THE YAW DIALECT OF BURMESE

John Okell

1. Introduction

It was no doubt his admitted lack of information which made Forbes (1881:56) think that the Yaw dialect of Burmese was 'certainly unintelligible to any Burman. In fact, as Houghton (1897:456) and Taylor (1921:91) observe, Yaw had few differences from Standard Burmese. A British Settlement Officer reported that, 'at first, the dialect is difficult to understand, but after a few days one finds oneself speaking it and it presents no difficulty' (Abigail 1932:6).

Few and unspectacular though the differences are, they are important, as they place Yaw (YW*) several steps closer than Standard Burmese (SB*) -- or any of the recognised dialects -- to Written Burmese (WB*), and this feature makes it a valuable ingredient in comparative studies.

Despite its importance in this respect, Yaw has not been described in any detail till relatively recently (Kya Htun 1969; Yabu Shiro 1980). Ono (1969) allows just over a page to Yaw, and earlier studies went no further than noting a few forms in comparative lists (Buchanan 1799; Houghton 1897; Grierson 1928; Taylor 1921). A description in English, and a comparison with Standard Burmese and Written Burmese has been lacking. I was fortunate in being able to record two texts of spoken Yaw in Burma, and to have the assistance of the speakers in transcribing them. These texts, supplemented by my informants' answers to queries, provide the material for the outline description presented here.¹

1.1 Features of particular interest

For many, the most spectacular feature of Yaw is its rhymes /ak/ and /æ/, corresponding to Standard Burmese /ɛʔ/ and /ɛin/. (For systems of transliteration and transcription see Okell 1971.) Yaw not only reflects more closely the ak and æ of Written Burmese, but also -- with occasional lapses -- has velar closure for both. It also has velar closure in its YW /suk/, WB ok, SB /auʔ/, though not, curiously, in its YW /sun/.

¹ These are the abbreviations used in tables and examples. (Ed.)
WB œn, SB /aun/. For the standard array of eight final consonants in Written Burmese, none of the other major dialects now has anything more than glottal stop (for Written Burmese obstruents) or nasalised vowel (for Written Burmese nasals). In these circumstances, Yaw's velar closure is a remarkable relic.

Yaw has also not yet allowed initial, or medial /w/ to alter the quality of the following vowel.

For WB

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>at</th>
<th>an</th>
<th>wat</th>
<th>wan</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ap</td>
<td>am</td>
<td>wap</td>
<td>wan</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

where SB has

| /a?  | an    | wu?    | wun    |

Yaw stoutly preserves

| /ɛ?  | en    | wɛ?    | wɛn    |

One other point worth mentioning here is the consistency of the Yaw rhyme /ɛ/ (rarely /e/) for Written Burmese əəm. Like the reflexes of this rhyme in other dialects, Yaw's consistency shows how eclectic Standard Burmese has been with its /i/, /e/ and /ɛ/ realizations.

1.2 Location and numbers of the Yaw

My informants said the main town centres of the Yaw are at Yaw itself, and at Htî-lîn and Gán-gâw, which places them at the head of the Myit-thâ valley, with the Chin Hills on the west, and the Pon-daung and Pon-nya ranges on the east -- a geographical setting that might be expected to isolate them somewhat. This location is confirmed by Kya Htûn (1969:142) and by the Ssw-sôn kyôn (1970:2). The Linguistic survey of Burma (LSB, Webb 1917), however, records the majority on the plains side of the watershed, 'between Saw and Seikpyu', with a few outliers further north on the western edge of the plain, reaching as far as Kani on the Chîn-dwîn river.

It is difficult to reconcile this discrepancy without a further survey. Some of the more obvious possibilities are that respondents to the LSB questionnaire in the valley, which the survey did cover, did not fully understand what was being asked; or my informants, being valley men, may have been unaware of the numbers of Yaw on the plains side; or there may have been appreciable population movements in the sixty years since the survey itself. There is also mention in the literature of a group of Yaw who fled to the upper Mû valley in the Katha District (Harvey 1925:262) and of two Yaw villages way up near Myit-kyî-nâ (Webb 1917:33).

The present number of Yaw speakers is unknown. The LSB (Webb 1917:55) recorded over 24,000. This stands in marked contrast to the Census (1933) figures, but these can hardly claim serious consideration anyway, in view of their incredible fluctuations: in the five decades from 1891 to 1931 they give
370, 5, 0, 2 and 877 respectively! The low response to the
Census (1933) is presumably due partly to uncertainty over the
criteria that qualify one as a Yaw, and partly to a reluctance
to identify oneself as a Yaw anyway (Scott 1900:569; HARDIMAN
1912:29).

