

## SOME ASPECTS OF MON SYNTAX

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To the best of my knowledge, the first general grammar of Mon is yet to be written; the same may be said, more precisely, of a study of Mon syntax.<sup>1</sup> The aim of this paper is to describe selected aspects of Mon syntax.

It is well known that the majority of Mon lexical items cannot be assigned to specific word-classes on formal criteria. Instead, they become verbs, nouns and the like according to the way they are used, while the use made of a given form includes its specific transformation and its place in a specific utterance. Once these facts are understood we may proceed to consider the organization of the simple and complex sentence.

It should be noted at the outset that Mon has been written as well as a spoken language for some twelve centuries and that there has been constant interaction between the two modes of expression.<sup>2</sup> This circumstance helps to explain certain contradictions between them.

A tendency toward monosyllabism appears to be general and continuously operative throughout the history of the language, being evidenced in the earliest loans. Forms borrowed from Sanskrit and other sources were shortened and made to conform to the Mon phonology of the period, being then re-written as native Mon forms. One result of this assimilation was the appearance of geminate consonants.

ols not found in the original loans. For  
ple,

Sanskrit	Old Mon
ga 'conjunction'	ussāyogga 'auspicious conjunction of planets'
ṛṇātithi 'lunar day'	punnatitthi 'lunar day'

At the same time, we see a certain reluctance  
tolerate geminate consonants, a reluctance which  
inherent in monosyllabism and which encourages  
generation of a phonetic neutral vowel between  
two consonants. This development set off a  
tendency toward dissyllabism which was  
strengthened by the operation of various affixes  
by the high incidence of various close-knit  
constructs.

### *Syntactic Function of Affixes*

#### *Fixation*

The formation of nouns from verbs, with  
developing abstraction, is shown by the following:

ām /keim/ 'to step'	>	lagām /ləkeim/ 'step'
uim /ʔa:m/ 'to speak'	>	lahuim /ləʔa:m/ 'speech'
aḥ /ieʔ/ 'to shine'	>	layaḥ /ləieʔ/ 'light'

Note the parallel between this use of prefix  
/ and various headwords:

aniy /bənoi:/ 'to trade'	>	naḥ baniy /nje bənoi:/ 'merchant'
ai /jowə/ 'to be sick'	>	daduḥ yai /teito: jowə/ 'sickness'

ru /pruʔ 'to make noise' > dama bru /dam pruʔ/ 'noise

Factitives are formed from verbal bases with

prefix /ph-/, among others. The following examples show transformation of the palatal initial of the base:

/če?/ 'to descend'	>	/phje?/ 'to let fall drop'
/čon/ 'to be soiled'	>	/phjon/ 'to dye'

The durative is sometimes marked by using the element ma /mei/ before the verb together with the element padai /pəduə/ before the noun head; see hereafter, under Syntax.

Adverbial and participial prefixation of ma /mei/ preceded by bway /pouə/ is illustrated by the following:

/klaing/ 'to be much'	>	/pouə mei klaing/ 'in quantity'
/jout/ 'to diminish'	>	/pouə mei jout/ 'at least'

### *Suffixation*

Sexual qualification, noted as early as the 11th century, is uncommon in modern Mon, especially in the spoken language. The qualifier for 'male human' is truh /kru ~ krə/ (< Old Mon karu), that for 'female human' is brau /preə/ (< Old Mon brow). It is especially in the literary language that we encounter such cases as manih truh /mni? krə/ 'man' and manih brau /mni? preə/ 'woman' (manih < Pāli *manussa*).

The qualifier for 'female animal' is mbo' /bu?/ while that for 'male animal' is kmak /meik/. Thus

		glau mbo' /kələə bu?/ 'cow'
glau /kələə/ 'cattle'	>	glau kmak /kələə meik/ 'bull'

Attributive to human referants, mbo' /bu?/ usually distinguishes an age group, e.g., manih /mni? bu?/ 'man of mature age'. As a headword denotes "the main component of a complex object" (Porto 1962: 164), as in mbo' padai /bu? pæduə ~ hœ/ 'inner room of the Mon house; principal room'.

### Inflection<sup>3</sup>

At certain stages of the language consonantal infixes, a thorough study of which has yet to be made, are found preceded by a vocalic infix, usually -/ə-/. Occasionally such vocalic infixation occurs by itself, and shows three uses:

#### (1) Change from intransitive to transitive:

pluit ~ plat /pəloit/ (Old Mon plit) 'to be extinguished' > palat /pəlot/ (Old Mon paluit) 'to extinguish'. Cf. Old Mon klon 'to carry on' > kalon 'to work'.

