Mon *raʔ* and *noy*: Assertive particles?

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Abstract
The two Mon clause particles *raʔ* and *noy* have both been described by most authors as expressing assertion, sometimes with a temporal, modal or aspectual connotation. They are widely seen to be mutually exclusive, occupying the same syntactic slot in clause final position.

In this paper a closer look is taken at the two morphemes and their functions and distribution. One of them, *raʔ*, is shown not to be an assertive marker, as it occurs in clearly non-assertive contexts such as interrogatives and imperatives. The author analyses *raʔ* as a marker of focus (wide or narrow), which can be used to mark whole predicates, verbal and nominal, or parts of them. In some contexts temporal connotations have arisen, partly due to areal influence.

The other morpheme discussed here, *noy*, is seen as an assertive marker which has developed modal (assumptive) and temporal (future) connotations or implicatures in some contexts, again under areal influence from strong neighbouring languages.

The data used to show the historical and functional development of the two particles are drawn from a wide range of sources, including Old Mon and Middle Mon as well as the modern literary and spoken languages.

1. Background studies

The two Mon particles *raʔ* and *noy* deserve detailed investigation. Earlier descriptions of Mon mostly analyse the two as assertive markers, usually assigning a past/present notion to *raʔ* and future or “limited assertion” to *noy*. Of the two, *raʔ* occurs more frequently, as it can stand in virtually any sentence in clause (or phrase) final position. The use of *noy* is more restricted, as we will see. First I will give an overview of earlier treatments of the two particles under discussion here and then turn to some theoretical considerations and definitions. When quoting other authors, the spelling of the original sources is retained.\(^1\)

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*This paper is part of a research project sponsored by Zurich University from 2001-2004. It is adapted from a chapter of the resulting study on the verb system of Mon by the author (Jenny 2005), where full reference of sources (literary and spoken) can be found.

\(^1\)In my own examples, I use a standardised phonemic transcription of spoken Mon as outlined in Jenny (2005:33ff) and a transliteration according to common usage in Southeast Asian linguistics for written sources. For Burmese, the transcription used by Okell (1969) is applied here, with minor adaptations.
(1) ra?

Haswell (1901/2002):

*2. Verbal Affixes. (a) Assertive Affixes.* [...] «ra» as an assertive affix, when combined with «tuy», always follows it, when combined with «hā» in the direct question, it stands before it [...] It sometimes adds strength to the verb [...] (implying past recall).

*(c) Imperative Affixes.* [...] «ra» is used [in] the imperative when the speaker assumes superiority over the person addressed.

*(g) Closing Affixes.* «ra» is often used simply to close a sentence. It seems also to supply the place of the verb to be in predicking a quality. (pp. 29ff)

Halliday (1955):

*Accidents of Verbs.* The accidents of verbs are expressed by words coming before or going after, sometimes called prefixes and affixes. [...] *Affixes* [...] Ra, assertive; emphatic; imperative. (p. xx-xxi)

Ra v.a. [verbal affix] assertive, closing the sentence, in questions it preceeds [sic!] the interrogative particle, also used with the imperative. (p.377)

Shorto (1962):

> ra’ ps. [sentence particle] *Particle of unqualified assertion.* [...] In emphatic use sometimes follows word or phrase in initial prominence position. (p. 175)

Shorto (1971):

> da’, rarely da’ ps. & ns. *Predicative particle,* (1) in verbal sents., perfective, usy. final. [...] (2) in nominal sents., usy. followed by attr p. [...] (3) otherwise following n., emphatic. [...] Perh. orig. w[eak] f[orm] /da/ of das ‘to be’, the modern vocalism developing under (secondary) stress in final posn. (p. 184f)

(2) noŋ

Haswell (1901/2002):

«roŋ» v.a. of the future tense. (p. 348)
Frequently the future is shown only by the connection [...] It is also denoted by «roŋ». (p.28)

«roŋ» is sometimes merely assertive. (p. 30)

Halliday (1955):

*Nong,* adv. certainly. *Oa à nong,* I shall certainly go. (p. 179)

*Rong,* v.a. of the future tense, assertive, emphatic. (p. 384)

Shorto (1962):

noŋ *ps. Particle of future, inferential or limited assertion.* [roŋ, ńoŋ] (p. 129)
Shorto (1971):

*rwōn*, rarely *rōn* /rōn/ ps. (MM.) particle closing (esp. final cl. of complex) sent., marking sequential, consequential, or inferential character of assertion; such a cl. is usu. nominalized by the inclusion of *ma*. (p. 326)

Bauer (1982) lists *ra* and *noŋ* as “Group-I sentence particles”, together with the “completive-perfect” marker *tɔɔ* ‘FINISH’:

