# Between Translation and Retelling: Thai Models for the Mon *Rājādhirāj* [1]

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## Abstract

Historians consider the narrative of *Rājādhirāj*, known in Burmese, Thai, and Mon-language retellings, to be the seminal text of Mon history. The historiography of the region holds that the Mons have one of the first civilizations of Mainland Southeast Asia, but this should not be taken to mean that all Mon-language texts and historical sources are primary, original, or necessarily precede those found in other languages. The extant Mon-language retelling of the *Rājādhirāj* narrative appears to have been largely translated from Thai, or retold in a dialect of Mon from within Siam that has undergone extensive contact with the Thai language. Although this text has been widely available

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in print for a hundred years, no scholars have commented on the unusual features of the language that the text is recorded in. Indeed, because of the assumption of Mon primacy, many scholars may not be able to conceive of the narrative as having come from outside Mon-language sources.

As part of a larger project of examining interpretative communities and frameworks, this article explores a specific example of how linguistic evidence may challenge the usual understandings and interpretations of Mainland Southeast Asian histories. A linguistic analysis of the text from the perspective of the scholarship on language contact and convergence reveals how native Mon words, phrases, and grammatical constructions have been reinterpreted to replicate Thai models. To gauge the language of this text, I consider examples from contemporaneous texts produced inside Burma. Rather than searching for the original "version" or language of the narrative, I consider linguistic evidence to rethink how historical narratives may have been passed down to the present. The evidence suggests a heterogeneity of predecessors and modes of transmission.

## Introduction

The understanding in Southeast Asian history of the Mons as having developed one of the earliest civilizations in the region has deep resonances outside the discipline of history. Given the position of the Mons, many scholars assume that Mon-language texts and sources are, therefore, originary. Mon scholars themselves consider the narrative of *Rājādhirāj* [3] to be the seminal text of Mon history. Yet

[3] The narrative of *Rājādhirāj* is one of the few historical and literary texts that has versions in Burmese, Mon, and Thai. Tracing all the possible connections between these versions is beyond the scope of this article, although the events – focusing on the rise and exploits of the Mon military hero, Rājādhirāj – are told from the perspective and interests of Mon speakers.

the Mon-language version appears to have been largely translated from Thai, or recorded in a heavily "Siamified" [4]dialect of Mon.

While this text has been widely available in print for one hundred years, no scholar has yet tried to make sense of the unusual features of the language of this text. Many scholars may not be able to conceive of this text as having come from outside Mon-language sources, and, therefore, its marked features have become invisible. In reading the texts of the *Rājāvaṁsa Kathā*,[5] a collection of Mon-language histories which includes the narrative of *Rājādhirāj*, it has struck me that much of the language was highly Thai-like. At the same time, part of the reason that the Thai-like features have escaped the notice of Burma Mon[6] scholars is that members of the Burmese intellectual communities are largely unfamiliar with the Thai language and recent linguistic scholarship. To the extent that Burma Mon scholars notice the differences in language between the texts of the *Rājāvaṁsa Kathā* and in contemporaneous Mon-language texts from inside Burma, they tend to think of the Mon dialects of Thailand as conservative, and, therefore, difficult to understand.

If there is such a wide disparity between my view of the Mon language of the text and that of local scholars, it is worth carefully considering the evidence for extended contact with, and possibly translation from, the Thai language. Based on the scholarship of language contact and convergence, I analyze the Mon of the text of the *Rājādhirāj* narrative and find evidence for "one-sided harmonization" of the Mon towards Thai, in other words, instances of the Mon replicating Thai models through the reinterpretation of native Mon

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[4] I use the term "Siamified" and elsewhere "Siamese Mon" in part to reflect the fact that this process started before there was the modern nation-state of Thailand.

[5] Phra Candakantā [စန္ဒကန္တာ၊ နာ], *Rājāvaṁsa Kathā* (2 Vols.) [ရာဇာဝံသကထာ (စာအုပ်)] (Pāk Lat, Siam 1911-1912 [ချုင်ပက်လာတ်၊ ဘာကြုင်စိုင်၊ ၁၉၁၂]) [in Mon]. The two volumes contain several different titles, both for the collection as a whole and for each component text, with varying names in both Pāli and Mon. For convenience's sake, I have followed the modern Mon title.

