’; women’s blouse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Also: ဗိုင်း ညီ ညီ ᶷုဝောင် ခေါ်  haweiy-an-šaq  ‘Hawaiian-shirt’)

Based on p’anaq ‘shoe’ (also a Burmese base)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Teddy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>shu-p’anaq</td>
<td>‘shoe-shoes’; light shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>buq-p’anaq</td>
<td>‘boot-shoes’; street shoes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>k’oun-p’anaq</td>
<td>‘bench-shoes’; clogs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>hnyaq-p’anaq</td>
<td>‘squeeze-shoes’; slippers, flip-flops</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>dauq-p’anaq</td>
<td>‘prop-shoes’; high heels</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Also: ဗိုင်း ညီ ညီ  p’an-shù  ‘pump-shoe’; pumps;
and ဗိုင်း ညီ ညီ  ledi-shù  lady-shoe)

Names of flora and fauna, which generally can stand alone in English, usually appear with a ‘generic’ base in Burmese, as, for example, -pin for plants (a bound-form), hngeq for birds, and ngà for fish:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Teddy</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>p’yuštša-bin</td>
<td>‘fuschia-plant; fuschia’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ᶷုန်း ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>p’alami-ngo-hngeq</td>
<td>‘flamingo-bird; flamingo’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>paq-ngà</td>
<td>‘pike-fish; pike’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>စီး ညီ ညီ</td>
<td>wel-nà</td>
<td>‘whale-fish,’16 whale</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

16Still a ‘fish’ in most folk-classifications; compare German ‘Wallfische’.

76  The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
Some additional examples are as follows:

\[\text{beh-win} \quad \text{‘left-wing; (position in football)’}\]

\[\text{jegz=tl-loun} \quad \text{‘jazz=tune; jazz’}\]

\[\text{wainya-/waya-jō} \quad \text{‘wire-thread; wire’}\]

\[\text{baqıq-thein} \quad \text{‘buzzard-hawk; buzzard’}\]

\[\text{c’eq=leq-hmaq} \quad \text{‘check=ticket; check’}\]

§7. The semantic field of car parts. In this section, we survey the range of loans in one technical semantic field: automobile parts. To provide a change from the monotony of lists, as many as possible of these terms are matched to the illustrations of figure 1. The data are based partly on interviews carried out some years ago with a small number of native speakers.\(^{17}\)

A car maintenance manual written by ‘Uichānu Hirā’ui and Úi: Kru̍t Cuk provides (Burmese) neologisms for some of the loanwords we cite (see illustration); these may or may not be gaining currency in spoken language. Some examples are \[\text{ye-thouq=tan} \quad \text{‘water-wipe=rod’ for ‘wipers’, ēq’ásun-k’an} \quad \text{‘strike-receive’ for ‘bumper’, le-t’ouq=paq-ion} \quad \text{‘air-take out=pipe’ for ‘exhaust’, le-t’ein \quad \text{‘air-control’ for ‘choke’, and leq-s’wēh=bareiq ‘hand-pull-brake; for ‘handbrake’. These may be longer than most loans, but they certainly reveal much about the function of the car parts.}\]

§8. Semantic shifts. Earlier (§5), we discussed both the process of semantic adjustment that occurs when (native) words are extended to cover new (foreign) concepts and the possibility that older usage may cause some resistance to the new. With loanwords, the process of semantic accommodation is different, for a loanword may not bring with it the same range of meaning and the conceptual structure it has in its original language. To cite a very mundane example, the

\(^{17}\)Usage, spelling, and pronunciation will vary, but the forms cited give a sense of the range and type of the terms. In order to save space, loanwords and loan elements given in the illustration are underlined and, when necessary, glossed in parentheses; neologisms are provided with a word-forward gloss only.
Fig. 1. Loanwords and neologisms for car parts.
loanword စတိန်း ဓေက်တော ‘duster’ seems to refer only to a ‘chalk duster’ for cleaning blackboards, not to a ‘house duster’, which is ကျား-ဟောင်း  ‘chicken-feather; feather duster’.