This group comprises modal and tense particles, *ra*, *noŋ*, and *tɔɔ*. *noŋ* and *tɔɔ* might be interpreted both as tense particles, future and past respectively, but *ra* may co-occur only with *tɔɔ* and not with *noŋ* (with which it commutes in its position). Although *noŋ* conveys the idea of future events or actions (and this is one of the reasons why it does not collocate with *tɔɔ*), its scope is similar to Khmer *nɔŋ* (no cognate!) in that it includes eventuality or hypothetical events as well (“would, might”). [...] A further reason for linking *ra* and *noŋ* to the same set is that both cannot co-occur with the negative particle *hū*, and are complementary in statements like ‘a *ra* ha ‘are you going?’- ‘a *noŋ* ‘yes, I will’. *noŋ* may not occur in relative or absolute questions. [...] *tɔɔ* and *noŋ* share the tense-designating function of past and future/hypothetical, respectively, *noŋ* and *ra* the assertive function limited/unqualified, and *tɔɔ* and ‘i’ combined with *ra* an aspectual colouring ‘perfective’. [...] *ra* assigns an assertive, unqualified value to a statement, and it is very difficult to render in(to) English; [...] It may also have an aspectual colouring, *nài nɔŋ* ‘a dɔɔi ra’ ‘Nai Nop has gone to town’, *nài nɔŋ* ‘a dɔɔi ‘Nai Nop is going/is about to go to town’. [...] That *ra* and *noŋ* are exclusively marking aspects can be seen in the behaviour of verbal complexes: *kəŋ nɔŋ nù lè phun* ‘he has arrived from Lamphun’ [...] *kəŋ nɔŋ nù lè phun ra* ‘he has just arrived ...’, *kəŋ nɔŋ nù lè phun i’ra* ‘???, *kəŋ nɔŋ nù lè phun tɔɔ* ‘he arrived from Lamphun’. The perfective meaning of the arrival is marked in all cases rather by the second position-verb *nɔŋ* than by the particle *ra*; only where *tɔɔ* occurs, *ra* marks it as an aspectual sequence. *tɔɔ* and ‘i’ may not co-occur. [...] *ra* cannot fulfill a hortatory function which, in Burma, is *ji*’ (and also sentence-final in position). (pp. 435ff)

In the Mon grammar sketch of his *Mun-Myanma Abhidhan*, Htun Thein (1980) in most cases uses Burmese *thi* (i.e. the literary variant of colloquial *te* ‘NON-FUTURE-REALIS’, s. Okell 1969:424ff) to translate Mon *ra*, though he leaves it untranslated in some sentences while in others Burmese *thi* is present where Mon has no sentence final particle. Mon *rōn* is consistently rendered in Burmese as *léin myi*, which according to the *Myanmar-English Dictionary* is a “postpositional marker suffixed to verbs to indicate probable future occurrence (equivalent in usage to auxiliary verb ‘will’)” (Myanmar
me/léin-myi as “probably will V, possibly will V, will no doubt V; will V
imminently”. The Myanmar Pocket Dictionary (Myanmar Language
Commission 1999:242,301) explains both myi and léin as “postverbal future
tense markers” (ānaga’ kalā pyä kāriya nau’ hse’ sākā lōun). Other ways to
express the same notion in Mon are according to Htun Thein (1980:12)
preverbal 〈krak〉 and 〈s-〉, which may not co-occur with 〈roñ〉, but only with 〈ra〉.

Most authors agree that ra? is an assertive marker in Mon. The
definition of an ‘assertive illocutionary point’ as given by Searle and
Vanderveken (1985:37) is the following:2

The assertive point is to say how things are. More cumbersomely but
more accurately, in utterances with assertive points the speaker presents a
proposition as representing an actual state of affairs in the world of the
utterance.

In other words, a sentence marked as assertive can be paraphrased by
‘x states that it is true that SENTENCE’. Van Valin (2001:321) distinguishes
between “assertions (statements), interrogatives (questions) and imperatives
(commands)”. As can already be seen from some of the translations/functions
given by earlier authors, Mon ra? does not fit into this definition of an
assertive marker. As such it should not occur in interrogative or imperative
contexts, both of which are common functions of ra? in SM.

On the other hand, if nøy was to be analysed as a ‘future tense
marker’, as some earlier authors suggest, we would expect it to be
incompatible with present and past reference (except for relative future in the
past), which is not the case. While nøy occurs in present and past contexts, it is
incompatible with interrogative and imperative contexts, which makes an
analysis as assertive marker at least possible. Both points will be elaborated
below.