[6] That is, Mons from inside Burma, in opposition to the Siamese or Thai Mons, or the *Thai Raman* [ไทยรามัญ].

materials. We find much less direct borrowing of linguistic material from Thai.

The purpose of this article is not to question the cultural legacy of the Mons or to cast into doubt their many cultural achievements and long presence in Mainland Southeast Asia. Rather, my study of a primary Mon-language source has revealed an unexpected mode of transmission. A further conceptual aspect to this process of analysis and comparison has been assumptions coming out of the intersection of history and linguistics. The first assumption, common among local scholars, is that languages of the same typological profile will, therefore, be more similar to each other than to other languages. In other words, many Mons like to claim that their language is very similar to Thai based on some basic word-order considerations. The evidence below complicates this picture, especially as many aspects of Burma Mon syntax are similar to Burmese. The second assumption, one that is harder to argue against, is that any similarities between Thai Mon and Thai have resulted from earlier Mon influence. I make no grand claims, but rather stress the contingent nature of variation within Mon, which I believe reflects specific episodes of contact both with Thai and with Burmese, rather than assuming that similarities or variation between Mon, Thai, and Burmese are always due to primary Mon influence.

## Linguistic Convergence

The concepts of replication and convergence underlie the interpretations of this chapter, which, in turn, form a central part of my understanding of the transmission of the *Rājādhirāj* narrative. Where there is widespread language contact and bilingualism, people speaking more than one language tend to level out the difference between them. Multilingual speakers tend to develop quick inter-translatability between their languages. Rather than maintaining two distinct grammatical systems, there is a strong tendency towards "leakage," so that the grammar and pragmatics – the ways of saying things – will tend to become more isomorphic over time. Convergence and replication can occur across the boundaries of

linguistic affiliation and typology – indeed, when two or more "genetically" unrelated languages come to be more like each other than their linguistic kin, this is a strong indication that convergence is at work. [7] The term *convergence* covers the more familiar concept of "borrowing", and is closely associated with loanwords. Convergence moves beyond the idea of individual words being borrowed and moves far beyond into the realms of syntax, morphology, and phonology.

The manifestations of convergence are contingent and depend on the duration and intensity of contact, as well as sociological factors. Contact can have pervasive influences throughout any aspect of language, including the sound system, vocabulary, morphology, and syntax. Bilingualism is key to the process, although not everyone in a given community need be bilingual for convergence to happen. If there are enough bilinguals who are in influential social positions, the changes in their speech can make its way back into the rest of the community as a whole. Language contact does not necessarily lead to "mixed languages," "creoles," or large-scale displacement of vocabulary, as is commonly thought. Those phenomena occur under very specific forms of contact not relevant to the case at hand.[8] A particular set of factors may favor convergence in one direction at one time, and in another direction at another time.

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[7] My understandings of these ideas come from the work of Aikhenvald and Dixon, Matras, Heine and Kuteva, and Thomason and Kaufman. Their ideas are not uniform, but the nature of the debates reach a depth of technicality that I believe reaches beyond the immediate argument here. See: Alexandra Y. Aikhenvald & R.M.W. Dixon, *Grammars in Contact: A Cross-Linguistic Typology* (Oxford University Press, 2007), which is an edited volume; Bernd Heine and Tania Kuteva, *Language Contact and Grammatical Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Yaron Matras, *Language Contact* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), Introduction; Sarah G. Thomason, *Language Contact* (Washington DC: Georgetown University Press, 2001); and Sarah G. Thomason and Terrence Kaufman, *Language Contact, Creolization, and Genetic Linguistics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

[8] See Thomason and Kaufman.

## Mons in 19th Century Siam

There are not many sources on the Mons living in Siam before the 20th century. What we know is that they settled scattered throughout what is now Central Thailand, usually in communities connected more by water than by land. The usual understanding is that these Mons arrived from Burma in waves starting in the 17th century,[9] although there is mention of Mon-speaking communities at Ayutthaya in earlier centuries.[10] Mon villages were often near those of Siamese and other populations that settled in the region. Mons cultivated rice and worked as potters, while women engaged in trade[11] and men could serve in the Siamese army in ethnically segregated regiments. There were Mon women at court. Rice cultivators were the first to assimilate to the Siamese, whereas those living in more isolated communities, particularly if they were engaged in trade or an occupation that the Siamese did not engage in, tended to maintain their language much later.[12] There appears to have been regular contact between Mons in both countries, particularly between religious institutions. Mons maintained separate monasteries and monastic education, meaning that at least a sizeable percentage of the male population were literate in Mon. Literacy and population size even warranted a Mon-language press.