Loanwords that refer to items of foreign culture may continue to designate those items, setting them off in contrast to the local. For example, ‘soup’ is borrowed as စ်ာ  and appears in the compound စ်ာ-ပေါ်  ‘soup-boil’. But it refers specifically to Western-style soups. Burmese ‘soup’, which is not a separate course and serves a different function in the meal, is referred to as စစ်ဖုရား ဟင်ခြေ, literally, ‘curry-sweet’ (‘sweet’ more in the sense of ‘rich’, referring to the broth in which the main dishes have been cooked).

Imported items may also take their particular meaning from the new culture. For example, the word ‘boot’ has been borrowed into Burmese as ပျ်  and appears in the compound ပျ်-ပန်း  ‘boot-shoe’ cited earlier; however, since heavy Texan-style boots are impractical in most parts of Burma, ပျ် has come to denote almost any kind of ‘hard shoes’. ‘Shoe’ has also been borrowed and appears in စိုး-ပန်း, but this composite word seems to designate the ‘light shoes’ (as opposed to heavy, hard shoes) of the kind commonly worn in Burma. To cite a second example, ဝံး  ‘workshop’ refers to a ‘garage’ in the sense of ‘repair shop’. A house garage is ကား-သယ်  ‘car-godown’ (godown ultimately from Hindi). Then again, စား  ‘tution’ means ‘private classes’ typically given in the evenings to supplement school work, while စား-ချ  is ‘to give’ such classes and စား-ချ  is ‘to take’ them. A ‘pop or rock concert’ is စတာ  ‘stage show’, and a ‘fancy restaurant’ of the sort found in most good hotels is ဟောင်း-ဟိုး  ‘hotel/hawteh’.

---

18 One dictionary (not the BCD) gives ပိုး-ဗော်  ‘dust-sweep=towel’ as an additional form for cloth ‘dusters’.
19 In Chinese, the opposite shift has taken place: large, tourist hotels are called ‘grand restaurants’ ဟောင်း-တော  ‘grand food-shop’, while the word that might have been extended to include ‘tourist hotels’, စိုး-ဗော် ‘travel-tavern’, is applied to smaller, local inns and rooming houses.
Other examples:

- bursement: *baq-giya* ‘back-gear; reverse’
- bursement: *baw-giya* ‘ball-gear; gear on the floor’
- vertisement: *satiyar* ‘steering; steering wheel’
- vertisement: *sainbouq* ‘sign-board’, typically, a name plate in front of an office (also: ‘street signs’ and ‘billboards’)
- vertisement: *sapehy* ‘spare; bus conductor’

Innovative combinations of loan and native material also appear:

- BrowserRouter: *mi-pwain* ‘light-point; traffic light’
- BrowserRouter: *lain-caq* ‘line-supervise; ticket inspector (on a bus)’
- BrowserRouter: *war/yàn-byè* ‘warrant-flee; convict’

The following examples combine an English loan noun with a Burmese verb (see §10 on verbs and loanwords):

- BrowserRouter: *pati cá* ‘party fall; get along, be sociable’
- BrowserRouter: *peqshin cá* ‘fashion fall; be fashionable’
- BrowserRouter: *peqshin louq* ‘fashion do; match’
- BrowserRouter: *weiq sháw* ‘weight reduce; urinate’
- BrowserRouter: *awdá laiq* ‘orders follow; to be hired out (said of musicians, caterers etc.); or ‘to get a pick up’ (said of a prostitute?)
- BrowserRouter: *shò t’ouq* ‘show produce; dress up’

§9. Phonological adjustments. Almost all the English loanwords cited so far are fully adapted to the Burmese sound system. In fact, complete assimilation may be a condition for treating a word as a loan rather than as a foreign ‘intrusion’ (see §10 below). In this

*The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4*  81
section, we will examine the way in which English words are represented in Burmese.