2. Historical development

Both ra? and nøy are the result of irregular developments from
OM/MM.3 The regular modern reflex of OM 〈da〉 would be *tè?, a form that is
not attested anywhere in modern Mon. For MM 〈rwoñ/roñ〉, one would expect a
form *rơñ in SM, again not attested in the dialects. The shift from OM 〈d〉 to
SM r has no parallel, while OM/MM 〈n-〉 > modern 〈n-〉 is also found in the
causative directional OM 〈rañ〉, LM 〈nañ〉 ‘(bring) hither’.4 The light register
value of both forms is irregular, too, as OM and MM show voiced initials in
both cases, which regularly give rise to heavy register in SM. In LM, ra? is
written 〈ra〉, nøy is usually spelt 〈roñ〉. The more phonetic spelling 〈poñ〉 is
becoming more popular in modern texts, though. Halliday, who first published
his dictionary in 1922, lists rong and nong as different words, as does Tun

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2For a more recent and detailed discussion of the notion of ‘assertion’ s. Palmer 2001.
3OM = Old Mon, MM = Middle Mon, LM = Literary Mon, SM = Spoken Mon.
4The shift from t > d > r is found in colloquial Burmese in intervocalic position.
In the first known Mon inscriptions, dating back to the 6th and 7th centuries, in Thailand, the word ‘da’ does not occur. This may be a coincidence, as the oldest Dvāravatī Mon inscriptions are rather short and not very numerous. The text of the Lopburi inscription shows complete sentences, though, which could, and probably would, end in ‘da’ in later OM. The oldest inscriptions of Thaton (the Trāp and Paṇḍit inscriptions, 11th c.), which were possibly written before the Burmese invasion of Thaton, equally do not make use of ‘da’. That no trace of ‘da’ is found in the earliest inscriptions is of some importance, as these texts are the only ones in which Burmese influence can be excluded.

Shorto (1971:185) states that OM ‘da’ is perhaps a weak form of the verb ‘das’ ‘to be’. There are no phonological or semantic obstacles to this etymology, especially given the fact that clauses ending with ‘da’ are usually followed by the attributive/relative marker ‘ma’ as illustrated in (1) from the Shweizigon Inscription (Pagān, 11th c.) (Hpei Maung Tin 1965).

(1) risi bismū goh kuṁ da ma skandaṁ
OM hermit Vishnu that EMPH FOC ATTR PROS:build
kom ku kuṁ.
associate OBL 2s
‘It is the hermit Vishnu who is going to build it with you.’
(‘The hermit Vishnu is [the one] who ...’)

More problematic is the syntactic structure of a sentence like (2), taken from the same inscription, if we take ‘da’ to be a weak form of ‘das’.

(2) kyāk buddha tarley ār nibbān dey dūn
OM holy Buddha lord go Nirvana LOC town
kusinār da.
Kusinara FOC
‘The Lord Buddha attained Nirvana at Kusinara.’

Being a SVO-language, the verb in Mon does not normally occur in sentence final position. If ‘da’ originates in the verb ‘das’, we have to account for its sentence-final position. According to Mon syntax we would expect in the above sentence ‘das kyāk buddha tarley...’ ‘it was that the Lord Buddha ...’ or ‘da dey dūn kusinār ...’ ‘it was as Kusinara that ...’, instead of ‘da’ in sentence final position. The sentence-final position is probably an indication that already in OM ‘da’ was not understood as verb anymore, but had developed into a particle.

Already in the Pagān inscriptions we find ‘da’ in imperative and prohibitive contexts, as in the following two examples (both from the Shweizigon Inscription) (Hpei Maung Tin 1965):

(3) smiṅ dewatau kuṁ rmiṅ da!
OM king god 2s hear FOC
‘Hear, king of gods!’
(4) laŋ sandeŋ gaŋ da!
OM PROH doubt more FOC
‘Don’t doubt anymore!’

The wide range of functions of ⟨da⟩ shows that ⟨da⟩ was grammaticalized to a large extent already in the early Pagan period.

The attested word order with final ⟨da⟩ might exhibit Burmese SOV influence. Pagan of the 11th and 12th centuries, where classical OM was at its height, was a Burmese state, although Mon retained its status as main literary language. We may expect increasing pressure on the Mon language from Burmese, which was the language of the majority. Clause-final verbs with particle function are common in modern Mon (and have been so since MM times). These particle-verbs include the (regular) modern reflex of OM ⟨das⟩, viz. təh ‘to be > be able’, as well as nım ‘to exist, be somewhere, have > have to’ and too ‘finish > perfect(ive)’.

If ra? originates in OM ⟨das⟩, it might be early evidence of a structural Burmanism in Mon. The intonational pattern of Mon is iambic, which means that stress increases towards the end of a clause or phrase. In this position the secondary strengthening of the weak form ⟨da⟩ /da/ to ra? is not uncommon. What remain to be explained are the irregular development of the initial and register, and the weakening of the particle in sentence final position in the first place.