1.3 Background

The antecedents of the Yaw are obscure, and have
attracted some divergent speculations:

Dr Mason classes the Yaw as a Burmese tribe. In this he
is followed by Dr Cushing. Mr Houghton is inclined to
doubt the accuracy of this classification. The Shan
chronicles of Mōng Kawng (Mogaung) seem to claim them as
Shans, though perhaps they may be the Nora spoken of as
earlier owners of the land. They themselves have a legend
that they are descended from a clan of the Palaungs called
Parawga or Payawga. This in time was shortened through
Yawga to Yaw. There are still to be found Parawga sayas
among them, oracles or mages, who make their divinations
on the Tai cycle tables, which is significant. The common
folk say that the reason why their dialect differs from
Burmese is that they drink the water of the mountain
streams... The dialect is a hybrid, nearest to Burmese
now; possibly it was at one time nearer to Shan or to some
of the Chin dialects (Scott 1900:569)

Other writers choose one or other of the alternatives
offered here: primitive Burmans (Forbes 1881:56), from the
Irrawaddy valley (Houghton 1897:456), captive Shans sent from
Mogaung (OWENS 1913:16), Burmese-speaking Chins (TAYLOR 1921:91),
or Chin-tainted Burmans (Saw Shwe Boh 1973:18) -- all indicative
of a notable absence of hard facts. Equally fanciful is the
identification with Tavoyan (SYMES 1800:2, 235), and the attempt
to derive Yaw from Standard Burmese /Yà-naKá/ 'Shan' (Saw Shwe

The only real evidence one has for the origins of the
Yaw is the dialect, and the closeness of this to Standard
Burmese and Written Burmese indicates fairly strongly that as
Kya Htun (1969:141) suggests, the Yaw are nothing more exotic
than a group of plains Burmans cut off from the mainstream of
Standard Burmese development comparatively recently by a degree
of geographical isolation.

The 'Payawga' derivation sounds like a folk etymology,
based on the fact that the Yaw have a reputation for skill in
the magical arts, one form of which -- by no means a Yaw
monopoly -- is called /pawâ-gá/ in Standard Burmese, from PÂLI
payoga. Among the many varieties of Palaung listed in the LSB,
none has a name resembling this word. Again, the idea that the
Yaw once spoke some more distant or unrelated language (Chin, Palaung, Shan) and subsequently adopted Burmese is an implausible explanation of the peculiarities of their dialect. Such differences as there are between Yaw and Standard Burmese in phonology, grammar and lexicon are not of a kind that can be considered vestiges of an unrelated language. Nor are alleged resemblances to Tavoyan persuasive.

In better documented times, there are records of a kind of Yaw autonomy. There was at one stage a Yaw-lei-myə-wun, with jurisdiction over the four towns of Pauk, Hti-lin, Saw and Laung-shei, and each of these towns was governed by a saw-bwà (shades of the alleged Shan connection). The Saw-bwà were replaced by myə-thagyì after a rebellion in the reign of Naung-daw-gyi (1763-65) (Owens 1913:15f.), and at the turn of the century the Yaw were still described as 'governed by chiefs of their own, but tributary to the Burmans' (Buchanan 1799:224) — perhaps not wholly inconsistent with Symes' (1800:1, 235) information that 'the Yoos are subjects of the Birman state, and observe the same religious worship'. Their relative remoteness from central government at this stage is perhaps indicated by the attitude of the clerk who told Symes that they were 'exceedingly ugly, having protuberant bellies and white teeth'. My informants were, in fact, quite good-looking.

1.4 Source of material

I did not go to the Yaw area, but made some recordings in Rangoon of unprepared speech by some students from Gàn-gàw who had arrived in Rangoon for the first time only a few days previously. One recording describes some distinctive features of the Yaw area and its people, and the second, by a different speaker, is a folktale.
2. **Outline phonology**

2.1 **Phoneme inventory**

2.1.1 **Tones:**

low /\+/
high plain /\?/
high creaky /\?/
high stop /\+?/ or /\+k/
weak /\?

