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. 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 a written as well as a spoken language for some twelve centuries and that there has been constant interaction between the two modes of expression. This circumstance helps to explain certain contradictions between them.

A tendency toward monosyllabicism 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 rewritten as native Mon forms. One result of this assimilation was the appearance of geminate consonants.
tools not found in the original loans. For example,

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
<th>Old Mon</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>yogā 'conjunction'</td>
<td>ussāyogga 'auspicious conjunction of planets'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>īrnātīthi 'lunar day'</td>
<td>punnatīthi 'lunar day'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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

**Syntactic Function of Affixes**

**Prefixation**

The formation of nouns from verbs, with the forming of abstractions, is shown by the following:

- ām /kēm/ 'to step' >  laqām /lēkēm/ 'step'
- uim /?a:m/ 'to speak' >  lahuim /lēʔa:m/ 'speech'
- a̞h /iʔeʔ/ 'to shine' >  laya̞h /lēiʔeʔ/ 'light'

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

- aniy /bənɔi:/ 'to trade' >  naḥ baniy /nje bənɔi:/ 'merchant'
- ai /jowe/ 'to be sick' >  daddun yai /tɛlto: jowe/ 'sickness'
- ru /pru? 'to make noise' >  dama bru /dam pruʔ/ 'noise'

Factivitives are formed from verbal bases with
prefix /ph-/ , among others. The following examples show transformation of the palatal initial of the base:

/čeʔ/ 'to descend'  >  /phjɛʔ/ 'to let fall drop'
/čon/ 'to be soiled'  >  /phjɒɔ/ 'to dye'

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

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

/klaiŋ/ 'to be much'  >  /pouɘ mei klaiŋ/ 'in quantity'
/jout/ 'to diminish'  >  /pouɘ 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 /mniʔ kəɘ/ 'man' and manih brau /mniʔ preə/ 'woman' (manih < Pāli manussa).

The qualifier for 'female animal' is mboʔ /buʔ/ while that for 'male animal' is kmak /meik/. Thus

glau mboʔ /kelee̊ buʔ/ 'cow'
glau /kelee̊/ 'cattle'  >  glau kmak /kelee̊ meik/ 'bull'
Attributive to human referants, mbo' /buʔ/ usually distinguishes an age group, *e.g., manih o' /mniʔ buʔ/ 'man of mature age'. As a headword it denotes "the main component of a complex object" (Morto 1962: 164), as in mbo' padai /buʔ pəduʔ ə həʔ/ 'inner room of the Mon house; principal room'.

Fixation

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-/ or /-e-/. 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 /pəloit/ (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 /həluʔ/ '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-/, 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:**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{klat} /k\l\o:\text{t}/ & \to \text{ kamlat} /k\o:\l\o:\text{t}/ \\
& \quad \text{ 'steal'} \\
\text{ghacuit} /\h\e:\c:\i\o:\text{t}/ & \to \text{ ghamcuit} /\k\o:\m\c:\i\o:\text{t}/ \\
& \quad \text{ 'to kill'} \\
\text{Old Mon kalon} 'to' & \to \text{ kamlon} 'work' \\
& \text{ 'work'}
\end{align*}
\]

(2) **Formation of resultatives from verbs:**

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{tuiw} /\text{towi}/ & \to \text{ tmuiw} /\text{t\o\m\o\i}/ \\
& \quad \text{ 'to level'} \\
& \quad \text{ 'to overflow'}
\end{align*}
\]

To mark unspecified number Mon uses the attributive forms \(\text{taa'} /t\o?/\) (cf. Burmese \(\text{tui'} /t\o/\) and \(\text{khamluin} /\o\m\l\a\i\n/\)). For example: \(\text{manih taa'} /\o\m\i? t\o?/ = \text{manih khamluin} /\o\m\i? \o\m\l\a\i\n/ \text{'persons}\)

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,

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{pre\dn-glau} /\text{pra\e\n kl\e\i\o}/ & \text{ 'buffalo + ox, = any animal'} \\
\text{cin-khtek} /\text{co\u\i\n \c\he\i?}/ & \text{ 'elephant + horse, = any animal'} \\
\text{kmin-kla} /\text{\a\m\e\i\m\ k\l\a}/ & \text{ 'bear + tiger, = any wild animal'} \\
\text{\dun-rah} /\text{\dun rei?}/ & \text{ 'town + country, = country'} \\
\text{\nh\a\n \dun rah} /\text{njei? \dun rei?}/ & \text{ 'inhabitants of the country'}
\end{align*}
\]
duŋ-khwān /duŋ kwaːn/ 'town + village, = communities'