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[9] See Robert Halliday, "Immigrations of the Mons into Siam," *The Mons: Collected Articles from the Journal of the Siam Society*, ed. Michael Smithies (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1986). Also Suphorn Ocharoen [สุภรณ์ โอเจริญ], *The Mons of Thailand* (มอญในเมืองไทย) (กรุงเทพฯ: สำนักงานกองทุนสนับสนุนการวิจัย, 2541 [1998]).

[10] See Victor Lieberman, *Strange Parallels: Southeast Asia in Global Context, C. 800-1830, Volume 1: Integration on the Mainland* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

[11] See Dhiravat na Pombejra, "VOC Employees and Their Relationships with Mon and Siamese Women: A Case Study of Osoet Pegua," *Other Pasts: Women, Gender, and History in Early Modern Southeast Asia,* ed. Barbara Watson Andaya (Manoa: University of Hawai'i at Manoa, 2000) 195-214.

[12] See Brian Lee Foster, *Commerce and Ethnic Differences: The Case of the Mons in Thailand* (Athens: Ohio University Press, Center for International Studies, Southeast Asia Program, 1982).

## Evidence for Convergence

It is not possible to match up sentences between versions across languages because of the multiplicity of Thai-language versions of the *Rājādhirāj* narrative.[13] In any case, my argument is that it is not clear that all of the text was simply translated from a *written* Thai-language source, but rather that the Mon-language *Rājādhirāj* is at least partly a retelling of the narrative in Siamese Mon. This means that, except for a very few instances, I cannot provide sentence-by-sentence equivalents between the versions. I have selected some clear-cut examples of the various manifestations of one-sided harmonization and analyzed them as fully as possible. The examples I consider here reflect the reanalysis of Mon syntax, largely using native Mon materials, to mirror a particular aspect of Thai syntax. Again, despite the supposed typological similarities between Thai and Mon, we find that there are significant differences in the syntax of the two languages – or perhaps more accurately, Burma Mon and Thai – such that examples of the replication of Thai are striking. Another aspect of these examples is reinterpretation of expansion, in which speakers change the semantic range of a given native word to match that of the model language. I finally consider examples of what I call 'translationese', language that is still so close to the source language as to be unintelligible without reference to the model expression.

## Formal Possessive Marker

Unlike Burma Mon, Thai and Burmese have formal markers for possession. While all three languages here can in certain conditions use a strategy of juxtaposition of possessor before the possessed (in Burmese) or possessed before the possessor (in Thai and Mon), this is

[13] I am grateful to Ajarn Bussaba Praphatsong of the Ministry of Education for sharing with me not only her knowledge of the various Thai-language versions of *Rājādhirāj*, but for advising me of the existence of two other Thai manuscripts, apparently translated from Mon, in the National Library. The standard Thai version is that of Chao Phrayā Phrakhlang (Hon) [เจ้าพระยาพระคลัง (หน)] of 1886, which has been embellished and rewritten to make for more interesting reading to a Thai audience.

the only strategy available in Burma Mon. In Thai, a commonly-used strategy is the grammaticalized[14] use of the word 'ของ' [*khong,* IPA: *kʰɔ̌ːŋ*], literally '*thing*' which in this context, no longer has its original meaning, but instead indicates posssession.