2.1.2 **Rhymes:**

open syllables
weak: ə
full: i e ε ι o o u

closed syllables
nasal: ain ein εn aŋ in oun aun

2.1.3 **Heads:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head</th>
<th>with</th>
<th>with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>med</td>
<td>med</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>/y/</td>
<td>/w/</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>all but</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Head</th>
<th>by</th>
<th>w</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>g</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>k</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>p</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kh</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>ph</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head</td>
<td>my</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>n</td>
<td>m</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>q</td>
<td>nh</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>?</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>w</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>h</td>
<td>l</td>
<td>y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>hl</td>
<td>hw</td>
<td>j</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.2 **Phoneme description**

As in Standard Burmese, except for:

/εn, ε?/: vowel lower than in SB /ε?/

/aŋ, ak, auk/: final velar consonants -- the stop not released -- clearly audible in slow speech, but sometimes realized by nasalization and glottal stop respectively. The vowel in /aŋ, ak/ is more open and back than in SB /an, a?/, and close to the SB /a/ of open syllables. Given /auŋ/ one would expect /auŋ/ to match, but it is not attested in my material.

/(ly, hly)/: rare variants for /y, j/, used in formal styles.
2.3 Comparison with Written Burmese

2.3.1 Tones: as for Standard Burmese

2.3.2 Rhymes:

open

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>i</th>
<th>e</th>
<th>ai</th>
<th>a</th>
<th>o</th>
<th>ui</th>
<th>u</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YW /i e ε a o u ø/</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

closed nasal

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>in</th>
<th>im</th>
<th>aññ</th>
<th>añ</th>
<th>an</th>
<th>am</th>
<th>aŋ</th>
<th>oŋ</th>
<th>uŋ</th>
<th>un</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YB /eɪn/</td>
<td>in</td>
<td>en</td>
<td>aŋ</td>
<td>aun</td>
<td>aìn</td>
<td>ouŋ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

closed stop

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>it</th>
<th>ip</th>
<th>ac</th>
<th>at</th>
<th>ap</th>
<th>ak</th>
<th>ok</th>
<th>uŋk</th>
<th>ut</th>
<th>up</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YW /ei?/</td>
<td>i?</td>
<td>ε?</td>
<td>ak</td>
<td>auk</td>
<td>aì?</td>
<td>ou?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2.3.3 Heads: as for Standard Burmese

3. Notes

3.1 Phonemes

3.1.1 WB aññ corresponds regularly to Yaw /ε/, but not also to /i/ or /e/ as in SB, e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>lhaññ:</td>
<td>hlɛ</td>
<td>hlɛ</td>
<td>'cart'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saññ</td>
<td>əɛ</td>
<td>či, di</td>
<td>'this'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khyaññ</td>
<td>čɛ</td>
<td>či</td>
<td>'cotton (thread)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>mraññ:</td>
<td>myɛ</td>
<td>myî</td>
<td>'taste'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kraññ:</td>
<td>cɛ</td>
<td>cí</td>
<td>'look'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tam-mrak-caññ:</td>
<td>tabya-k-śè</td>
<td>təbyeʔ-si</td>
<td>'broom'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tacaññ:</td>
<td>tɛzɛ</td>
<td>tɛzî</td>
<td>'a bundle'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kraññ:</td>
<td>cɛ</td>
<td>ci</td>
<td>'be clear'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>naññ:</td>
<td>nɛ</td>
<td>nî</td>
<td>'way'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>caññ:</td>
<td>sɛ</td>
<td>si</td>
<td>'be crowded'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praññ:</td>
<td>pyɛ</td>
<td>pyi</td>
<td>'pyi (measure)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>praññ:</td>
<td>pyɛ</td>
<td>pyέ</td>
<td>'be full'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I did encounter a few words with Yaw /e/:

- paccaññ: pyi?-sè pyi?-sì 'thing'
- man-kyaññ: majè majì 'tamarind'
- caññ:-we: sè-wè sì-wè 'meet'
- tuñ:-praññ: taìn-pye taìn-pye 'country'

There seems to be no environment feature corresponding to the use of Yaw /e/ rather than /ə/; in the list above the heads pr-, c-, and ky/khy- occur with both rhymes.

3.1.2 Initial and medial w do not affect the pronunciation of the rhymes WB an, am and at, ap, as they do in SB, e.g.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>wam:</td>
<td>wèn</td>
<td>wùn</td>
<td>'stomach'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kam:</td>
<td>kèn</td>
<td>kàn</td>
<td>'bank'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lwat</td>
<td>lwe?</td>
<td>lu?</td>
<td>'be free'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tat</td>
<td>te?</td>
<td>ta?</td>
<td>'know'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3.1.3 Yaw has only /θ/ where Standard Burmese has /θ/ and /ð/, e.g.