The other particle under discussion here, noŋ, is not attested until MM. According to Bauer noŋ has taken the place of the OM aspectual prefix ⟨s⟩:

This [that noŋ includes eventuality or hypothetical events] conforms well with the historical evidence from OM and EMM [early MM] where its corresponding role was taken by the inflectional prefix ⟨s⟩ marking the hypothetical (OM /’ar/ [sic!] ‘to go’, /s’ar/ [sic!] ‘shall go’, /ket/ ‘to take’, /sket/ ‘shall take’). SM noŋ, LMM/LM /roŋ/ (LM roŋ ~ çoŋ) emerged later, taking up that function, even if LM shows still the starred [i.e. frozen] prefix ⟨s⟩ (co-occurrence of this prefix and noŋ in classical texts is still to be examined). (1982:436)

Nothing can be said at the time being about the etymology and original semantics of noŋ. It does share some characteristics with OM ⟨s⟩, but as noŋ seems to have pragmatic rather than strictly syntactic functions, comparison with evidence from OM inscriptions has to be done with care. OM ⟨s⟩ is indeed lost in modern Mon (SM as well as LM), but classical LM seems to make correct use of the prefix at least to some extent, while noŋ is already well established in the language. In SM there are other means to express future or prospective events, especially auxiliaries, which can be used together with noŋ.

As mentioned above, Mon has been influenced to some degree by Burmese and later Thai. As most Mon today are (and for centuries have been) bilingual speakers of Mon and Burmese and/or Thai, the foreign influence can
be seen not only in the vocabulary, but also on a deeper structural level. Mon *raʔ* may have been influenced by the Burmese sentence particle *te* (REALIS), the focal and aspectual particle *tó*, and the nominal predicate marker *pè* (s. Okell 1969:424ff, 441ff, 294ff; Okell and Allott 2001:94ff, 77ff, 121f). This does not mean that *raʔ* is derived from or modelled on any particular Burmese particle, but rather that the Burmese sentence structure (*‘the urge to end a clause with something’*) may have influenced the structure of Mon.

On a more concrete level, *noŋ* appears to be functionally modelled on the Burmese sentence particle *me* (IRREALIS), with which it shares many functions, and of which it is a standard translation (Okell 1969:354ff; Okell and Allott 2001:157ff). There are important differences, though, such as the incompatibility of the Burmese particle with nominal predicates, where Mon *noŋ* is common and the incompatibility of Mon *noŋ* with interrogatives.

Besides regular contact between Mon and Thai since at least the 13th century, the later Mon population in Thailand has been under linguistic pressure from their hosts for two hundred years and more. Many Thaiisms can be seen in contemporary Thai-Mon (Râman) on all levels of the language. It is not impossible therefore that the Thai aspect marker for *‘new situation’* (NSIT, s. Jenny 2001:124ff) has influenced the use of Mon *raʔ*, which today serves as standard translation of Thai *léew* ‘NSIT’ in most contexts.

3. **Modern Mon**

Let us now consider more extensive language data from modern Mon, showing the functions of *raʔ* and *noŋ*. We will see that the earlier descriptions of *raʔ* as *‘assertive’* particle cannot be sustained, nor can Bauer’s statements about the *‘aspectual colouring’* and restrictions concerning co-occurrence of *raʔ* and *noŋ* with each other and with the negative marker *hùʔ*. It will be seen that *raʔ* can be analysed as a particle marking focus.5 Where *raʔ* seems to exhibit aspectual or temporal values, this can be explained as either an implicature or as a result of influence from the dominant neighbouring languages Burmese and Thai. *noŋ* does not inherently express futurity (though this may be implicated in many contexts), but rather puts emphasis on the truth of the statement. There seems to be an undertone of uncertainty in *noŋ*, which may be an implicature rather than the primary function of the particle. Actually *noŋ* may be said to override the uncertainty of the statement. Based on the linguistic data examined, I take *noŋ* to be an assertive particle.

3.1 **The focal particle raʔ**

The focal particle *raʔ* can occur in a wide range of clauses, and it is very frequent in sentence final position. In this case, the whole predication (or core in Role and Reference Grammar terminology, s. Van Valin and LaPolla 1997) is marked as (low) focal, which may be considered the default for any utterance. The topic-deictic marker *kɔ̊h* can be used to mark a topic in fronted position or *in situ*, as in the next sentence, where it simply marks a nominal expression as known/old information.

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5See Van Valin and LaPolla 1997 for a detailed account of focus structure.
(5) mɔ̀tɔka yɔ̀tha krip mɔ̀n ?ɔtao kɔ̀h raʔ.  
SM motorcar train run STAY on.top TOP FOC  
‘Cars and trains run up there.’

This sentence was uttered talking about Japan, which the speaker describes as a big island where cars and trains are running. raʔ here marks the whole predication as FOCUS, contradicting the expectation that ‘there are no cars and trains on an island’. The focus marker in (5) has, to some degree at least, counter-expectative function.

(6) ɲua-yèh tyʔ pèh tèh tèk raʔ.  
SM tomorrow that 2 HIT beat FOC  
‘Tomorrow you’ll be beaten up.’

Sentence (6) is about a nightly excursion from the temple where the speaker was living as a temple boy. The kids are caught and the above threat is uttered by the one who found them. The sentence clearly has future time reference, as can be seen from the use of the temporal adverbial ɲua-yèh ‘tomorrow’. The use of raʔ in this context stresses the inevitability of the (future) event.

That raʔ is not inherently a marker of ‘new situation’ (at least in Burmese SM) is demonstrated in the following sentence.