**Initial consonants:** Figure 2 aligns the consonant systems of Burmese (B) and English (E). To make the comparison easier, English sound values have been written with the same symbols that we have been using all along for Burmese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstruents</th>
<th>Resonants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B: p t c k</td>
<td>w l y r h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E:</td>
<td>w l y r h</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| B: p' t' c' k' | hw hl |
| E: p t c k    |      |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nasals</th>
<th>fricatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B: m n ny ng</td>
<td>th s sh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E: m n</td>
<td>f th s sh</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| B: hm hn hny hng | s' |
| E:              |    |

| B: dh z | dh z (zh) |
| E:      |           |

The chart shows that in most cases there is available in Burmese a sound that corresponds closely to the English; the exceptions are the fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, which are found only in English. Words with these sounds are usually borrowed as p’ and b, respectively, spelled in the normal way as /w/, /hp/-, and /b/-, although Burmese speakers familiar with English may pronounce them /ʃ/ and /ʒ/, just as English speakers affect a foreign pronunciation of names such as ‘Bach’ or ‘Borges’. In orthography, the sounds /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are represented through a special convention that employs the letters /g/ /hp/- and /g/bw/- in otherwise rare combinations.
free kick p’ərikiq
February p’ép’awwari
form p’añ
Typhus taiq’aq
Typhoid taiqfaiq

Y
Driver darainba
tivi
bito
Convent kunbín
(-school) (-càun)

The letter transliterated r in Burmese is pronounced y in most words, which is why the official foreign spelling of Rangoon, pronounced yan-goun, has changed to Yangon. However, the sound has long appeared in loanwords from Pali, as in စမာရုပ် (the former capital city) and တန်ကားတင်း (the way was prepared for English loanwords such as စတေး စတိုင် (also စတခင် စတခင်) ‘rectangle’ and ၏ိုး ၏ိုး ၏ိုး ၏ိုး  ‘rubber’.

Vowels: Figure 3 shows the Burmese vowels.

Figure 3. Burmese Vowels

As figure 3 indicates, Burmese vowel values vary according to whether the syllable is or is not nasalized or checked (in orthographic terms, ‘closed’ or ‘open’). Thus, ai and au occur only in orthographically closed syllables: laiq, lain; lauq, laun, etc. Within
the range of its syllable types, Burmese can accommodate most English vowel sounds, but this means that the vowel of English 'buy', for example, has to be represented either by an 'open' syllable with a quite different vowel, such as ɓa, or by a 'closed' syllable with a similar vowel but with additional suprasegmental features such as ɓaiq or ɓain. Our examples all follow the latter course:

The vowel of ‘buy’ > ɓain

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>virus</td>
<td>ɓainraq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>licence</td>
<td>lainsin</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>rye (grain)</td>
<td>ɣain (-zəɓə)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bowtie</td>
<td>ɓotain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For the vowel of ‘boy’, there is no close Burmese correspondence in either open or closed syllables. Burmese therefore naturalizes it as - wain or -waɪq.

The vowel of ‘boy’ > -wain, -waɪq

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Word</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>convoy</td>
<td>kunbwain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>point</td>
<td>pwain</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>thyroid</td>
<td>thaiqwaɪq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boycott</td>
<td>bwàṅkaʊq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boiler</td>
<td>bwainlə</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>boy-scout</td>
<td>ɓwanʃəkauq</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Final consonants: Burmese permits only the final consonants that we transcribe -q and -ŋ. The actual phonetic values of these consonants vary according to the following sounds, but in citation form, -q is realized simply as a glottal check (ʔ), and -ŋ only as nasalization on the preceding vowel. The writing system, on the other hand, preserves evidence of a richer system of finals: syllables pronounced with final -q can be spelled with letters -p, -t, -c, or -k; similarly, those pronounced with final -ŋ may be spelled with letters -m, -n, -ny, or -ŋ. So while the range of English final consonants cannot be reproduced in the pronunciation of Burmese, it can be represented

84  The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
in the spelling in much the same way that the original spelling survives in many Pali loans).