- sum:soñ: θoûn-θaûn θoûn-ðaûn 'thirty thousand'

3.1.4 The continuant series has some examples of aspiration in words not aspirated in Standard Burmese, e.g.

- mya: hmyà myà 'be many'
- 'anañ | ønен | ønan | 'side'
- ñañ | hqin | qìn | 'draw'
- lwam: hlwèn lûn 'too much'

3.1.5 Loanwords from Standard Burmese occasionally cut across the general pattern, e.g.

- YW & SB /pyi-ðù pyi?-sè ko-po-rè-jìn/
  for *YW /pye-ðù pyi?-sè ko-po-rè-jàg/ 'People's Trade Corporation'

3.2 Morphophonemics

3.2.1 Voicing occurs, as in Arakanese, only with plain initials, not with both plain and aspirate as in Standard Burmese, nor with /θ/, e.g.
ne-tā-ka  ne-da-gā  ne-da-gā  'staying'
ta-khu-khu  təkhū-khū  təkhū-gū  'something'
thā:tay  thà-de  thà-de  '(they) place'
vokyā:thak  yau-k-cà-thak  yau?-cà-de?  'more than men'
lū-pyui  lu-byo  lu-byo  'bachelor'
twe.phū:  twē-phū  twē-bū  'ever see'
lū-kri:  lu-jì  lu-jī  'elder'
pro-khyań  pyē-chaŋ  pyē-jin  'want to say'
nhac-nam-cap  hñōñen-ze?  hñōnan-za?  'sewn together'
'apo-chum  əpō-shoûn  əpō-zoûn  'most abundant'
hañ:sī:  hāq-thī  hīn-sī  'vegetable'

This feature reveals some aspirates that one would not expect from Written Burmese and Standard Burmese:

ləpñ-pān:  ləpñã  le-bin  'neck'
wən:phaik  wən-phai?  wən-bai?  'stomach'
rañ-pat  yaŋ-pha?  yin-ba?  'chest'

Possibly Written Burmese spelling has been altered from a more etymologically correct form.

Some words in Standard Burmese have voiced initials even when they are not in close juncture. Their counterparts in Yaw often have voiced initials in the same way, but a number have aspirate initials, e.g.

Voiced initial in Yaw:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>gwam:</td>
<td>gwən</td>
<td>gün</td>
<td>'cotton'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gui:</td>
<td>gō</td>
<td>gō</td>
<td>'goal'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khwa</td>
<td>gwā</td>
<td>gwā</td>
<td>'fork'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dhāt</td>
<td>də?</td>
<td>da?</td>
<td>'relic'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>byuiñ:</td>
<td>byaîn</td>
<td>byaîn</td>
<td>'paddy bird, egret'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>khve:</td>
<td>jē</td>
<td>jī</td>
<td>'dirt'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>jhe:</td>
<td>zē</td>
<td>zē</td>
<td>'market'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>chak-krui:</td>
<td>zak-cŌ</td>
<td>zē?-cō</td>
<td>'reins'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Aspirate initial in Yaw:

khoûn: khoûn gaûn 'head'
dhâ: thâ dâ 'knife'
bhâ, bhay pha, phê ba, be 'what? which?'
bhoûn:bhi phaûn-phi baûn-bi 'trousers'
(bic)
bhu-raû phêyaq bêyin 'king'
bû: phû bû 'gourd'
bhî: phi bî 'comb'
khyi, khyi chei? jêi? 'hook'
khruî cho jo 'horn'
khyok chau? jau? 'chasm'

[jhî:sî: shî-êî zî-êî 'wild plum'

There is hardly enough evidence here to sort out the various factors involved. Some of the Yaw voiced initials can be accounted for by being loans, e.g.

/gô/ from English goal
/ds?/ from Pâli dhâtu

others may have been voiced in Standard Burmese by the formative voicing and then borrowed in this form into Yaw (e.g. /gwâ/) -- assuming, on the evidence of words such as Yaw /chei?, chau?/, that the voicing formative does not operate in Yaw. Others again have probably been voiced in Standard Burmese by close juncture and later lost the first syllable but retained the voicing (cf. e.g., the older forms, Written Burmese: ūkhoûn; ūkhruî). In Yaw the first syllable may have been dropped in the same way, but no voicing remains as aspirate initials would not have been voiced in this position.

