

QUESTIONS IN MON - ADDENDA AND CORRIGENDA

Christian Bauer
Silpakorn University

In her recent comparative study on questions in Hmong Marybeth Clark (1985) quoted me correctly in saying that "[...] it is possible to have a V-NEG-V question in the Mon language spoken in Thailand but not that spoken in Burma (1985.60)."

In our correspondence, sometime in 1983, I mentioned the idea (which I seem to remember discussing with Shorto in class in the late 1970s) that it might be a calque of, or a case of *Analogiebildung* to, Burma Mon V-lè-V, as in the following⁽¹⁾:

Burma Mon	Thai Mon	
klɔŋ lè klɔŋ	klɔŋ hù? klɔŋ	if you want to come, do # are you coming?
	don hù? don	are you tired, or not?

Having done more work with Mons in Burma in the meantime, I have to admit that my original claim is no longer true; younger Mons from Burma are using constructions involving an auxiliary, both in spoken and literary Mon, such as

1	klɔŋ kè? hù? kè?	may I come, or not?
		come/AUX/NEG/AUX

However, my own intuition is still uneasy about it, and I maintain that it is a calque or *Analogiebildung* due to contact with *lè* being a Mon-Burmese contact-word, attested since MM when extensive borrowing from Burmese occurred, *lè* meaning *if* [conditional-consequential] in colloquial, as distinct from formal, speech; in the latter case it is ɣo? ra?-[CLAUSE]-mækèh. *lè* may also be a nominal clitic, co-occurring frequently with clause-final *kɔm* or with clause-initial *ɓɔn* even *if*, *even though*, *though*. Apart from absence of any epigraphic evidence the main reason for my assumption is that a variant of absolute questions (Yes/No questions) with

a 'rhetorical' implication anticipating an affirmative reply exists already in modern Mon:

- 2 deh klɔŋ nù kwan kɔ? pìn hù? seŋ ha *he's from Kawbein, isn't he?*
 prN/come/p/village/N/N/NEG/NEG BE/Q
- 3 yòə pièh tih cao seŋ ha *once you've fully recovered, you'll go home, won't you?*
 illness/release/p/return/NEG BE/Q

Disjunctive co-ordination in Mon, corresponding to the English translation-equivalent of 'or', other than at clause level either ... or, is not overtly marked. Yet, disjunctive constructions are attested since MM:

- 4 MM pday thān ma dah cnih kuim lar ; thān ma ha seŋ⁽²⁾
whether in a place which is a landing place or in one which is not
 LOC/place/REL/BE/ghat/p/p/place/REL/NEG/NEG BE
- 5 LM ka' kuiw tka' 'arew wohā man bā wwa' 'adhippay de' tup hā hwa' tup hā⁽³⁾
ka' and tka', do these two words have the same meaning, or not?
 neck/p/island/speech/word/Mon/2/CL/meaning/prN/similar/Q/NEG/similar/Q
- 6 SM nài chao kòh klɔŋ ha hù? klɔŋ ha
is Nai Chao coming, or not?
 Nai/Chao/CL/come/Q/NEG/come/Q

These constructions pose a number of problems which can be linked to another suggestion made in the same article (Clark 1985.63) that the absolute question-marker in Thai and Lao may be related to the preverbal negative particle; this may have some implications for Mon.

In the above-mentioned sentences (2) to (4) the verb MM seŋ SM seŋ, pleonastically occurring with the preverbal negative particle MM ha LM ha, hwa', hu SM hù?, is the negative equivalent of the verb of existence to be which cannot be negated unless it occurs in a serial construction following the head-verb; it also negates attributive clauses. The non-negated form in (3) is confined to questions. The absolute question-marker LM hā SM ha occurs

always in sentence-final position and can turn any declarative sentence into a question without necessitating a change in word-order.

Sentences (5) and (6) illustrate disjunctive questions. My own 'acquired' intuition about Mon, combined with the historical evidence, however scant, leaves no doubt as to the unusual character of such constructions.

As for the second suggestion about the relationship between question-markers and preverbal negative particles, spoken Mon *hù?* cannot be related to the absolute question-marker SM *ha* (probably corresponding to an OM clitic /-a/); however, the relative question-marker SM *rao LM ro* is homophonous with a negative emphatic particle SM *rao LM ro*. The following examples from SM will illustrate this:

7 *əkhoŋ lɔ cɔp kòh deh hù? tɛm nɛm* *he doesn't know yet when he'll be coming*
time/CL/arrive/CL/prN/NEG/know/yet

8 *əkhoŋ lɔ cɔp kòh deh tɛm ha* *does he know when he will come?*
time/CL/arrive/CL/prN/know/Q

9 *kʰʰ? əyʰk mò? ci? rao* *how old are you?*
get/age/what/Q-CL/Q

10 *ɓɔh rao hù? ɓɔh kətao rao hù? kətao* *he is neither cold nor hot [= he*
has not developed a temperature]
cold/---/NEG/cold/hot/---/NEG/hot

11 *pòh rao pòh hù? lèp chu rao chu hù? lèp⁽⁴⁾* *he can neither read nor write*
read/---/read/NEG/able/write/---/write/
NEG/able

The earlier reflexes of LM *ro*, OM *yo* and MM *ro*, functioned both as relative question-marker and assertive/positive (!) emphatic S-final particle:

12 OM *mu kāl ma deh scis das yo⁽⁵⁾* *when will he come down and be born?*
what/time/REL/prN/descend/BE/---

13 OM *smin dewataw row goh yo⁽⁶⁾* *thus it is, King of gods*
king/god/manner/CL/---

Three conclusions can be drawn from the above sentences (9) to (13): SM rao is not a negative emphatic marker as stated in Shorto DSM (1962) ⁽⁷⁾ since it occurs only in contexts which are already negated by SM hù?; from this follows that it has retained the semantic scope of its earlier reflex, namely (i) marking relative questions and (ii) being an emphatic clause-marker even though the word-order of the latter has changed. The only discernable difference between its use in OM and SM is that it is not attested in negated contexts in OM and does not occur in affirmative contexts in SM, that is always co-occurs with SM hù? as preverbal (and pre-auxiliary) negative particle. Finally, one can identify only indirect diffusion, possibly from Tai, that seems to have confined SM rao to its negated contexts.

Noteworthy, however, is that in some dialects in Thailand the preverbal negative particle is SM ?ao ~ ?ao? spelt LM 'o which Shorto noted during the early 1950s as assertive. The question now is: Can it be related to SM rao (< OM yo) or is it a variant of SM hù? LM hwa'? It should be noted that SM hù? shows unnatural register and ought to correspond to SM **hao? or SM **ho?; the possibility of the first is strengthened by contemporary spellings in both countries of SM hù? ~ ?ao ~ ?ao? as LM hu. ⁽⁸⁾

NOTES

(1) Burma Mon and Thailand Mon (or Thai Mon) are strictly areal terms and do not imply dialect divisions. Mons in Thailand use a slightly more archaic variety of Mon script; the lexicon of each variety shows a greater proportion of Thai loans and Burmese loans respectively. Burma Mon sustains the tendency toward verb-finality and disyllabic word-structures whereas Thai Mon favors monosyllabic reductions even of grammatical markers and particles.

Interlinear glosses are, I hope, self-explanatory. CL are clitics, Q are question-markers, p particles and prN pronouns. My transcription of SM is identical with Shorto's DSM 1962, ignoring, for the sake of standardization, dialect differences which are considerable. LM, MM, OM forms are transliterated according to Blagden-Duroiselle, as explained by Shorto in DMI 1971.