

REVIEWS

The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary

U Hoke Sein

Reviewed by John Okell

Students of Burmese in the English speaking world have been blessed with a new Burmese-English dictionary: **The Universal Burmese-English-Pali Dictionary** by U Hoke Sein (for details see References below). The preface reveals that we nearly missed it. The author's intention was to write a Burmese-Pali dictionary, a sequel to his *Pali-Burmese dictionary*, but the *Ani-sahkan Hsaya-daw* (long may he flourish) seems to have provided the stimulus that led U Hoke Sein (HS) to insert an English gloss between the Burmese entry and the Pali equivalent (p. ja). The result is the present Burmese-English-Pali dictionary. Its author is a distinguished lawyer, and the dictionary took him 30 years to compile (p. 1066). For its last seven years he worked at it full time (p. ja).

Sources

HS lists his sources clearly in the preface. The nucleus of his work was a reverse dictionary made by turning his own four volume Pali-Burmese dictionary back to front. He enlarged it using material from Judson, porāṇa collections, works on literature, officially authorized wordlists from various academic subject areas, U Wun's incomplete Burmese-Burmese dictionary, spelling books, and published government regulations.

Size

A rough and ready method of estimating yields a total of around 68,000 entries, which puts HS's dictionary among the most ambitious Burmese dictionaries ever attempted, let alone completed (for a list of the largest see my review of Bernot).

However, this figure is partially misleading. A large number of entries would be considered redundant by many people's standards. See for example the set of entries (p. 4)

kacā:mrū:tū:e*	disports
kacā:mrū:tū:khrāṅ'	a disport [sic]
kacā:mrū:tū:luiso	
!akroṅ':kroṅ'	for the sake of sport

Or again (p. 715)

rhañṅ'e*	becomes long
rhañṅ'lāe*	becomes long
rhañṅ'lāsañṅ'	lengthened
rhañṅ'lwan:sañṅ'	too long
rhañṅ'sañṅ'	long

In both cases (and numerous others throughout the volume), given an explanation of the first word in the set, the meaning of subsequent entries is readily deducible and

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they would for that reason be excluded from many dictionaries. They are collocations rather than compounds. Presumably their inclusion in this dictionary is an inevitable outcome of its former incarnation as a Pali-English dictionary: no doubt it was useful to have separate translations for the Pali nouns and verbs and compounds. This must also be the explanation for the inclusion of such unlikely entries as

nhac'pā:so'akroñ': rhisāññ'	twice conditioned
nhac'thoñ'.thwā !atuiñ':!arhaññ' rhisāññ'	measuring 2 & 1/3 cubits
ñwekhye:cāsūe* mayā:	the wife of a usurer

This feature means that for use in comparison with other dictionaries the figure for the number of entries should be reduced by an unknown but significant factor.

Coverage

Coverage seems to be strong in many areas. Dipping into the volume at random one sees many terms from justice, administration and government, as one would expect, and numerous names of flora and fauna in addition to core vocabulary words.

Notable absences are the names of ethnic groups such as Kachin, Kadu, Shan, etc. Even **Tarup'** 'Chinese' gets no entry on its own, though **Kulā:** 'Indian' is included. Grammatical suffixes are also often omitted. There are no entries for example for **-ka** 'from, subject, past time, if', **-kataññ':ka** 'ever since', **-lhyañ** 'per' though **lhyañ** 'if' is there, **-mhā** 'at, subject'. Omissions in these areas are probably matters of deliberate policy.

Other omissions are less susceptible to explanation. HS states that he made use of U Wun's dictionary, but he omits for example entries for

katañ	(part of a horse)
katañ	(a domino)
kati pe:-	promise
katok'sap'	(a plant)

and many others which find a place in U Wun's work. It is not easy to see why these words should have been omitted.