Forms like Yaw /thâ, phû, phê, shî/ are the most interesting. They could well be survivals of a hypothetical period when Burmese had no voiced obstruents. By this theory, voicing has supervened in Standard Burmese while Yaw holds out against this development. Such words also suggest an explanation for the otherwise bizarre spellings of Written Burmese.

3.2.2 Weakening and induced creaky tone occur much as in Standard Burmese. (See the texts for examples.)

3.3 Grammar

3.3.1 Particles seem to match those of Standard Burmese closely. Two with not quite regular reflexes occur in the recordings.
In Written Burmese and Standard Burmese both have different forms for colloquial and formal styles.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>WB</th>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>coll.</td>
<td>form.</td>
<td>coll.</td>
<td>form.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>nai.</td>
<td>nhañ.</td>
<td>ná</td>
<td>nê</td>
<td>hnín</td>
<td>'with'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lâ:</td>
<td>lo</td>
<td>lê</td>
<td>lâ</td>
<td>lê</td>
<td>(interrog.)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yaw /ná/ corresponds to Arakanese, Tavoyan, and In-tha /ná/; Standard Burmese is the odd man out here. Yaw preserves the older form /lâ/ which is not used in colloquial Standard Burmese and even in formal Standard Burmese is being ousted by the colloquial /lâ/.

3.3.2 Some selectives show different forms from Standard Burmese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WB</th>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>saññ</td>
<td>òe</td>
<td>ði</td>
<td>'this'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bhay, bha</td>
<td>phè, pha</td>
<td>bê, ba</td>
<td>'which?, what?'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>dâ</td>
<td>tha</td>
<td>da</td>
<td>'that (thing)'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saññ</td>
<td>òag</td>
<td>ðin</td>
<td>'that (year)'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of these, the first two show regular correspondences, with Yaw voicelessness for Standard Burmese voicing. The last item is rare in Standard Burmese; it is not used in colloquial, but occurs in older literature, and then only with the noun nhac 'year'. Yaw preserves it in speech.

3.4 Vocabulary

There were a few items that differed from Standard Burmese.

3.4.1 Forms which appear not to have cognates in Standard Burmese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>jè-dàq</td>
<td>poun-byin</td>
<td>'story'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>kezauk-kezak</td>
<td>òmyà-дж</td>
<td>'much, a lot'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3.4.2 Forms with different meaning or use in Standard Burmese:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YW</th>
<th>SB</th>
<th>gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>eìn-hmü</td>
<td>ē khan</td>
<td>'greet, welcome'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cf. ē, hmü</td>
<td>'visit, do'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>loun-gwàq</td>
<td>loun-ji</td>
<td>'lon-gyi'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cf. kwìn</td>
<td>'circle'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>si-shaq</td>
<td>si-zin</td>
<td>'arrange'</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>cf. shin</td>
<td>'set up, set out'</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Other vocabulary items are listed in Kya Htun (1969:152f.) and Yabu Shiro (1980:169f.).

4. Recordings

The following two texts are extracts from the recordings mentioned in the introduction, the lower line showing the Standard Burmese equivalents. In the transcription of the Yaw version, the rhymes /aук, ak, aη/ are written /auʔ, aʔ, an/ where this seems closer to the actual pronunciation on the recording. Irregularities such as the occasional voicing of aspirate initials, presumably the result of Standard Burmese influence, are marked with a (B) and shown as they are spoken. False starts, where the speaker corrects himself, are enclosed in square brackets. Sentences are numbered to facilitate reference to the translation.

4.1 Texts

4.1.1 Yaw customs: courting and hospitality

(1) (B) Gù pyj-chaŋ-da-gā [Gën-gà-ne-ma jì-dè o]
(1) Gù-pyj-jin-da-gā [Gân-gà-ne-ma jì-dè o]
Yà-ne-ma jì-dè lu-byo hlı-dè délè-lè phyiʔ-pa-dè
Yà-ne-ma jì-dè lu-byo hlı-dè délè-lè phyiʔ-pa-dè