When reading the *Rājādhirāj* narrative, my Mon instructor commented repeatedly on what appeared to be 'superfluous' words, one of which was the frequent use of *krɔ̰p,*[15] which in Burma Mon means *thing, item; treasure.* Burma Mons whom I have consulted with on this phenomenon universally reject it, although some Burma Mons who have settled on the Thai side of the border may have already replicated this Thai pattern. In all of these sentences, the Burma Mon way to express the idea is to remove the use of *krɔ̰p*.

p 301:[16]

| နရာမိလ္လာ | သို | ဗုၚ်လဗး | ကြေဝ်ခတာ | စိင်ချေ့ | ၍ပ် |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Nərɛ̰əmɨnlɛ̰ə | sɒm | pɜ̰.ləpɛ̰h | krɔ̰.həta | coiŋ.cʰeh | krɔ̰p |
| Narāmilla | with | general-troop family | | elephant-horse | **THING** [17] |

[14] Following the definition of Payne, this is a process in which certain words take on a grammatical function, thus losing their original meaning. See Thomas E. Payne, *Describing Morphosyntax: A Guide for Field Linguists* (Cambridge, UK: Oxford University Press, 1997) 239 and 262.

[15] All Mon pronunciations have been rendered in literary or "reading" style, and not colloquial pronunciations.

[16] Unless otherwise indicated, page numbers all refer to Phra Candakantā's *Rājāvaṁsa Kathā*. All translations are my own.

[17] Words that are written in capitalized type have been grammaticalized and have specialized functions beyond their original meaning. Abbreviations: DEIC *deictic* (indicating "this, that"); FIN abbreviation for *finish,* used as a conjunction; FOC *focus* particle; HON honorific; INT is an *interrogative*; IRR and REAL *irrealis* and *realis*, aspect-tense distinctions between actions that have not or have been accomplished; NEG *negative*; TOP *topic*; a period between words reflects that words so joined are equivalent to one unit in the other language; = indicates that one unit contains a combination of fused meaningful units. Numbers followed by S or P indicate pronouns: 1P *first person plural*. An asterisk indicates ungrammaticality.

ဇကၠ၊ အနိုင်အခိုင် ဇက် တိတ် ကျင် ပျံ ပြင် ဇကၠ
cəkao?, ʔənɤ̰iŋ.əkʰaiŋ cɛ̤ək tɛt klɜŋ pəŋo? pəraŋ cəkao?
body, strenuously march go.out come direct side body

တံခိုင် တ္ဍ ရာဇာဓိရာဇ် ပ္ဍန်။
tɔm.cɑ̰iŋ təla? rɛ̤əcɛ̤ətʰi̤ʔrɑt plɔn
foot lord Rājādhirāj AGAIN

*Narāmilla, together with **his** troops, their families, and cavalry, forced themselves on to march straight back to the presence of Lord Rājādhirāj.*

We find several points of interest in the following example, including words and phrases that are highly reminiscent of Thai, but cannot necessarily be put back into Thai word-for-word. This example exemplifies the linguistic slippage that often marks the language of *Rājādhirāj*. This is a highly coherent example, meaning that once we take into consideration the convergence of the Mon towards Thai, it becomes readily interpretable (although in this case, being an example of prognostication, the speech of the child is deliberately cryptic).

We can note the presence of an otherwise unknown Sanskrit word *rājaśastra*, here *rɛ̤əcəsat* following the Thai pronunciation 'ราช ศาสตร์'[18] [*ratchasat*, IPA: *râːtcʰəsàːt*], which in Thai usage is a law promulgated by the king in accordance with the principles of the Dhammathat. Another Siamified phrase is *ɲɛ̤h mə tɔ̤h cənɔ̤k*, not in the Mon sense of "the person who will become great," but rather the Thai 'ผู้เป็นใหญ่' [*phu pen yai*, IPA: *pʰûː pen yày*], a common description of someone who is a "superior." There are many such examples throughout *Rājādhirāj* that may be only marginally meaningful, or misleading in Burma Mon, but when interpreted through the lens of a Thai expression or phrase become much clearer.