#### (2) Change from stative verb to noun:

Old Mon dlu 'to be dark' > modern Mon dalu /həlu?/ 'darkness'.

#### (3) Change from intransitive to causative intransitive:

Old Mon drep /rip/ 'to run' > darep /hərip/ 'to cause to run'.

Consonantal infixation is the most frequently noted aspect of Mon grammar (Dupont 1954: 19). The three principal consonantal infixes are -n- /-n-/, -m- /-m-/, and -w- /-w-/. Since their operation falls more properly under the head of morphology,

I shall, pending an exhaustive study, mention only the second of these, namely /-m-/. Often combined with /-l-/, this shows two main uses:

(1) Formation of nouns from verbs:

klāt /klo:t/ 'to steal' > kamlat /kəmlɔ:t/ 'thief'

ghacuit /həčɪɔt/ 'to kill' > ghamcuit /kəmčɪɔt/ 'death'

Old Mon kalon 'to work' > kamlon 'work'

(2) Formation of resultatives from verbs:

tuiw /toweɪ/ 'to level' > tmuiw /təməweɪ/ 'to overflow'

To mark unspecified number Mon uses the attributive forms taa' /tɔʔ/ (cf. Burmese tui' /to/ and khamluin' /gɔmlaɪŋ/. For example: manih taa' /mniʔ tɔʔ/ = manih khamluin' /mniʔ gɔmlaɪŋ/ 'persons'. The use of these forms is, however, rare.

*Generalization*

By generalization I refer to the coupling of terms into binary constructions which are not in apposition (Dupont 1954: 21) but in parallel, as on other levels of the syntax. Such constructions express not only plurality but also indefinite or approximate quantity. For example,

preñ-glau /preɲ kleiɔu/ 'buffalo + ox, = any animal'

cin-khtek /čouɪn čheiʔ/ 'elephant + horse, = any animal'

kmin-kla /əmeim klə/ 'bear + tiger, = any wild animal'

duñ-rah /duɲ reiʔ/ 'town + country, = country'

ñah duñ rah /nɲeiʔ duɲ reiʔ/ 'inhabitants of the country'

ḍuñ-khwān /ḍuŋ kwa:n/ 'town + village, =  
communities'

ñah ḍuñ khwān /njei? ḍuŋ kwa:n/ 'inhabitants  
of communities'

chu dun /čhu tun/ 'tree + bamboo, = plant, tree'

ma chu dun /mei čhu tun/ 'seed + tree + bamboo,  
= seed'

sat chu /sout čhu/ 'fruit (product) + tree, =  
any fruit'

### *Classifiers*

There are few classifiers in Mon. The choices they offer and their composition are in consonance with the generalization characteristic of the language.

#### *General Constructions*

In the absence of a classifier numerals are attached directly to the noun they quantify. When a classifier is used, the construction conforms to the pattern: general classifier + noun head + general + particular classifier. Examples:

tuan panah mwai tuan /tənoum pənə mwouə tənoum/  
'tree + jackfruit + one + tree, = one jack-  
fruit tree'

kau dakah pi dañ /kau teik pai dən/ 'blossom  
+ lotus + three + flower, = three lotus  
flowers'

sat brau bāma /sout prəə ba:mei/ 'fruit +  
coconut + two + seed, = two coconuts'

### *Classifiers*

Halliday (1922: xviii) enumerates thirty-seven classifiers in modern Mon. However, it seems clear that the bulk of these came into the language from Burmese. Not more than seven are in actual use, and these are from the stock of terms used in generalization. For example,

chu kla /čhu klə/ 'tree + tiger, = teak'  
 sat brau /sout preə/ 'fruit + woman, = coconut'  
 tanom brau /tənom preə/ 'tree + woman, =  
 coconut tree'

### *The Dual*

Mon follows a special pattern in constructions designating two members: noun head + one + classifier for 'pair'. For example,

danap mwai cho /teinoup mwouə čhau/ 'shoe + one + pair, = two shoes'

glau mwai tanow /kle:ɔ mwouə tənou/ 'cattle + one + relationship, = two head of cattle'

One member of a pair is expressed as mwai duih /mwouə tɕə/ 'one side', which may be included with the dual.

The existence of means for expressing the dual in Mon is not without significance. It is as yet uncertain whether it is original with Mon or whether it reflects the Sanskrit dual (with Sanskrit *dvi-* compare Mon duih).