(2) Lu-byo hlı-dè délè-gā phè-lo-lè sho-dè cənə-dó
(2) Lu-byo hlı-dè délè-gā be-lo-lè sho-dè cənə-dó
Yà-ne-ma jì-dè ka-là-thà-de - ka-là-thà sho-da-gà
Yà-ne-ma jì-dè ka-là-thà-de - ka-là-thà sho-da-gà

[sywe yauʔ-tē echein o - ] sywe yauʔ-tē echein œak she-jə
[sywe yauʔ-tē echein o - ] sywe yauʔ-tē echein œəc? she-jə
hnəshə pəʔ-wən-jaŋ-ma jì-dè lu-byo-de-hà - ka-là-thà-de-hà
hnəshə pəʔ-wən-jin-ma jì-dè lu-byo-de-hà - ka-là-thà-de-hà
əpyo lə-dè alə jì-jà-dè.
əpyo lə-dè alə jì-jà-dè.

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(3) [ㄠㄢʊ ㄌㄧ-ㄉㄧ ㄝㄌ ㄆㄧ-ㄉㄧ-ㄝ - ]
(3) [ㄠㄢʊ ㄌㄧㄆㄧ-ㄉㄧ-ㄝ - ]

ㄠㄢʊ ㄌㄧ-ㄝㄌㄧ-ㄌㄧㄝ ㄠㄢʊ ㄧㄤ, ㄠㄢʊ ㄧㄣ ㄠㄢʊ ㄊㄧㄢ-ㄆㄧ-ㄉㄧ-ㄝ.

(4) ㄠㄢʊ ㄧㄣ ㄊㄧㄢ-ㄆㄧ-ㄉㄧ-ㄝ, ㄠㄢʊ ㄋㄧ ㄠㄢʊ ㄆㄧ-ㄉㄧ-ㄝ.


(12) Tēchā-ne-gā la-dē lu-dāîn-go-lē θu-dō-gā [θe ne-ma
(12) Tēchā-ne-gā la-dē lu-dāîn-go-lē θu-dō-gā [di ne-ma
fi-dē -l] tekha-gā, oyaq tekha twē-phù-dē-ṣtaín, twē-phu-ṣaolo
fi-dē -l] tekha-gā, ayin tekha twē-bù-dē-ṣtaín, twē-bù- EHICLE
COUNT-(B)bù-ṣaolo shk-shan-de, pho-ywe-de.
cOUNT-bù-ṣ饿o shg?-shan-de, pho-ywe-de.

(13) e-θē ēlē-ha Yē-ne-ma sho-ló jī-yaq
(13) e-di ēlē-ha Yē-ne-ma sho-ló jī-yin
chi?-saya kaūn-dē ēlē tekhu phyi?-te-lō sho-chaq-de.
chi?-saya kaūn-dē ēlē tekhu phyi?-te-lō sho-jin-de.

(14) Nau?-pī epehe-ame-ha sho-ló jī-yaq-lē
(14) Nau?-pī epehe-ame-ha sho-ló jī-yin-lē
ē-lo ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma, θu-dō-gā
ē-lo ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma, θu-dō-gā
[ĭeβš ca-đe: Yē dēlē ehe-nā sho-lō jī-yaq wēn myauk-ca-đe.
[ĭeβš ca-đe: Yē dēlē ehe-nē sho-lō jī-yin wēn myau?-ca-đe.

(15) e-lo ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma θu-dō-ha sō-zō sī-zī
(15) e-lo ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma θu-dō-ha sō-zō sī-zī
ei?-ya waq-de?-te ēlē jī-de.
ei?-ya win-da?-te ēlē jī-de.

(16) Ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma
(16) Ka-lā-θā-de elc la-dē achein-ma
ka-lā-θā-de-nā [ĭeβš-gā o -l] ĭeβš ca-đe sho-lō jī-yaq,
ka-lā-θā-de-nē [ĭeβš-gā o -l] ĭeβš ca-đe sho-lō jī-yin,
θu-dō-go pyco-byco jwag-jwag ne-ze-chaq-de,
θu-dō-go pyco-byco jwin-jwin ne-ze-jin-de,
lve?-lve? lə?-lə? ne-ze-chaq-de ĭeβš.
lv?-lv? la?-la? ne-ze-jin-de ĭeβš.