ñah duŋ khwān /njel? duŋ kwaːn/ 'inhabitants of communities'

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

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

Classifiers

There are few classifiers in Mon. The choice 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:

tuăn panah mwai tuăn /tənow mənow tənow/ 'tree + jackfruit + one + tree, = one jackfruit tree'

kau dakah pi daŋ /kau teik pai dɔŋ/ 'blossom + lotus + three + flower, = three lotus flowers'

sat brau bāma /sout pree baːmei/ '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 Pali. Not more than seven are in actual use, and these are from the stock of terms used in generalization. For example,
chu kla /'chu kla/ 'tree + tiger, = teak'
sat brau /sou t pree/ 'fruit + woman, = coconut'
tanom brau /tanoum pree/ '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 /tei noup mwou e chau/ 'shoe +
one + pair, = two shoes'
glau mwai tanow /kle:ɔ mwou e tenou/ 'cattle +
one + relationship, = two head of cattle'

One member of a pair is expressed as mwai duih
/mwou e tɔ/?/ '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 m̩p mɔŋ ha:/ = 'How do you do?' or 'How are you?'

The Mon in question would probably answer,

/mɔŋ m̩p mɔŋ ra:/ = 'I am well' or 'I'm fine'.

However, the first speaker could also say, (1)
/mɔŋ m̩p mɔŋ ha:/, (2) mɔŋ m̩p ha:/, or (3) /mɔŋ
stressing the rising intonation of /mip/. And a second speaker could also say, (1) /məŋ mip məŋ/, (2) /məŋ mip ra/, (3) /məŋ mip məŋ/, or even /mip mip/, or (5), more simply, /mip/. In short, p/ 'to enjoy' (e.g., /ci mip/ 'to eat with enjoy-t, = enjoy one's food') proves to be the only ble element in these utterances. The other elements are /məŋ/ 'to stay, remain', /ha:/ interrogative particle', 4 and /ra/ 'final assertion ker'. 5 The construct /məŋ mip/ means 'to be in health', while /məŋ mip məŋ/ means 'to remain good health'. Placed before the predicate, /məŋ/ 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 n mip/ '[I] am in good health' = an auxiliary + P, and /məŋ mip məŋ/ '[I] remain in good lth, am well' = A₁ + P + A₂. In the same way, :n/ 'to win' > /mə:n məŋ/ 'to keep (on) winning' + A₂.

Note that the negation marker, most often hwa', occurs immediately before P. Thus, /ϕ mip/ ] do not enjoy' (N + P), /məŋ ϕ 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., prəp ā a:p a:/ 'to approach + to go, = to go', uit ā /c:t 'all + to go, = exhausted'); ̄nā /nā:/ 'to take y' (e.g., yuik ̄nā /jo:k nā:/ 'to carry + to take y, = to carry, as a child in the arms'); tuai ̄ui/ 'to succeed' (e.g., wiwɨn tuai /wiwɨn tuui/ be dazed + to succeed, = to be stupid'); da mâ h ̄mouŋ/ 'to remain' (e.g., tim da mâ /teim nouŋ/ 'to know + to remain, = to know'); law /lo:/
'to put' (e.g., kanham law /kənəum lə:/ 'to make + to place, = to accomplish'); kuiw /kə:/ 'to give' (e.g., gah kuiw /kə? kə:/ 'to speak + to give, = to tell, say to'); and klu' /klu?/ 'to leave' (e.g., gacuit klu' /həcə:t klu?/ '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 /mniʔ prəʔ/ 'person + female, = woman'; we may also encounter brau kyew /prəʔ cəʔ/ 'pretty woman'. Similarly, bamā /həmei/ 'a Burmese', but lik bamā /louʔ həmei/ 'Burmese book'.