The examples below illustrate the way in which English final consonants are adapted to the narrower range of Burmese options. The italicized letters shown in parentheses after the transcription indicate the orthographic value of the Burmese final consonant in those cases where a choice exists: e.g., ag may be spelled -at and -ap, but aou can only be spelled -ok in regular orthography. Our examples suggest the following: English final obstruents (-p, -b, -t etc.) are generally realized as -q (realized as a glottal stop in citation form); final nasals (-m, -n, etc.), or as -n (realized as nasalization of the vowel in citation). Despite apparent irregularities, such as the different treatment of final -sh in the two words ‘British’ and ‘English’, which appear in Burmese as [yclerview] byitishâ (-htya) and ingaleiq (-p), respectively, final fricatives (-s, -sh, -th, etc.) also tend to be realized as -q in Burmese. The final resonant (-l), on the other hand, is simply omitted (syllable-final -r does not occur in standard British English, which seems to be the main source of loans). The treatment of final clusters (-st, -tm, etc.) varies, but unless the syllabification pattern is altered (log-ar-thm > lo-ga-rith-thm), the final element of the cluster is not represented in the Burmese.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>final obstruents and nasals</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>isotope</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>block (print)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>plug</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>club</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soup</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>function</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>prune</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>stadium</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>acting</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>fricatives</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Irish</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English</td>
<td>Burmese</td>
<td>Pinyin</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------</td>
<td>------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bailiff</td>
<td>ပဲပြေ/ပဲပလေ</td>
<td>biliq/biliq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>socialist</td>
<td>စိနီးလောင်ကောင်း</td>
<td>s’oshehliq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>virus</td>
<td>ပေရီးယား</td>
<td>bàinraq (p)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**resonants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>shawl</td>
<td>အားစါ</td>
<td>shaw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bulldozer</td>
<td>ဗားစိုက်</td>
<td>budoza</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>parcel</td>
<td>ပစ္စု</td>
<td>pas’eh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dollar</td>
<td>ဒေဝါ</td>
<td>dawla</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**clusters**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Burmese</th>
<th>Pinyin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August</td>
<td>အားကား</td>
<td>àwgoq (t)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exchange</td>
<td>ခြေရာ</td>
<td>eiq (p) c’èin (n)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>insect</td>
<td>ဗားစိုက်</td>
<td>ins’eq</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>warrant</td>
<td>စိုက်</td>
<td>waràn (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volt</td>
<td>ပင်</td>
<td>bo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>logarithm</td>
<td>လော်ကားဗုဒ္ဓ</td>
<td>lawgariqthan (m)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>exhaust</td>
<td>အပြင်</td>
<td>eiq (t) zàw</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>clutch</td>
<td>ကြက်</td>
<td>kalaq (t)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The reduction in final contrasts may lead to neutralization, as when ‘matrix’ and ‘metric’ (as well as ‘matric’—the ‘matriculation’ examination) are realized as မောင်မော်မောင်  meq’tàriq.

When possible, Burmese orthography does seem to match the English values of single final consonants, but it is less predictable in matching clusters (e.g., ‘warrant’ is spelled with a final -m, even though -n is available). The orthographic convention for representing foreign final obstruents in Burmese is to place an appropriate Burmese consonantal letter in parentheses after the syllable: thus, ‘bus’ has been borrowed as ပေါ်, but it can also be spelled with the letter -s—စိုက်(စ) —to indicate a pronunciation ပေါ်(s). Similar spellings are also seen for ‘softball’ မောင်မော်ဖားဗုဒ္ဓ  s’àw(ဖ)ba and ‘focus’ ဖားဗုဒ္ဓ(စ)  p’okaq(s).
Initial clusters: To accommodate the clusters of consonantal sounds that can occur at the beginning of words in English—mostly obstruents followed by resonants (br-, kl-, etc.)—Burmese makes use of ‘weakened’ syllables—those transcribed with the ‘neutral’ vowel ə. Thus ‘clutch’ is resolved into two syllables (or, rather, one and a half), the first of which is unstressed: kalac. There are many other examples:

- plug ပိုးကြ   palaq (-t)
- prune ပိုးကြ   parin (-n)
- dacron ဒေါ်စွန်း   deqkerun (-n)
- diaphragm ဒေါ်စွန်း   dainyap’aran (-m)
- driver ဒေါ်စွန်း   darainba
- trust (savings) ဒေါ်စွန်း   ’araq(s) (-t)
- inspector ဒေါ်စွန်း   insapeqtaw

The strategy may alter the syllabification of the original, often by ‘sharing’ a sound across syllable boundaries:

- i-cream ဆော်စွန်း   aiqsekarin
- pri-mrose ပိုးကြ   parinmaró
- trans-former ဒေါ်စွန်း   ’araqawma
- pla-stic ပိုးကြ   palaqsatiq
- e-ray ပိုးကြ   eiqseré
- shocka-bsorber ပိုးကြ   sháweqbaawba

Although Burmese does have a medial -y- sound, it appears only after labials: py-, p’y-, by- and my-. ‘Museum’, therefore, can be borrowed as [mjuziyan] myuziy, but the medial is not available for words such as cube and tube (the prototype for the latter presumably having the palatal glide), which are adopted with ɕ-, ɕ’, and j- (spelled ky, k’y-, or gy- and kr, k’r, or gr-, respectively). Thus, the initial sound of, say, ‘duty’ (again, with palatal glide) ends up matching that of ‘jury’ (as shown):
ky-
cuticle ကြုံကူး cutikeh
cue (billiards) ကြား cu

ty-, dy-
tuition သန်န်း cushin
tube သန်န်း cuq
duty (fee) ကြား juti
(cf. jury ကြား juri)

Junctures: Two-syllable noun compounds in Burmese generally show close juncture between syllables, frequently realized by the voicing of internal consonants: အား ‘coconut’ + စာ ‘oil’ becomes အားစီ ‘coconut oil’ (z- to z-); ထီး ‘guest’ + ဆ ‘room’ becomes ထီးဆ ‘guest room’ (g- to g-); and, to repeat a former example, လွ်းဗေ ‘wind machine’ + ကြား ‘fly’ becomes လွ်းဗေ-ဗ ‘airplane’ (p- to b-). This has the effect of reducing the number of consonantal choices in certain word-internal (or phrase internal) positions. Most English loanwords, however, do not participate in the voicing associated with close juncture:

anpainya (not anbainya) အားနားမီး umpire
anti (not andi) အားတာ auntie
shanpu (not shanbu) စားပါ shampoo
p’aunteinpin
(not paundeinbin) ပိုင်းဖွင့် fountain pen
pas’eh (not pazeh) ပျားခွ parcell
s’aiinp’un (not s’aiinbu) စားတသီ siphon

In fact, the choice between, say, -p- and -b- usually follows the English prototype: where English has a voiced consonant, so, in most cases, does Burmese (နားဗ ‘label’; mawdan နားဗ ‘modern’, etc.).
Orthography: Not only is the voicing of internal consonants stable, as we have just seen, but English loans tend to avoid irregular rhymes and special conventions which can make the relationship between sound and writing unpredictable (see Wheatley 1995). In practice, this means that English loan-words can generally be written ‘sight unseen’, a fact which Okell exploits when he uses loanwords to introduce the Burmese writing system in his textbook on the script. There are some exceptions: အောက်စိုက် ‘oxide’ is spelled with a final -d (in the BCD, at least) instead of the -k of the regular spelling of the rhyme -aik: presumably this is to match the English spelling. And the practice of ‘stacking’ identical (-kk-) or ‘homorganic’ (-mp-) internal consonants, a convention that has survived from the Indic prototype, can also appear in the spelling of English loans:

- magazine  meggazin  မြော်ဇင်
- mechanic  meqkinniq  မူရည်နားဗီးဗ
- summon  thanman  သန်းနား
- miss  miqsá  မျိုး
- mister  miqsata  မျိုးသတ်
- misses  miqseq  မျိုးစွ်

In some cases, the stacked consonants correspond to English double consonants, but in others, factors internal to Burmese are responsible, as in -iq, which is regularly spelled with a final ‘s’ consonant (conventionally transliterated with its Indic value, -c).