(17) Hta-jaîn-hmō-lō e-θē epehe-ame-de-ha
(17) Da-jaîn-hmō-lō e-di epehe-ame-de-ha
sho-lō jī-yaq-lē θu-dō-ha-nā θu-dō
sho-lō jī-yin-lē θu-dō-ha-nē θu-dō
wain-phwē-lō-ōe-lēgaun, lu-jî-châq
wain-phwē-lō-ōe-lēgaun, lu-jî-jîn
wain-phwē-lō-ōe-lēgaun, thma-məhəu? sō-zō sî-zî
wain-phwē-lō-ōe-lēgaun, thma-məhəu? sō-zō sî-zî
ei?-ya waq-dē ehe-nā-ōe-lēgaun,
ei?-ya win-dē ehe-nē-ōe-lēgaun,

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4.1.2 The tale of the tiger and the elephant

(1) jē-doùn-gā cā-nā shaŋ-gā fī-de kwē.
(1) jē-doùn-gā cā-nā shin-gā fī-de kwē.

(2) ë-tha ðu-dō twē-jā-dō, təgə pyayn-yā-aun sho-pā-mā
cā-gā pyə-pyā-de.
(2) ë-da ðu-dō twē-jā-dō, təgə pyayn-yā-aun sho-pā-mā
cā-gā pyə-pyā-de.

(3) ë cá 'phə-lo pyayn-jā-mələ' sho-dō
(3) ë cá 'bə-lo pyayn-jā-mələ' sho-dō
[cho -] lak-pən-baŋ-bə-ma [lək -] shəyak-tei
[cho -] le°-pan-bin-bə-ma [le° -] zəye°-tei
(4) əmyə-jī nā-ne-de kwá.
(4) əmyə-jī nā-ne-de kwá.

(5) ë-tha-go - ho shəyak-tei-go [θə -]
(5) ë-da-go - ho zəye°-tei-go [θə -]
'Mǎŋ øən-gā kən-li - məŋ-gā pyən-hnain-aun
'Mın øən-gā kən-li - mən-gā pyən-hnain-aun
lou°-hnain-mələ', ə-gā pyən-hnain-aun lou°-hnain-mələ'
lou°-hnain-mələ', ə-gā pyən-hnain-aun lou°-hnain-mələ'
sho-bi lou°-cā-dō,
sho-bi lou°-cā-dō,

(6) [θəwə -] 'Mǎŋ-gā øəyən ə kwə' lō pyə°-de - shaŋ-go.
(6) [θəwə -] 'Mın-gā øəyən ə kwə' lō pyə°-de - shin-go.

(7) θəkha ø-dō [cho -] shəyak-te-gā øənəŋ-kən
(7) θəkha ø-dō [cho -] zəye°-te-gā øənəŋ-kən
shu-ne-ya-gā-ne-pù-dō-mā tei°-θəwə-de.
shu-ne-ya-gā-ne-pù-dō-mā tei°-θəwə-de.
(8) Nau?-tēkha c-lai?-tō [ho -] tēgaun hnakaun
Nau?-tēkha c-lai?-tō [ho -] tēgaun hnakaun
thā-pyen-(B)ōwā-de.
thā-pyan-ōwā-de.

(9) Nau?-tēkha c-lai?-tō òun-1e-gaun, lē-ŋə-she-kō-gaun
Nau?-tēkha c-lai?-tō òun-1e-gaun, lē-ŋə-she-kō-gaun
pyen-ōwā-de-le.
pyan-ōwā-de-le.

(10) ë-nau? cá-dō [ho -] shayak-te-gá ømya-jī-ha-gō:
(10) ë-nau? cá-dō [ho -] zøye?-te-gá ømya-jī-ha-gō:
akoun mapyen-(B)bù-le.
akoun mapyan-bù-le.

ña c-phelé yau?-pi' sho-pí-dō-má, cā-gā-ne-pí-dō-má
ña c-bó ahlé yau?-pi' sho-pí-dō-hmá, cā-gā-ne-pí-dō-ma
tēkha-dē-nā c-pelai?-ta.
tēkha-dē-nē c-pelai?-ta.

(12) [Shayak-oun-ma ho -] lak-pen-baq-ma shayak-ha
(12) [Zøye?-oun-ma ho -] le?-pan-bin-ma zøye?-ha
tēgaun-má macen-(B)bū: pyen-(B)ōwā-de.
tēgaun-má macen-bū: pyan-ōwā-de.