### *Word Order*

#### *Place of the Predicate and Auxiliaries*

Upon meeting a Mon of one's own age and social standing, one might say to him if the encounter is fortuitous,

/mɔŋ mɪp mɔŋ ha:/ = 'How do you do?' or  
 'How are you?'

The Mon in question would probably answer,

/mɔŋ mɪp mɔŋ rə/ = 'I am well' or 'I'm fine'.

However, the first speaker could also say, (1) /mɔŋ mɪp mɔŋ ha:/, (2) mɔŋ mɪp ha:/, or (3) /mɔŋ

/, stressing the rising intonation of /mip/. And second speaker could also say, (1) /mɔŋ mip mɔŋ/, (2) /mɔŋ mip ra/, (3) /mɔŋ mip mɔŋ/, or even /mip mip/, or (5), more simply, /mip/. In short, p/ 'to enjoy' (e.g., /ci mip/ 'to eat with enjoyment, = enjoy one's food') proves to be the only ble element in these utterances. The other ments are /mɔŋ/ 'to stay, remain', /ha:/ 'interrogative particle',<sup>4</sup> and /ra/ 'final assertion ker'.<sup>5</sup> The construct /mɔŋ mip/ means 'to be in d health', while /mɔŋ mip mɔŋ/ means 'to remain good health'. Placed before the predicate, /mɔŋ/ bines with it to form a quasi-compound; placed er the predicate, it marks the durative aspect. s /mip/ '[I] enjoy' = the predicate (P) while ŋ mip/ '[I] am in good health' = an auxiliary + P, and /mɔŋ mip mɔŋ/ '[I] remain in good lth, am well' =  $A_1 + P + A_2$ . In the same way, :n/ 'to win' > /ma:n mɔŋ/ 'to keep (on) winning' +  $A_2$ .

Note that the negation marker, most often hwa', , occurs immediately before P. Thus, /ø mip/ ] do not enjoy' (N + P), /mɔŋ ø mip/ '[I] am not good health, am not well' (A + N + P).

Other auxiliaries, which may also function as dicates, are: ā /a:/ 'to go' (e.g., prāp ā a:p a:/ 'to approach + to go, = to go', uit ā /ɔ:t 'all + to go, = exhausted'); ŋā /na:/ 'to take y' (e.g., yuik ŋā /jɔ:k na:/ 'to carry + to take y, = to carry, as a child in the arms'); tuai ui/ 'to succeed' (e.g., wiwiñ tuai /wiwiñ tɔui/ be dazed + to succeed, = to be stupid'); damañ imouŋ/ 'to remain' (e.g., tim damañ /teim nouŋ/ 'to know + to remain, = to know'); law /lɔ:/



'to put' (e.g., kanham law /kənoum lɔ:/ 'to make + to place, = to accomplish'); kuiw /kɔ:/ 'to give' (e.g., gah kuiw /kə? kɔ:/ 'to speak + to give, = to tell, say to'); and kle' /klə?/ 'to leave' (e.g., gacuit kle' /həcɔ:t klə?/ 'to kill + to leave, = to kill').

Considering the great influence of Mon as a language of religion throughout western Southeast Asia, it is worth noting that such auxiliaries are found in Old Mon both of the inscriptions and of the palm-leaf manuscripts. Of particular interest is dah, which marks necessity ('must') when occurring before the predicate but inadvertence or error when occurring after the predicate (Duroiselle 1921: 182).

Note finally that a good many words function now as adjectives, now as nouns. We have already encountered manih brau /mni? preə/ 'person + female, = woman'; we may also encounter brau kyew /preə ce/ 'pretty woman'. Similarly, bamā /həmei/ 'a Burmese' but lik bamā /louit həmei/ 'Burmese book'.

## *The Sentence*

### *The Simple Sentence*

Generally speaking, the Mon sentence consists of two syntagms, a nominal syntagm preceding a verbal syntagm--that is to say, the "condition of state or action" followed by the actual, possible, imaginary or moral result. Determinatives normally follow their headwords. The simple declarative sentence hence conforms to the following pattern:

ko 'ai ā wa baŋa ra /kɔu ?uə a: wei ŋei ra:/  
 'elder-brother + first person + to go + open-space  
 + ricefields + assertive marker, = my elder brother  
 went to the farm'. In this case the assertive

er connotes completed action and thus a past  
ect.

mbai 'ai dadaḥ ā cā bhā ra /bouə ʔuə teitɔ:n a:  
phei ra/ 'elder-sister + first person + being + to  
+ chief + school + assertive marker, = my elder  
ter is a school teacher'. The form dadaḥ /teitɔ:n/  
a quasi-prefix indicating state, while cā /ʔa:/, no  
ot under the influence of Burmese charā /saja:/  
pert', functions as a classifier.