Tones: Burmese non-checked (i.e., not ending in -q) syllables allow three possible tones: the low (unmarked), the high (‘´), and the so-called ‘creaky’ (‘`). Since Burmese does not have toneless stressed syllables, each stressed syllable of a loan receives one of these tones. Bickner (1986) has shown us the subtle ways in which Thai assigns tones to borrowed words, and in doing so he has shed light on the complex of features that make up the phonological distinctions of tone in Thai. For Burmese, we have not yet been able to explain the

---

Footnote: An interesting play on this loan is sometimes heard: pyseq-kinniq ‘break-chanic’, that is, ‘someone who ruins what he tries to fix’.
assignment of tone with the same precision, but some tendencies can be noted. For example, the creaky tone (a short high pitch, with a creaky, constricted voice quality associated with it) often appears with syllables whose English prototype has a cluster of final consonants: point [pt] gwain; hoarfrost [həːfrəst]; how*ər*aw; [picture] mount [mau̯t] mān; volt [vɔl̩] bo; chipmunk (=squirrel) [tʃɪmpʌŋk] shin; pharynx [ˈfaɪrəŋks]; p'ehrín; postman [pəstman] pəsəmən. The last example contrasts with ʃəsətə poseta ‘poste’, in which the cluster ‘survives’ and is therefore not represented by the creaky tone.

The association of creaky tone with ‘lost’ final consonants calls to mind the conventional Burmese romanization of creaky-toned personal names with a final ‘t’ (myin, spelled Myint; thän, spelled Thant), as well as the proposed origin of the creaky tone in the loss of final consonants.21

Earlier, we saw that English loanwords whose prototype had a single final obstruent or fricative appeared in Burmese with simply the final glottal check. However, when the English vowel is more closely matched by that of a Burmese non-checked syllable, the creaky toned non-checked syllable with matching vowel (and often with novel syllable boundaries) may appear rather than the checked tone syllable with non-matching vowel: boss [bɔs] baw (but contrast ‘bus’, baq); proof [pɾu] paju (contrast ‘bailiff’, biliq or biliq); locket [läwket] lawke [lock- et > lo- cke- t]; Dodge (jeep) [Do-dgest] dəwja; boycott [bɔkətə] bwainkaw (also bwainkaw, so in this case, both options occur); and primrose [prɪməzə] primmarə.

The conditioning factors for the assignment of high and low tones are not still clear. Many English polysyllabic words are rendered monotonal in Burmese, as in mawtawtpidão ‘motor torpedo’, ikawloji ‘ecology’, rediveta ‘radiator’, although checked or weakened syllables may provide some relief, as in s’inpatheqtipoaq ‘sympathetic nerve’ and lawgariqtha ‘logarithm’. One might expect the high tone to

---

correspond to English stressed syllables, which have higher pitch, and indeed, such is often the case. Then, too, amphibia‘Amphibia’ and kawporèshin ‘corporation’ illustrate a phenomenon that might be called ‘high tone spreading’: if a high tone is assigned to the English stressed syllable (often, it is not, as we have seen), the following non-checked syllables are also high toned. Other examples are impiyëh ‘imperial’; innàshà ‘inertia’; bighiyà ‘hysteria’. Foreign place names (culled from Okell 1994) offer still further illustration: ainyòwa ‘Iowa’, bolîghiya ‘Bolivia’, and binnizwila ‘Venezuela’. Needless to say, there are exceptions still to be explained, such as awsatarélyà ‘Australia’, with its final creaky tone.

§10. Verbs and ‘intrusions’: Orwell’s description of the subdivisionsal magistrate in Burmese Days speaking “in a patchwork of Burmese verbs and English abstract phrases” points to an important feature of the Burmese language, which is that English loanwords, with very few exceptions, do not function as verbs in Burmese. In fact, loans from any source—even Pali—are rarely verbs.