[18] This word has come through Thai because of the final consonants, which in native Mon words would not result in a final *–t* pronunciation of a syllable final *–s*.

p 194:

ချိန် အာ ပွဲ တြင် ထသံင်ကိုင် ဂုံ မိင် ဗြု ဒြပ် ဒါရက မ
cʰɒn ʔa pəɗoa təraŋ həsɔŋ.kaiŋ kɜ̱ʔ mo̱iŋ pəruʔ **krɜ̱p** tɛ̱ərɛ̱əkaʔ mə
when go in door Thasåŋ Kuiŋ GET hear sound **THING** child REL

ဟို် ဂး သို် ဇော် ကျင် ဒဗ် ရာဇာသာတ် ဂုံ တဝ်ဇော့ဟ် ဒုင်တဲ
hɒm **kɛ̱h** səmoiŋ cənɔ̱k klɜŋ həto̱h rɛ̱əcəsat kɜ̱ʔ tɔ.cəneh to̱ŋ.toə
say **SAY** *sming* great come establish *rājaśastra* GET attack repulse

ကု ညး မ ဒ္ဉ် ဇော်၊ ညး မ ဒ္ဉ် ဇော် မ ဂုံ ဇ္ဈ။။
kaoʔ ɲɛ̱h mə to̱h cənɔ̱k. ɲɛ̱h mə to̱h cənɔ̱k mə kɜ̱ʔ cənɛ̱h
with person REL be big. person REL be big REL GET be.victorious

*When they went to the Tasawng Kaing gate, they heard the sound of a child saying, "The great sming who brings about the rājaśastra will attack and repulse the superior man. The superior man will be victorious."*

## Quotation Particle

A feature of Burma Mon syntax that sets it apart from both Thai and Burmese is the fact that it lacks a 'quotative' particle marking direct speech and other compliments of speech. In Thai, the usual particle is 'ว่า' [*wa*, IPA: *wâː*], a grammaticalized verb originally meaning *say*. In Burma Mon, the most natural way for speech to be quoted is to either precede or follow the speech with a verb of saying or hearing, as in this sentence from *Rājādhirāj*, showing the more usual Mon phrasing:

p 294:

ဟ့ံ ကိ် စုိပ် တိရုး ပိုဍိုက် ရ **ဂး** တုဲ နုံ အ့ံ် ကိ်
hɜ̱ʔ kɒ cɒp tɔeʔ.rɛ̱h poy.ɗoik raʔ **kɛ̱h** tuy, nu̱m əsɔm kɒ
not GIVE arrive territory 1P.vassal FOC **say** FIN, exist order GIVE

ပြုပြေင်။
prɑoʔ.preaŋ
prepare

*"...[take them on] so that they won't arrive in our territory." So saying, he gave an order for preparations to be made.*

We find in the text of *Rājādhirāj*, there are repeated examples of *kɛ̤h*, Literary Mon verb meaning *say, tell* being used exactly following the Thai pattern of *wa*. This is another usage that causes considerable confusion to all the Burma Mons with whom I have consulted. Other examples include verbs other than *say*, providing more evidence for the Mon replication of the Thai model of 'รู้ว่า' [*ru* wa, IPA: *rúː wâː*], 'know that', as in:

p 294:

| တ္ဍဲး | ရာဇာဓိရာဇ် | တီ | ဝး | ပ္ဒါန် | ဗာ | စ္ဒေ့ | ရီ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| təla?.ɲɛ̤h | rɛ̤əcɛ̤ətʰi?raṭ | tɛm | **kɛ̤h** | pənan | həmɛ̤ə | cih | rɜ̤m |
| lord | Rājādhirāj | know | **SAY** | army | Burman | descend | surround |

| ဍုင် | ပြန်။ |
|---|---|
| ɗɜŋ | prɔn. |
| town | Prome. |

*Lord Rājādhirāj knew **that** the Burmese army had come down and surrounded Prome.*

The above example follows Thai word order, whereas in Burma Mon, the subordinate clause would precede the main verb, at least in Literary Mon. We may note that this Mon construction of placing the subordinate clause before the first is the natural word order of Burmese. A Burma Mon rendering of the above might be:

| ပရ္ဝ | ပ္ဒါန် | ဗာ | စ္ဒေ့ | ရီ | ဍုင် | ပြန် | ဂ့် |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| parao | pənan | həmɛ̤ə | cih | rɜ̤m | ɗɜŋ | prɔn | kɔ̤h, |
| circumstances | army | Burma | descend | surround | town | Prome | TOP, |

| တ္ဍဲး | ရာဇာဓိရာဇ် | ဂ့ | တီ | ကေတ်။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| təla?.ɲɛ̤h | rɛ̤əcɛ̤ətʰi?raṭ | kɜ̤? | tɛm | ket. |
| lord | Rājādhirāj | GET | know | TAKE. |