jwā 'ai ā swā sat khyā padai kwān paṅa ra /hwei  
a: sʌ sout kjə pəduə kwa:n paŋa ra/ 'intimate-  
end + first person + to go + to sell + fruit +  
ay-chestnut + in/at + village + proper name +  
ertive marker, = my intimate friend went to sell  
ay chestnuts in Panga village'. The form padai  
duə ~ həduə/ is usually the first member of a  
positional group, of which there are eight in all.

mbai 'ai kwā damaṅ ka padai sakai kamā ra /bouə  
hwə təmo:n kə pəduə səkouə kəma: ra/ 'elder-  
ter + first person + preverbal + to dwell + to  
h + in/at + edge + pond + assertive marker, = my  
er sister is fishing at the edge of the pond'.  
form kwā /hwə/ indicates that the action is vol-  
ary or deliberate, while damaṅ /təmo:n/ 'to dwell,  
ain' marks the durative aspect.

### *Simple Imperative Sentence.*

Imperative constructions follow the same  
tern as declaratives, but are punctuated by a  
ninal marker such as a pressing expression of  
iteness freely translatable as "please."

sañu pakuiw hnuT sadi rai ā ni /həu pəko:  
 nei: sədi: rʌ a: nji/ 'husked-rice + let-spill +  
 over/upon + cushion + preverbal + to go + please-  
 not, = don't let the rice spill on the cushion'.  
 Here rai /rʌ/ has the same function as kwā /hwə/  
 in the last sentence above--that is to say, it  
 indicates that the action of ā /a:/ 'to go' is  
 deliberate. The form ni /nji/ means literally 'to  
 be small or few' (cf. /nji-nji/ 'a very small  
 quantity, a bit'), and used to be used in formal  
 solemn styles of utterance as a supplicatory  
 particle.

### *The Simple Interrogative Sentence*

Interrogative constructions likewise follow  
 essentially the same pattern as declaratives. We  
 have already seen one example. Another is

rai tamña ā padai hlā hā /rʌ tɛŋa: a: pəduə  
 hla: ha:/ 'collectivity + fisherman + to go + to/at  
 + lake + interrogation marker, = are the fishermen  
 going to the lake?' Here rai /rʌ/ is a pluralizer  
 with the lexical meaning 'race, tribe'.

### *Distribution in Time and Space*

#### *Time*

gakū wwa' prāthā klā gakū puai nim /keikəu  
 wo? pra:tha: kla: keikəu pʌ naim/ 'race + this +  
 to appear + before + race + first person plural  
 + still/yet, = this people developed earlier  
 than our people'. The deictic wwa' /wo?/ often  
 seems to be used as a subject marker; nim /naim/,  
 as Shorto (1962: 127) indicates, is always final  
 except when /ra:o ~ ro/ or /ha:/ (vid. note 4) is  
 present.

sañi puai kuiw sañi phyā khrā pT sañi ra  
 pΛ kɔ: hɔə phja: khra: paɪ? hɔə ra/ 'house +  
 person plural + with + (house + market =) shop  
 separate + three + house + assertion marker, =  
 there are three houses between our house and the  
 'house'.

### *Condition*

It is useful to distinguish three types of condition, each exhibiting different structures having different denotations.

#### *Factual Condition*

Factual conditions are clauses using an equivalent of 'if' but predicating a reality (as in *si* + present tense + future: *S'il vient, lui parlerai*). The pattern in Mon is: statement of the reality + 'if', followed by the consequence and the assertion marker.

mbT kadā magah ā kuiw kwi loai swā ra /bi: kɔda: ei?, a: kɔ: kwi: lΛ hwa: ra/ 'sea + shallow + to go + with + cart + to be easy + to be (sic) + assertion marker, = if the sea is low, it is easy to go by cart'. The expression swā /lΛ hwa:/ is another example of generalization. The form magah /meikei?/ consists of the prefixal prefix ma /mei/ and gah /kei?/ 'to say, say', and has the lexical meaning of 'as concerning'.

#### *Hypothetical Condition*

Hypothetical conditions are clauses in which the assumption is not certain to materialize. Fictive hypothetical conditions are those followed

by a concrete consequence. The pattern is: statement of the assumption + 'if', followed by the consequence + future marker.

kyāmbi khyT magah dah ā wā roñ /kja:bi: čhi: meikei? tei? a: wei roŋ/ 'wind-sea + to move + if + to be right + to go + field + future marker, = if the sea-breeze blows, we must go to the farm'. Before another verb, dah /tei?/ 'to be right, proper' expresses obligation.