(13) ë cá-dō ðu-dō ëså-shoun kēdī thā-da-gā [hewa -]
(13) ë cá-dō ðu-dō ëså-zoun kēdī thā-da-gā [hewa -]
'Māng-gā òun-1ō fí-yaq, màŋ-ga na sà-me;
'Mīn-gā òun-1ō fí-yin, màŋ-ga na sà-me;
ña-gā òun-1ō fí-yaq, màŋ-gā nà-go sà' sho-pí-má
ña-gā òun-1ō fí-yin, màŋ-ga nà-go sà' sho-pí-má
ë-tha-myë [hewa -] lou?-thā-da-le.
ë-da-myë [hewa -] lou?-thā-da-le.

(14) [ë cá-dō hewa -] nau? cá-dō
(14) [ë cá-dō hewa -] nau? cá-dō
'Phñe-gā-ne-bī sà-hma-lē' sho-dō
'Bñe-gā-ne-bī sà-hma-lē' sho-dō

[Khun-neyak amāng-ko hewa - chën-tha -]
[Khun-neye? mūn-go hewa - chën-da -]
khun-neyak-ko màŋ-ga pë-ṃc kwe: øyak-shaín
khun-neye?-ko mūn-go pë-ṃc kwe: øye?-shaín
khun-neyak pë-ṃc' sho-pí-dō-mā lou?-cā-dō,
khun-neye? pë-ṃc' sho-pí-dō-má lou?-cā-dō,
4.2 Translations

4.2.1 Yaw customs: courting and hospitality

(1) What I would like to talk about now is the way courting is done in the Yaw region.

(2) Now, these courtship customs are that the young men in our Yaw region -- by young men I mean boys who have come of age, boys in their teens -- these young men have a custom of visiting the girl.

(3) When they visit her they go into her house.

(4) and when they're inside they talk to her.

(5) The girl greets everyone that comes, and talks to him.

(6) While she is receiving him, mostly she will offer plain tea, and always roasted beans -- the roasted butter beans that grow in the Yaw region -- and jaggery.

(7) Then, when she is receiving him in this way, there is hardly any time when she lays down her work.

(8) While talking, she will be spinning or doing some kind of work -- that's the custom when receiving visitors,

(9) and it makes it easier for them to make conversation.

(10) They have this custom of spinning and preparing yarn while they receive visitors.

(11) At the same time they drink tea and so on, and are very friendly.

(12) Anyone who comes from outside the region too is treated in this friendly way, just as if they had met and known him before.
(13) This Yaw custom strikes me as very attractive.

(14) Then, the parents too are pleased when the young men come visiting—*it makes them happy, according to Yaw custom*.

(15) They usually go to bed early when the young men come visiting.

(16) The idea is that when the young men come visiting they want them, if they approve of them, to have a good time, to be at ease.

(17) That's why the parents either sit by themselves—*just the older people together*—or go to bed early, allowing their daughters freedom to talk without constraint.

(18) That's the way courting is conducted in the Yaw region.

4.2.2 The tale of the tiger and the elephant

(1) Long ago there was a tiger and an elephant.

(2) When they met the tiger suggested they should have a contest.

(3) The contest was like this: there were a lot of mynahs in a silk-cotton tree.

(4) They were to see which of the two had the strongest voice, which one could make the mynahs fly away.

(5) So the tiger said 'You shout first' to the elephant.

(6) So the elephant shouted.

(7) The first time he shouted, the mynahs, who had been making a terrible noise, all went quiet.

(8) The next time he shouted one or two of them flew away.

(9) And the next time several more flew away.

(10) So then—there were lots of mynahs, you see, and they hadn't all flown off—

(11) So then the tiger said 'Hold it now: you've had three shouts. Now it's my turn to shout', and he let out one terrific shout.

(12) There wasn't a single mynah left in the silk-cotton tree—they all flew off.
(13) So then -- they'd made this agreement at the very beginning -- 'If you lose I'll eat you; if I lose you eat me' -- that's how they'd fixed it.

(14) Then, when the elephant asked when he was to be eaten, the tiger said he would give him seven days -- he'd give him seven days' grace.

(15) The elephant couldn't think what to do and just wandered aimlessly about waiting for when the seven days were up.

(16) 'Soon I shall die, when the tigers eat me up', the elephant thought, and he stood where he was and wept.

NOTE

1. It is a pleasure to record my gratitude to Ü Htôn Tîn of the Burmese Department of Rangoon University, himself a Yaw man, for his help with my queries and for arranging the recording session; and to Ko Hôn Myîn and his friends who generously recorded for me.

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