## Interrogative Strategies

There are many features of Mon syntax shared with Burmese. Burmese and Mon share a common interrogative pattern which stands in contrast to the Thai patterns. Mon usually indicates yes-no questions with an "absolute" question particle *ha.* Questions involving relative (who, what, where) words, however, are marked with a different particle, *rao* or *ro*. Thai, in contrast, uses a variety of expressions to ask absolute questions, including 'ไหม' [*mai*, IPA: *măi*], meaning 'isn't it?'. Another strategy is 'หรือ' [*reu,* IPA: *rɯ̌*], 'or'. The Thai and the Burmese-Mon strategies are not directly equivalent and do not always correlate with each other.

It is striking to see some of the seemingly incongruous uses of the Mon sentence-final particle *ha,* especially when found in mid-sentence. Such sentences as the following originally led my Mon teacher to wonder whether there was some kind of misprint or elision of text:

p 201:

| အဲ | ချိုန် | လဝ် | လမျိုဲ | ကု | မိ | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ʔoə | cʰɒn | lɔ̤ | ləmyɜ̤m | kaoʔ | mi̤ʔ | raʔ |
| 1s | give.over | PUT | life | with | mother | FOC |

| လှုပ် | ဝှံ | မိ | ကေတ်ဏာ | လမျိုဲ | အဲ | ဟာ | ဟာ | ပှဲး | လမျိုဲ | အဲ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ləmṳh | wṳʔ | mi̤ʔ | ket.na | ləmyɜ̤m | ʔoə | ha | ha | pəlɛ̤h | ləmyɜ̤m | ʔoə |
| now | this | mother | take | life | 1S | **INT** | **INT** | free | life | 1S |

(Bañña Noy, having read a letter, is now speaking to Ai Lea) *I have entrusted my life to you, my mother – now will you take my life or free it?*

This is another example of a sentence that, while sounding unnatural to the Burma Mon ear and appearing to be Thai-like, at the same time, a direct back translation is not fully acceptable to the Thai ear:

| เดี๋ยว | นี้ | แม่ | เอา | ชีวิต | ฉัน | หรือ | ปล่อย | ชีวิต | ฉัน |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| dĭaw | níː | mæ̂ː | aw | cʰiː wít | cʰăn | rŭ | plɔ̀ːy | cʰiː wít | cʰăn |
| Now | | mother | take | life | 1S | or | free | life | 1S |

This slippage highlights that, despite the convergence of the Mon towards Thai, there are still many details in which the syntax of the two languages are distinct, or that some parts of the syntax have been more subject to convergence than others.

The Thai word *rŭ* by itself means '*or*' and can be used to indicate alternatives. The Burmese and Mon strategies to indicate alternatives, however, are significantly different: one of the most natural strategies is to ask two parallel questions, each stating one alternative. The doubling of *ha* may indicate that Mon has not precisely copied the Thai, or the form is in fluctuation before replacing the old usage. The first instance of *ha* can be seen as a continuation of the old interrogative pattern, with the second instance taking on the meaning of '*or*'.

## Politeness Strategies

Mon and Burmese have strategies to indicate politeness in making requests, suggestions, or commands, usually taking the form of sentence final particles and verbs used to soften the question. In Thai, however, there is one particularly high-frequent strategy, the use of the verb 'ขอ' [*kho*, IPA: *kʰɔ̌ː*], literally '*ask for, request*', that has been rather grammaticalized as a way to indicate politeness. The direct translation of the Thai *kʰɔ̌ː* into Mon is *ʔat*. In Burma Mon, this verb is not used as a polite way to make a request. Clauses introduced with *ʔat* are found in *Rājādhirāj,* and I observed that this usage was confusing for both my Mon instructor and for other Burma Mons whom I asked. Part of the obscurity comes from how the construction is 'headless' in Thai, that is, no overt subject is indicated. Sentences like the following from *Rājādhirāj* are striking in their seeming unnaturalness to the Burma Mon speaker:

p 199:

| အာတ် | ကို | ဗ္ဍိလဗး | သရဲ | စိင် | ချေ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ʔat | kɒ | pɜ̤.ləpɛ̤h | səray | coiŋ | cʰeh |
| **request** | give | soldier | hero | elephant | horse |

| ကို | အဲခိုက် | ည်ဝ် | ရုံ | ဂဝ် | ညိ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kɒ | ʔoə.ɗoik | ɲɔ̤ŋ | rṵm | kɔ̤p | ɲi̤ʔ |
| GIVE | 1S.vassal | so.that | enough | suitable | LITTLE. |

The Burma Mon equivalent of the above sentence would most naturally drop the **ʔat** entirely.