HS's coverage of recent officialese, vogue words and ideological terms is erratic. Some are included and some are not. For example, he includes the following:

kwak'krā:cac'che:khrāñ':	spot check
kwañ':chañ':!up'ñan':	field work
!aññamañña	system of correlation
caññ':ruñ':re:	organization
ññhwan'krā:re:mhū:	director
tuiñ':rañ':sā:	native
!uthulūtan':cā:aphwai.	mass and class organizations
!aprañ'jhe:	open market

But the following are not to be found:

kedā	cadre
kañ'.sat'kun'	state controlled goods
kan':!wat'kun'	uncontrolled goods
!up'ā: pe:-	contribute voluntary labour
cetanārañ'	well wisher

chan'.pwā:sañ'tan':	multiplier course
nok'tan':mhū:	commanding officer
ū:cī:thāna	department
thane	place of residence

Likewise the words current in international news reports. HS has these:

phwañ-phrui:chai nuiñ'ñan'	developing country
ñwepe:ñweyūrhañ':tam':	balance of payments
thip'sī:chwe:nwe:pwai	summit conference
prok'kyā:cac'sā:	guerilla

but not these:

dukkha saññ'	refugee
lakram:phak'wāda	terrorism
lip'khaitañ':lan':akhrelanei	impasse
lan':akrī:nuiñ'ñan'	major power

Terms from science and technology are similarly served. We find these:

tache:dhāt'	diastase
taññ'ñrim'pwat'ñ:	static friction (unfortunately printed as 'statistical friction')
ganjan':twak'cak'	calculator
lapuipaccaññ':	spare parts
re'ñ:suñ:dhāt'ñ:lup'ñan':	hydroelectric works

but not:

duñ:pyañkhwañ':duñ:pyañ	antimissile missile
mui:pyañpūpoñ':	gas filled balloon
ñakāsalwan':pyañkutui.yaññ'	space shuttle
lapumrūdhāt'poñ':phui	nuclear reactor

I also found that a number of HS's scientific terms did not correspond precisely with those given in the authoritative *Paññārap' wohāramyā:*.

Accuracy

Most entries are given a simple one-word English gloss. At first sight this looks bare and unhelpful: what of all the other meanings? The answer is that many of them are covered by HS's glosses for the compounds of the simple word. For example **chui:** (entered as **chui:saññ'**) gets its one-word gloss 'bad'; but the compounds give a less terse idea of the semantic range of **chui:**. We find compounds with glosses like:

pernicious	scurrilous
foully impure	profligate
base	vile
malign	evil
depraved	

One cannot of course guarantee that the meanings of the compounds are all valid for the simple verb, but they do help to round out the bare one-word gloss.

This method of presentation certainly saves space, but it is not a convenient one for the user. Under **kok'**, for example, which is a word with two or three homonyms, there are over 120 compounds to wade through.

Given this restriction - i.e. that one-word (or two-word) glosses do not tell the

whole story - the meanings given seemed to me to be quite satisfactory on the whole. I say this with some reserve because there were a few examples that weakened my confidence. For example, for **kakhyo 'kakhywat'** HS has 'flippantly' where Judson has 'in a manner bungling and laughable'; and the **Mran'mā 'abhidhān' 'akyañ':khyup'** (henceforth MA) has 'wrong' (with an example about errors in text inscribed on stone) and 'superficial'. Further, consider the following divergences:

	HS gloss	MA gloss (translated)
kati:karam':	obscurely	confused, deranged
kaywat'kayui	unevenly	wrong, superficial
kalin':kalak'	unsteadily	uncouth, rude

My suspicion is that MA is right and HS is wrong in most of these cases, possibly all.

In other examples I think HS's one-word gloss is misleading. For **kapok'karok'** for example he has 'thoughtless'. This would be acceptable if taken in the sense of 'taking what comes to hand, going where the whim leads, having no system or objective'; but that is unlikely to be the first meaning of 'thoughtless' that comes to mind. A similar example is **kalekakhye**, for which HS's gloss 'at one's own will' would only be reasonable if one knew that it meant 'living a life according to one's own will', i.e. wandering about, without a regular home, occupation or relationships. More generous glossing would have saved some misunderstanding in such cases.

Arrangement of entries

The system of alphabetical order currently preferred in Burma is what one might call the 'spelling book' (**sat'pumkyam':**) system, as used in MA. In this system closed syllables are listed separately from open syllables, and ordered first by final consonant and only then by vowel. This approach has been followed by the compilers of the Burmese-Russian, Burmese-Chinese, and Burmese-French dictionaries; but HS remains unmoved by current fashion and uses a system close to that of the Pali dictionaries, as one would expect of a Pali scholar of his standing. This makes his system similar to Judson's, and it will therefore be easy to operate for those familiar with the Judson dictionary.