(7) tɔh mɔ̀n plày raʔ lèy.  
SM be STAY young.man FOC EMPH  
‘We were (still) young men back then, that’s it.’

The speaker, a 76 year old man, talks about his life when he was still young. In this context the contrast is clearly ‘then – now’ (young man – old man), not ‘earlier – then’ (child – young man). The expression tɔh mɔ̀n plày raʔ in another context may very well be understood as ‘he has grown into a young man’, indicating a NSIT reading.

The use of raʔ in questions excludes its definition as ‘assertive particle’.

(8) lɔ̀kɔh nèh pɔkom hɛt-hɛt raʔ haʔ?  
SM then person CAUS:associate quiet-RDP FOC Q  
‘Did they assemble all quietly at that time?’

The use of raʔ here indicates narrow focus on the adverbial ‘quietly’ with a counter-expectative connotation. It is unexpected that at the time of the Burmese re-occupation (after the British and Japanese had left in 1948) the Mon could assemble without the enemy knowing about it.

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4In modern Mon and Burmese, only the 1st person pronouns make a distinction between singular and plural. I use 1s, 1pl for the first person and 2, 3 for the others. The translation depends on the context.
In negative contexts, *raʔ* often seems to have an undertone of **NSIT** (‘not anymore’). This is clearly the case in (9a) and (to a lesser degree) in (10a).

(9a) kwan poy ?ətvʔ hūʔ mû raʔ, dĕh hûm.
SM village 1pl there NEG one FOC 3 speak
‘Our village (country, home) over there does not exist anymore, they said.’

The Japanese in Monland complain about the destruction of their country by the nuclear bombs. Clearly they used to have their “village” there (in Japan) before, but at the time of utterance their home has been destroyed. *raʔ* here puts more emphasis on the statement, giving it more importance. The NSIT connotation is implicitive, although one might think of Burmese influence. The Burmese standard translation of (9a) is given below. Notice the use of the focus marker tó to mark NSIT in negative contexts.\(^7\) The proper NSIT marker *pyi* does not occur in negative contexts in colloquial Burmese (Okell 1969:385).

(9b) hou-hma tó-yé ywa mâ-hyî tó /*pyi hû, thu-tóu
B\(^8\) that-LOC 1pl-POSS village NEG-exist NSIT NEG 3-PL
pyô te.
speak REAL

(10a) dĕh hûʔ kô hâyêh raʔ.
SM 3 NEG GIVE sing FOC
‘He didn’t allow us to sing anymore.’

The translation of (10a) is natural, but it implicates that he (in this context the abbot of the temple) allowed the boys to sing before, which is not the case. True is that the boys did actually sing before they were caught, and now they cannot anymore. The Burmese translation in this case would most naturally include tó, as in (9a):

(10b) thu pêi mâ-hsou tó hû.
B 3 GIVE NEG-sing NSIT NEG

In sentence (11), taken from the historical novel about King Dhammaceti, Queen Mi Cao Pu had been abducted by the Burmese king of Pagân, and her foster son, the monk Piṭakadhara, brought her back to Pegu. They waited outside the town until everything was ready for the big reception of the queen.

This example clearly demonstrates that also in negative contexts *(ra)* has no inherent **NSIT** meaning. The presence of the persititive marker *(ni)* ‘yet’, definitely excludes a reading as ‘new situation’. Notice that in the

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\(^7\)Burmese *tó* may actually be related to Mon *raʔ*, i.e. it may be derived from or influenced by OM *da*. In connected speech, *tó* is usually pronounced *nó*, approaching the Mon form also phonetically.

\(^8\)B = Burmese
Burmese translation of this sentence the use of to is impossible, as to cannot co-occur with the persisitive marker thèi.

(11a) hwa’ lup duñ prah-prah nim ra.  
LM NEG enter town early-RDP PERS FOC

(11b) thu-tòu myòu hè-kou myan-myàn mà-win  
B 3-PL town inside-GOAL fast-RDP NEG-enter
thèi hpu. 
PERS NEG
‘They were not in a hurry to enter the town yet.’

The focus marker ra? can be used to form strong imperatives that do not allow contradiction. Sentence (12a) is from the temple boy’s narrative again. The boys are playing and the senior monk sends out another monk to call them. The use of the familiar 2nd person pronoun bë? together with ra? reinforces the urgency of the order.

(12a) ?akùn kok mò, a ra? bë? to?!  
SM monk call STAY go FOC 2fam PL
‘The monk is calling you; go now!’

The situational context of (13a) implies NSIT reading of the prohibitive. The monks were out on an extended round and the accompanying temple boys who had to carry the donations back to the temple get their share of pocket money. The speaker got only 100 Kyat and asked for more.

(13a) bë? pa? ket ra? lèy!  
SM 2fam PROH take FOC EMPH
‘Don’t take anymore!’