There is much evidence in languages for treating the verb as the heart of the sentence, giving life to the nominals and adverbials that attach to it. Certainly, the centrality of the verb is readily demonstrated in many Southeast Asian languages. Nominals that can be recovered from the situational context are usually omitted, but verbs, or rather verb phrases, are obligatory elements of sentence structure. The sense of ‘He will repair it for me’ can be expressed in Burmese as simply:

Pyin-pè-meh.
repair-give-irrealis

On the other hand, as beginning students of Burmese soon learn, even when the verb is understood from context, as in a response to a

---

²See Wallace Chafe, Meaning and the Structure of Language (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975), 96-98.
question or comment, usually it is neither omitted nor replaced (as in English) by a pronominal element:

A. Canaw móun-hin-gà theiq caiq teh. I love mohinga.
I very like

B. Canaw lēh caiq teh! Me too!
I also like

Not all languages resist the incorporation of foreign loans as verbs. Hong Kong Cantonese borrows certain English verbs in the verb-not-verb question construction, even though doing so involves segmenting off the first syllable. Thus, paralleled to jì m’h jidou, with the native Cantonese verb jidou ‘know’, one finds:\footnote{The angle brackets (<,>) are used here and below to avoid commitment to a precise phonetic description. My former colleague at Cornell, Arthur Lau, brought my attention to the Cantonese examples.}

\begin{align*}
<Ap> & m’h \langle apply \rangle \ ne? & \text{Are you applying?} \\
& \text{ap- not apply Q} \\
<\text{Gua}> & m’h \langle \text{guarantee} \rangle ? & \text{Do you guarantee it?}
\end{align*}

In Burmese, there are very few examples of loanwords being used as verbs—that is, with verb particles attached. The following both refer to football (similar examples are cited in Forbes 1967:57):

\begin{align*}
\text{Gò shù laiq pi.} & \quad \text{Gò bi.} \\
goal shoot- & \quad \text{Goal-} \\
\text{[She]’s just shot a goal!} & \quad \text{Goal!}
\end{align*}
In the first, ɡô is a noun, but the presence of post verbal particles (laɪq and ḫi) defines the loanwords shû and ɡô (in the second example) as verbs. Another similar example incorporates the loanword ‘okay’:

O-ke ba deh! Di lo s’o-o-ke da bâw!
ookay- this way-say okay-
Okay! This way’s just fine!

But in the following very colloquial example, the locative marker, -hma, indicates a nominal usage of o-ke:

O-ke hma so-pye deh!
Okay at serene-
[Everything]’s just fine!

Another example, noted by Okell, shows a verb derived from the English adverbial particle ‘out’:

rîzaq ma-aug dhè bû
results not out yet-
The results aren’t out yet.

But in

p’ilin aʊq teh
feelings down-
[I] felt upset. [feeling-down? or feeling out?]

aʊq may just be the ordinary Burmese word for ‘below; under’, used here idiosyncratically as a verb. And if c’èh in the following sentence derives from English ‘challenge’, which seems to be the case, then we can cite another example:
Min ngá go c’êh da là? Are you challenging me?

C’êh yin louq meh! If you are ‘daring’ me, I’ll do it!

In other cases, words that are not usually nominals in English are incorporated as nominals in Burmese:

Reh-di là? Are you ready?

O-ke là? Okay?

Kà de gá jàn p’yiq ne deh! The cars are jammed in!
  car-s subj ‘jam’ be- There’s a traffic jam!