My personal preference is for the Judson type system. The spelling book system seems to me to have several irritating defects; but there will no doubt be many who find HS's arrangement a drawback.

The Pali Component

Each entry contains a Pali equivalent for the Burmese entryword in addition to the English gloss. In nearly all cases there is a Sanskrit form as well, in square brackets, and a note of the gender in round brackets; e.g.

lhwa a saw kakaca [krakaca] (pum)

I cannot tell how accurate the Pali equivalents are. I can only express astonishment and admiration for the way in which HS has found, or created - apparently without undue effort - Pali equivalents for such terms as:

short circuit	United Kingdom	enzyme
electrode	freshman (at university)	Covenanted Assistant Commissioner
tungsten	broadcasting station	

also numerous varieties of fauna and flora, and many more items that can play no part in the Piṭaka or its commentaries.

Minor grouses

It is a pity that the Burmese words are given no indication of pronunciation. The written word is unfortunately an unreliable guide, most of all in matters of weakening and voicing, e.g. **tāmkhā:** pronounced /tāgà/, not /tan-khà/.

It would have been helpful to have entries under some of the more widely used variant spellings with a cross reference to the spelling selected as the norm. HS normally gives an entry in only one spelling, so if it is not there in the spelling you know, you have to hunt around trying out other possibilities: e.g. there is no entry for the common spelling **dā:** 'knife', and no indication that you will find what you want under **dhā:** - though (to give credit where it is due) there is an entry under **thā:** saying 'see **dhā:**'.

There are however a few cases in which both members of a pair of alternative spellings are listed and glossed, together with some of their compounds; see e.g. the entries under **kāthin** and its compounds (p.5) compared with those under **kathin** (p.7); or **kacī** and compounds compared with **kajī** and its compounds (p.4f). This is wasteful, and in fact unhelpful, because not all compounds are listed under each spelling. The user finding **ññie*** 'is entangled' and no compounds would probably assume that the dictionary had no entry for **ññikap'**, **ññicwan'**, **ññicwai** etc; how is he to know that all these are listed under the spelling **ñri-**? An entry saying

ññi see ñri

would have avoided this difficulty.

There are occasional mishaps in the English or the printing - e.g. **Regular Trial** (p.678), **arraignment** (ibid.), **lookes for** (p.770), **danse shade** (p.998) - but they are commendably rare. Under **procarā!aprac'** the gloss is 'the fault of being reprehensible' - presumably an error for 'a reprehensible fault'.

I am also honour bound to record my usual complaint about the fact that HS has missed the opportunity to make a really convenient dictionary (and save himself space) by combining the entries beginning with prefix **!a-** with the unprefixed forms (see my review mentioned above).

Under **prochuisampāññā** the gloss given is 'phonetics'. Actually the standard Burmese term for phonetics - not given in the HS dictionary - is **saddabeda**, the same word as the Pali. It looks as if in the Pali-Burmese version HS wrongly glossed **saddabeda** as **prochuisampāññā**, so the error persists in the reverse version.

Conclusion

The HS dictionary is undoubtedly more comprehensive and up to date than Judson. On the debit side there are the omissions, like those mentioned under **Coverage** above; and it is inconvenient, and often misleading, to have only one-word glosses as against Judson's strings of equivalents (sometimes filled out with example sentences), which provide the user with a much more precise idea of the range of meanings of each entryword.

Also on the debit side, though less serious from the practical point of view, is the inclusion of a lot of material that the English-speaking student of Burmese would have no need for. Keep in mind here entries of the type 'the wife of a usurer', and the numerous compounds of deducible meaning (see above under **Size**).

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In brief, then, we must congratulate HS on making a distinct advance over Judson's dictionary in some ways, but we cannot say that he has superseded Judson: rather, the two dictionaries complement each other. And we still need a single dictionary, to combine all the information in these two, and to supply what they leave out.

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Romanization

The transliteration system used above is close to that adopted by the Library of Congress (see Cataloging Service Bulletin 12, spring 1981, pp. 69-71). The main differences are in the spacing, and in the tone marks (for which I use : and .); and I replace their raised comma and inverted comma with ! and ' respectively.

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