As the boy has already got his 100 Kyat, the meaning is clearly that he must not ask for more, not that he must not ask for money at all. In both (12b) and (13b) the Burmese translation includes to:

(12b) hpùnci hko neî te, thin-tòu thwà to lei!  
B monk call STAY REAL 2-PL go FOC EMPH

(13b) thin mà-yu né to!  
B 2 NEG-take PROH NSIT

Without verb, ra? can mark a noun/noun phrase as predicate. In the next sentence, the speaker is talking about a pagoda the Japanese built near Thanbyuzayat during the occupation of southern Burma.

(14a) kyac kòh mü? kyac hù? tém, kyac kyàpan  
SM pagoda TOP what pagoda NEG know pagoda Japan
ra?.
FOC
‘I don’t know what pagoda that was, [it was just] a Japanese pagoda.’
Sentence (14a) would be ungrammatical without ra?, as would be (15a), the answer to ‘What aeroplane was it that crashed at Ko’ Dot?’.

(15a) δεη-κya ?ηκωλ?c ra?.
SM ship-wind England FOC
‘It was an English aeroplane.’

The narrow focal function of ra? is illustrated in (16a). Having finished his story, the speaker asks if it was OK, as he didn’t know anything else to tell. Notice the use of ra? after the initial adverbial and after the verbal complex of the sentence.

(16a) ?εkhak no? ra?, lεo kε`y ra?.
SM manner this FOC tell GET FOC
‘That’s it, that’s how I can tell stories.’

The most common Burmese translations of sentences (14a) – (16a) involve the use of the particle pê, which marks nominal predicates and (restricted) focal elements (often translated as ‘just, only’):

(14b) hou hpäyà ba hpäyà lè mà-thì hpù, câpan
B that pagoda what pagoda Q NEG-know NEG Japan
hpäyà pê.
pagoda FOC

(15b) ingålei’ lei-yin pê.
B England wind-vehicle FOC

(16b) di-lou myòu pê pyò ta’ te.
B this-ADV kind FOC speak able REAL

**Summary of ra?**

Since at least the 11th century, the particle da/ra? was used in Mon in a wide range of functions. Already in the early Pagán inscriptions we encounter the particle in statements as well as imperative and prohibitive contexts. In OM, da does not seem to occur in negated sentences, a restriction that is not found in the modern language and may be due to the limited data available of earlier stages of the language. In LM and SM da is always clause/phrase final and fully stressed, usually receiving high pitch and sometimes lengthening of the vowel. Bauer (1982:438f) states that “in no instance ever does ra’ lose its final glottal stop, an important prosodic feature for the delimitation of clauses and sentences (Grenzsignal)”. The analysis of ra? as focus marker is consistent with its being in direct opposition with the topic marker kəh.7 This opposition is illustrated in sentences (15c) and (16c), in which the focus marker of the original (15a) and (16a) has been replaced by the topic marker. Notice that the replacement results in a phrase that cannot in

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7kəh is the modern reflex of the OM deictic/topic marker goh, goh ‘that, the afore mentioned’ (DMI:82f).
itself constitute a sentence. Unlike ra?, the topic marker is not usually stressed, even in sentence final position, receiving low pitch.

(15c) ɓẹŋ-kyा ʔẹŋkọlọc kòh
SM ship-wind England TOP
‘as for that English aeroplane, ...’

(16c) ʔəkhak nə? kòh lèə kə? ra?.
SM manner this TOP tell GET FOC
‘Well, I can tell stories like that.’

Besides the functions listed above, ra? appears in a few idiomatic expressions, all usually in clause initial position: yə? ra? ‘if’, bən ra? ‘though’ (usually with kɔm ɿɛy at the end of the clause), ɦətiŋh ra? ‘thus, this being the case’.

In combination with the prefix ʔə?, ra? has developed aspectual value as NSIT marker (in the form ʔəʔraʔ/yaʔ, s. Jenny 2003, 2005).

3.2 The assertive particle noy

The use of noy is much more restricted than that of ra? in the modern language, both in SM and LM. noy can mark a statement as definitive, as in (17). The speaker reinforces a statement made by his wife about the medicine of the English, which “would defeat all diseases.”

(17) həʔuy ɗɛh kɔh kɔh nɔŋ.
SM medicine 3 good STAY ASRT
‘Their medicine was definitely good.’

Clearly there is no future or irrealis connotation in this statement. The same is true for (18), with the LM spelling ɿoŋ for SM noy. The sentence is from the cover of a religious text printed in Mouleim in 1989.

(18) gakoŋ ɬamaŋdhammācariya ɬalum desa raŋ
LM association R. whole province state
man phan-phak tuy ma pɿdúiŋ buiŋ cak
Mon arrange FINISH ATTR press image machine
 tackle raŋ pɿtὶt ɿoŋ.
beats spread CAUS:EXIT ASRT
‘Compiled, printed, published and distributed by the Ramanya Dhammacariya association of Monland.’