In the first two utterances, the presence of là, not usually found directly after verbs, identifies the loanwords as nominals in ‘categorial’ or ‘noun’ sentences, while in the third utterance, jàn is attached to the verb p’yiq as a nominal complement. This latter pattern is a favorite word-building device in Burmese, as illustrated in ဝင် ဒီ ‘belly pleasant; happy’, မိန့်စော ‘mouth join; greet’, စောင် ‘mind be hot; be worried’, and ကြားက ‘fork (in tree) fall; be in a predicament’. Loanwords originating as verbs or adjectives (or able to perform those functions) in English are also typically recast in this pattern:

- to sign စောင် ‘sign thrust’
- to design စောင် ‘design hang’
- to be stylish စောင် ‘style fall’
Speakers with some knowledge of English may retain foreign pronunciation of English words, which in these contexts can be called ‘intrusions’:

<Excited> p’yiq teh! [I was so excited!]
<Depressed> p’yiq teh! [She]’s depressed!
Thu <lonely> p’yiq teh! He’s lonely!
Thu gá theiq <independent> p’yiq teh!
She is very independent!
asou-yá as’eiq-tan de <demonetarize> louq-teh.
The government demonetarized the 25/- bills.
Canouq <confirmation> la louq t’a.
I’ve come to confirm it.

It is curious that English words should appear at all in these contexts, since Burmese words of similar meaning are available: စိဗ်ူ စခင် ‘emotion be small’ for ‘depressed’; တံတာတံဃား တာ ‘alone be left’ for ‘lonely’; and ကြယ်ရိုးဗ်း ‘self-strength depend’ for ‘independent’. One reason for this may be that the Burmese words may carry special connotations. The word တာ, for example, includes some sense of ‘abandonment’ in addition to ‘lonely’. So while the use of English in these contexts might be simply dismissed as ‘affectation’, it may also be a way of escaping from the associations that adhere to the native words.

It was probably ‘intrusions’ rather than ordinary loanwords that were noted by Orwell and which angered Saya Lun when he came to Rangoon late in the nineteenth century. And it is probably such phenomena that continue to provoke fears of languages being ‘inundated’ or of ‘succeeding to the onslaught’ of foreign tongues. But, in fact, these ‘intrusions’ are very well circumscribed, fitting right into the structural patterns of the language and held at arm’s

---

"In the early 90s, legislation was considered in France to prevent the gratuitous use of loanwords in the media, this as part of an effort to stem the tide of what Barry James, in an article on the French Academy, called ‘Eurospeech’. The legislation threatened to put an end to such memorable advertising slogans as ‘La plus speedy du pizza’ (an example cited by James). See Barry James, “French Academy: Getting Words Right”. International Herald Tribune, Nov. 21-22, 1992: 20.

The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4   95
length, away from the verbal core. On the other hand, the fact that borrowings from other languages constitute foreign material that has not been “refined” by cultural experience—the very quality that makes it attractive in certain settings—may be the underlying source of concern. Foreign words, after all, bring with them foreign cultures and foreign ways of thinking. Yet the evidence supports the contrary conclusion that Burmese appropriates both foreign content and form and makes them its own. The great English lexicographer Samuel Johnson clearly expressed his view of attempts to legislate matters of language when he wrote:

To enchain syllables, and to lash the wind,
are equally the undertakings of pride.

So when you get to a cafe in Rangoon, be prepared to ask for a cup of ‘black’:

ဗုဒ္ဓဓားယား ဝင်းကျင်စီးပြီး
canaw go balaq tak’ weq pë ba!
Give me a cup of ‘black’ please.

And listen as the order is relayed to the kitchen:

ဝင်းကျင်:
balaq wàn

But just hope you don’t get:

သာခေါင် ဝင်းကျင်ကြယ်ကြည်
Ta’p’a-ti leq-p’eq-ye.
1 party tea.

It’s too bitter!

96  The Journal of Burma Studies, Volume 4
References

Allott, Anna J.

Bickner, Robert J.

Bradley, David

Burmese Teaching and Research Section, Department of East Asian Languages and Literatures, Beijing University.

Chafe, Wallace

Forbes, K.

Hla Pe

James, Barry

Luce, G.H.

Okell, John


Orwell, George

Thein Han (Zawgyi)

Thurgood, Graham

Tin Htway
‘Uichāmū’ H̱êrà ‘ui and U’: Kranû Cui

Wheatley, Julian K.


Zeya Maung