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 a wa baña ra /kəu ?uə aː: wəl əəi raː/ 'elder-brother + first person + to go + open-space + ricefields + assertive marker, = my elder brother went to the farm'. In this case the assertive
ker connotes completed action and thus a past aspect.

mbai 'ai dadaŋ ǝ cǝ bhǝ ra /boue ñe teito:n a:
 phe: ra/ 'elder-sister + first person + being + to + chief + school + assertive marker, = my elder
 sister is a school teacher'. The form dadaŋ /teito:n/
 a quasi-prefix indicating state, while cǝ /ča:/, not under the influence of Burmese chara /saja:/
 pert', functions as a classifier.

jwā 'ai ǝ swa sat khya padai kwān paŋa ra /hwei
 a: sɬ sout kje pəduə kwa:n paŋa ra/ 'intimate-
 end + first person + to go + to sell + fruit +
 ay-chestnut + in/at + village + proper name +
 assertive marker, = my intimate friend went to sell
 ay chestnuts in Panga village'. The form padai
due: ~ heduə/ is usually the first member of a
 positional group, of which there are eight in all.

mbai 'ai kwā damaŋ ka padai sakai kamā ra /boue
 hwe tǝm:ǝ n ke pəduə səkoure kama: ra/ 'elder-
 sister + 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 /hwǝ/ indicates that the action is vol-
 tary or deliberate, while damaŋ /tǝm:ǝ n/ 'to dwell,
 ain' marks the durative aspect.

Simple Imperative Sentence.

Imperative constructions follow the same
 pattern as declaratives, but are punctuated by a
 minal marker such as a presssing expression of
iteness freely translatable as "please."
sānu pākuw hnuT sādi rai ā ni /hēu pāko:
nei: sādi: rA 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 /rA/ has the same function as kwā /hwē/
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 tamāa ā padai hīā hā /rA tena: a: pedue
hīa: ha:/ 'collectivity + fisherman + to go + to/at
+ lake + interrogation marker, = are the fishermen
going to the lake?' Here rai /rA/ is a pluralizer
with the lexical meaning 'race, tribe'.

Distribution in Time and Space

Time

gakū wwa' prātha kīā gakū puai nīm /keikēu
wo? pra:tha: kīa: keikēu pē 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; nīm /naim/,
as Shorto (1962: 127) indicates, is always final
except when /rā:o ~ ro/ or /hā:/ (vid. note 4) is
present.
person plural + with + (house + market =) shop + separate + three + house + assertion marker, =
are three houses between our house and the
'.

**Condition**

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

**Actual Condition**

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

mbT kadə magah a kuïw kwi loai swə ra /bi: keda:
ei?, a: kɔ: kwi: lə 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
swə /lə hwa:/ is another example of general-
don. The form magah /mei kei?/ consists of the
icipial prefix ma /mei/ and gah /kei?/ 'to
k, say', and has the lexical meaning of 'as
concerning'.

**Hypothetical Condition**

Hypothetical conditions are clauses in which
assumption is not certain to materialize.
Hypothetical conditions are those followed
by a concrete consequence. The pattern is: statement of the assumption + 'if', followed by the consequence + future marker.

kyâmbi khyT magah daḥ ā wā roṇ /kjaːbiː čhiː meikei? teiʔ aː 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, daḥ /teiʔ/ '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 wwaʔ rai sapa maŋi rai daḥ gwa roṇ /pēwa woʔ rə hapa mneiʔ rə, teiʔ 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 kuː bhaiparai hwā hmāra ra /hoːm koː ḳəɾəɾə ho hmaːraʔ ra/ 'to speak + with + to respect + not + to err + assertion marker, = if you talk with care there is no mistake'.

Causal Constructions

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

/hoːt/ + verb = 'because', huit nū /hoːt nu:/ un = 'because of'. Thus:

huit gwa nan gwi hwā daŋ byi ra /hoːt kwei neiŋ, ha tei? pji? ra/ 'because + to obtain + to bring
applying turtle + not + to be right + to blame + assertion marker, = one is not to be blamed because
arrives a snapping turtle'.

huit nū gyi gagi 'ai khī hwię gwa ra /hoːt nu: kωki?, ?uə čhi: ha kwei ra/ 'because + from +
on + centipede + first person + to move + not +
take + assertion marker, = I could not move
use of the poison of the centipede'.

In the same way,

damā nū samū masa mi wuit a ra /teimei nu: hameu,
mi? wot a: ra/ 'because + from + smell + smell
other + to faint + to go + assertion marker, =
use of the bad smell, mother fainted'.

"In addition to an anonymous old curio entitled maire des Pégouans, see in particular F. Mason,
Talaing Language," in JAOS, 4 (1854): 277-88;
Haswell, Grammatical Notes and Vocabulary of the
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), 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.

2 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).


4 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 discriminating "ro Mon" from "ra:o Mon." In asking permission the terminal ko' /go?/ or mān /ma:n/ is used.

5 The final /ra:/ may also connote insistence or the imperative, and is not obligatory as is Burmese /δɛ/.