This and similar sentences appear often on the cover of printed Mon books. One could possibly construe a prospective reading for the second part of the sentence, which temporally follows the first part ending in ɿtuy, along the lines ‘after compiling, the association will publish’, but the sentence as a whole certainly does not have future reference.

In the next sentence, habitual reading is the most natural interpretation, given the subject ‘everyone’. That the habitual is not in the
meaning of *nøy* (though it is compatible with it) is evident from the possibility of omitting *nøy* or replacing it with *ra?*. The sentence is part of the description of a beautiful but cunning young girl.

(19) ’arew cnāy kon-nāk brau ma huiān ṇā,
LM speech deceit child female ATTR speak CAUS:GO jmāp ṇāh ma miṅ pateh tau rōn.
every person ATTR hear believe STAND ASRT ‘Everyone who heard the deceitful words of that girl believed her.’

Both (18) and (19) allow an interpretation of *nøy* describing an event that follows another event, apparently giving relative temporal value to the particle. The next sentence seems to support this interpretation. The speaker describes his journey from Monland to Thailand. Here it is made explicit by the use of *tō tēh* ‘and then’ that the walking followed a prior action/event, in this case riding a boat. Clearly the absolute time reference of the utterance is past, as the speaker already is in Thailand at the time.

(20) tō tēh ?uō kwac kłyā nøy.
SM FINISH COND 1s walk COME ASRT ‘And then I walked here.’

Although *nøy* is compatible with and in some cases leads to an inference of relative future, relative tense is not part of the semantics of *nøy*. In the next example, it merely reinforces the certainty (or overrides the uncertainty) of the speaker that it really was the temple boys who had stolen and eaten his Bael fruit.

(21) kwāh phē ṭo? klōt cīō? mōn ḥāʔt nøy.
SM pupil temple PL steal eat STAY ADV:all ASRT ‘The temple boys stole and ate them all (I’m sure).’

In (22), the non-success of the intended action is not implied by the use of *nøy* but rather by the broader context. Even if *nøy* was replaced by *ra?* in the same sentence, the meaning would remain unchanged. The use of *nøy* merely emphasises the fact that the speaker did really (try to) stop the passing cars.

(22) hāʔt? ka dēh ty? nøy, ka dēh hūʔ hāʔt?
SM CAUS:stop car 3 that ASRT car 3 NEG CAUS:stop kn.
GIVE ‘We tried to stop their car, but they wouldn’t stop their car (for us).’

In connection with the preverbal modal *tēh* ‘hit; must; PASSIVE’, *nøy* is often used to reinforce the obligatory modal interpretation ‘must’, although this does not exclude the passive reading. The use of *tēh ... nøy* ‘must’ in the following sentence seems to be influenced by the parallel Burmese
construction yà me ‘must’, where the irrealis marker me is used to get the obligatory reading against yà te with realis marker ‘can, ABILITIVE’ (s. Okell 1969:456f; Okell and Allott 2001:178f).10 (23) is from the introduction of the historical novel about Dhammaceti:

(23) dâh khyû jan chak ’â gata te’ roê.  
LM HIT write compose continue GO front that ASRT ‘I do have to go on writing and composing.’

Sentence (24) reports the advice of an officer at a meeting with the Mon leaders, telling them to separate from the Burmese if they were really interested in gaining independence. The first part of the sentence shows a rare occurrence noê in a conditional context. This obvious contradiction to the analysis of noê as assertive marker remains to be explained. As it is the only instance of noê in a non-assertive context in the data, its status is not certain. Probably the conditional is superimposed on the assertion and it is to be interpreted along the line ‘if you really say that...’.

(24) lûp lê cät noê teh têh pac thô? noê.  
SM enter KEEP heart ASRT COND HIT separate THROW ASRT ‘If you are really interested, you have to separate for good.’

The co-occurrence of ra? and noê is rare, but not ungrammatical, as the following examples illustrate. In (25) the speaker is not quite sure about the correctness of his interpretation and therefore uses noê to give more weight to his statement. In sentence (26), too, a slight dubitative or assumptive undertone may be heard, which is not expressed by noê itself; noê rather serves to override this dubitative undertone.

(25) yûmû? kyêpan kôh chûn teh hûôk ra? noê. tûô  
SM name Japan TOP chûn COND big FOC ASRT Is hûyû? rdr.  
think LOOK ‘The Japanese, if they had a chûn11 attached to their names, they were important people, I think.’

(26) kyûc hûûêm lb ra? noê.  
SM monk remember KEEP FOC ASRT ‘The monk still remembers me, I’m sure/I think.’

With nominal predicates, the function of noê seems to be very close to that of ra?. The only difference is that it perhaps puts more emphasis on the (asserted) truth of the statement. (27) is the answer to the question whether it was the Japanese guards who scattered the rice of the English prisoners.

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10 There is some dialectal variation as to the use of REALIS vs. IRREALIS markers for abilitive and obligatory readings respectively. The correlation seems to be more consistent in southern Burma than in other regions.