### *Abstract Hypothetical Condition*

Abstract hypothetical conditions are similar to the preceding type except that their consequence is non-concrete and often involves a moral or religious abstraction. Moreover, the pattern of such conditions is more complex: instead of an 'if' in clause-final position it uses negation. This may be formulated as: statement of the assumption + negation of the assumption, followed by the consequence + future marker.

pwa wwa' rai sapa mañi rai dah gwa roñ /pəwa wo? rʌ həpa mnei? rʌ, tei? kwei roŋ/ 'deed + this + preverbal + to do + without + intention + to be right + to be ashamed + future marker, = if you do this you should be ashamed'.

### *The Consequence*

As can be seen from the foregoing examples, the statement of the consequence follows the simple declarative pattern:

huTm kuiw bhaiparai hwā hmārā ra /hɔ:m kɔ: ʌpəroə hʌ hma:ra? ra/ 'to speak + with + to respect + not + to err + assertion marker, = if you talk with care there is no mistake'.

The structure of causal expressions is quite simple: 'because (of) + statement of the object, followed by consequence + assertion marker. Verbal and nominal clauses are distinguished as follows:

/hɔ:t/ + verb = 'because', huit nū /hɔ:t nu:/ + noun = 'because of'. Thus:

huit gwa nan gwi hwā dah̩ byi ra /hɔ:t kwei neiəŋ  
, ha̩ tei? pji? ra/ 'because + to obtain + to bring  
snapping turtle + not + to be right + to blame +  
assertion marker, = one is not to be blamed because  
one carries a snapping turtle'.

huit nū gyi gagi 'ai khyt̩ hwā gwa ra /hɔ:t nu:  
kəki?, ʔuə ʔchi: ha̩ kwei ra/ 'because + from +  
I + centipede + first person + to move + not +  
to obtain + assertion marker, = I could not move  
because of the poison of the centipede'.

In the same way,

damā nū samū masa mi wuit ā ra /teimeɪ nu: həməu  
, mi? wot a: ra/ 'because + from + smell + smell  
together + to faint + to go + assertion marker, =  
because of the bad smell, mother fainted'.

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<sup>1</sup>In addition to an anonymous old curio entitled *Journal de la Mission de Pégouans*, see in particular F. Mason, "The Talaing Language," in *JAOS*, 4 (1854): 277-88; Haswell, *Grammatical Notes and Vocabulary of the Mon Language*. Reprint by Edward O. Stevens (Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press, 1901); R. Halliday, *The Talaings* (Rangoon: Superintendent of Government Printing & Stationery, 1917), 28; R. Halliday, *A Mon-English Dictionary* (Rangoon: The Siam Society, 1922), vii-xxix; *New Mon Language* [in Mon], books 1-5 (Rangoon: All Ramannya Mon Language Association, 1955); L.F. Taylor, "The General Classification of Languages Spoken in Burma," in *JBRSL*, 1 (1956).1:101-20; H.L. Shorto, *A Dictionary of Mon Spoken Mon* (London: Oxford University Press, 1957), xii; and H.L. Shorto, *A Dictionary of the Mon*

*Inscriptions from the Sixth to the Sixteenth Centuries* (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), xxi-xxv.

<sup>2</sup>Let us note that, as with many other languages the written form represents in a more or less adequate form, the spoken language, and besides, is always, in relation to the latter, somewhat behind (the time-lag factor) (see Halliday 1917: 123).

<sup>3</sup>See Shorto 1971: xxii-iv.

<sup>4</sup>The interrogative terminal /ha:/ may be replaced by interrogative intonation on the preceding word or by ro /ro ~ ra:o/. The latter calls for a yes or no answer, and is the basis for discrimination "ro Mon" from "ra:o Mon." In asking permission the terminal ko' /go?/ or mān /ma:n/ is used.

<sup>5</sup>The final /ra:/ may also connote insistence on the imperative, and is not obligatory as is Burmese /ðε/.

1. The most common type of question is the "yes-no" question. In the written form, the question is usually written in the affirmative form, the spoken language, and besides, it is always, and before the question, the speaker usually says "yes" or "no" (the time-lag factor) (see Halliday 1961: 133).

2. See Shorro 1971: xii-iv.

3. The interrogative form is usually used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form. The latter calls for a word or no answer, and is the basis for the affirmative form. In asking permission the term "yes" is used.

4. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.

5. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.

6. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.

7. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.

8. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.

9. The final form may also be used in the affirmative form, and is not obligatory in the affirmative form.