11 It is not clear which Japanese word the speaker is talking about. Having only learnt a few words and expressions during the Japanese occupation over fifty years ago, his knowledge of Japanese is far from perfect. Probably he is referring to the suffix 様 -san ‘Mr., Mrs., Ms.’.
(27) haʔeʔ, hēʔ kōh ʔẹŋkəlōc noŋ.
SM no PREF TOP English ASRT
‘No, it was the English (themselves who did it).’

In (28) the speaker is talking about a man who remained in Monland after the war. The previous assertion was that there was a Japanese man still living in the area.

(28) kryk noŋ, ʔey ʔiʔkōh kōh.
SM Chinese ASRT eh NML:TOP TOP
‘That is a Chinese (not a Japanese), that one.’

Apparently noŋ is incompatible with imperative and interrogative contexts, adding weight to its analysis as assertive marker.

There are a few instances in the data of noŋ in negated sentences, e.g. in the MM Shwedagon inscription (Lu Hpei Win 1958). The passage is not very clear and the reading less than sure. The general context has past tense reference, speaking of monks in former times when they did not receive any alms on their rounds.

(29) ñañ ma kuiw dān ha-mwoy rwɔjñ.
MM person ATTR give donation NEG-one ASRT
‘There was no one to give donations.’

Other examples of noŋ in negated contexts are (30) and (31), both taken from a Mon newspaper published in 2002.

(30) mu katuiw dah ku ñañ taʔ ro gah puiy hwaʔ gwaʔ
LM what arise be OBL person PL Q TOP 1pl NEG GET
tíṃ ket khyuit-pluit roñ.
know TAKE certainly ASRT
‘We cannot ourselves know for sure what happened to them.’

(31) yaw ra smān kon ñuŋ yūrop taʔ man gah mu
LM if FOC ask child county Europe PL Mon TOP what
ro mgaŋ ñañ hwaʔ tíṃ roñ.
Q ATTR:SAY person PL NEG know ASRT
‘If you ask Europeans “What are the Mon?” they don’t know it.’

The use of noŋ in negated sentences in SM is illustrated in (32), a spontaneous statement of the abbot of a monastery at the Thai-Burmese border about a rope he just made out of a plastic bag to carry heavy bunches of bananas. Reverend Mahe is obviously very certain about the strength of his rope (and equally proud of it) and his statement is an answer to doubtful looks from the person who received the bananas.

(32) dëh hūʔ pnt noŋ.
SM 3 NEG break ASRT
‘It is not going to break for sure!’
The use of noŋ in negated sentences is not incompatible with its analysis as assertive marker. The corresponding utterances can be paraphrased as ‘I state that it is a fact that x does/did not V’.

The particle noŋ shares the clause final slot with the interrogative markers ha and rao, and the common imperative/politeness marker piʔ ‘a little bit’ with which it cannot co-occur. This indicates that noŋ is best analysed as a marker of illocutionary force, namely of ‘assertion’. In this function, noŋ can occur in both verbal and nominal clauses. Like the other IF markers, noŋ is usually fully stressed, and often receives vowel lengthening and high pitch.

4. Conclusion

Both particles under discussion here are the result of irregular developments from OM and MM, a fact that concurs with their unstable semantics. The actual value of raʔ and noŋ in a given clause/sentence mainly depends on the (pragmatic) interpretation of the broader context, both linguistic and extra-linguistic.

The only instance where raʔ and noŋ do appear to share the same syntactical slot is in nominal predicates, which can end in either of the two particles. This is also the only case where the use of either raʔ or noŋ is compulsory. The use of raʔ in nominal predicates usually leads to a neutral, the use of noŋ to a more emphatic or dubitative reading. This can be explained by the fact that raʔ is much more frequent than noŋ, which makes the latter a more powerful marker than the former.

The clause particles raʔ and noŋ were described by earlier authors in different ways. They were usually taken to be mutually exclusive, occupying the same slot in a sentence. Most authors analysed raʔ and noŋ as sentence particles indicating different degrees of assertion, sometimes with aspecto-temporal connotations. I have shown in this paper that neither are the two morphemes mutually exclusive, nor do they have inherent aspectual or temporal (or modal) value. The particle raʔ is analysed here as a focal particle, the use of which may have been influenced by neighbouring languages. The particles raʔ and noŋ serve as standard translations for a number of Burmese and Thai morphemes that cover similar (but not identical) functions. The influence must be seen on a more abstract structural level rather than as direct ‘loan translations’ or calques. In a largely bilingual society ‘standard translations’, however accurate or inaccurate, arise easily and become part of common language usage also in monolingual contexts. The vast field of contact phenomena and mutual influence among the languages of Southeast Asia is still largely unexplored and leaves much space for future research in this area.

12 Asked about the meaning of noŋ, which one informant used unusually often in elicited sentences, he stated that in Burmese one “uses noŋ a lot”, although not all Burmese sample sentences included the Burmese irrealis marker me.
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