## Grammaticalization

I now consider more closely two other cases of grammaticallization. The first is the use of the word '*arrive*' to indicate a human compliment of verbs of thinking and feeling, and the other is the use of the word '*search*' to indicate direction of motion or action towards humans. These two examples are significant not only because of their relative frequency, but because of how their interpretation may be deceptive to the Burma Mon reader. These usages may appear either superfluous or seem to have a literal meaning that is in contrast to their intended meaning.

### *Arrive*

In Thai, the verb 'ถึง' [*thueng,* IPA: *tʰɯ̌ŋ*) can mean '*arrive*', but has a function of also marking direction towards the endpoint of something. At the same time, it can also be used with more abstract concepts and means something like '*about, concerning*'. The use of *tʰɯ̌ŋ* is particularly common with the verbs like '*think of, remember* and *say, talk about*'. In the following sentence we have a clear example of the Thai usage. Notable also is the presence of a direct Thai loanword 'คิด' [*khit,* IPA: *kʰít*], meaning '*think (of),miss; plan, consider; wonder; be of the opinion*'. In Mon the various meanings of *kʰít* are broken up into disparate expressions. Because *kʰít* is used quite frequently in Thai for a number of purposes, the word may have been

borrowed directly into Mon because its polysemy does not allow easy division:

p 199:

| ကိုဴ | ဗညာ | နဲ | ယိတ် | **ဓုပ်** | ဇကော့ | တော့ | မေ | ထ် |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kɒ | pəɲɛ̤ə | nɔ̤ə | kʰi̤t | **cɒp** | cəkao? | təla? | mɛ̤ | thao |
| GIVE | Baññā | Noy | think | **ARRIVE** | body | lady | Me | Thao |

*Let Baññā Noy think of Lady Me Thao; let Baññā Noy miss Lady Me Thao.*

***Search***

Another Thai complementizer used in a similar way is the verb 'หา' [*hai,* IPA: *hǎ:*], which also indicates directionality, principally towards humans. The term literally means '*look for*' but in most contexts, the idea of actually searching is absent. In the following sentence, we find a clear example of Mon having replicated the Thai pattern, with the native Mon *klạy,* '*search, look for*' being pressed into service. For a Burma Mon speaker, this usage is discordant because of the desire to interpret the Mon meaning literally:[19]

p 210:

| ကိုဴ | ဗညာ | နဲ | တိတ် | ကျုင် | **ကျဲ** | အဲ | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kɒ | pəɲɛ̤ə | nɔ̤ə | tɛt | klɜŋ | **klạy** | ?oə | ra? |
| GIVE | Baññā | Noy | exit | come | **search** | 1S | FOC |

*Let Baññā Noy come to me, Have Baññā Noy come to me.*

In Burma Mon, this sentence could be rendered:

| ကိုဴ | ဗညာ | နဲ | တိတ် | ကျုင် | **ဇရင်** | အဲ | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kɒ | pəɲɛ̤ə | nɔ̤ə | tɛt | klɜŋ | **cərɛ̤əŋ** | ?oə | ra? |
| GIVE | Baññā | Noy | exit | come | vicinity | 1S | FOC |

*Let Baññā Noy come to me, Have Baññā Noy come to me.*

[19] Such English expressions as "Come look for me tomorrow" are not that different from the Thai.

**Changing *'see'* into *'think'***

A final set of expressions have to do with a Thai usage covering a range of meanings, including thinking, planning, considering, and agreeing, all based on the Thai verb 'เห็น' [*hěn*] or '*see*'. The meaning varies according to the complementizer it is coupled with. These include:

| Thai | Thai Mon Equivalent |
|---|---|
| เห็น | ညာတ် |
| [*hen*, IPA: *hěn*] | ɲat |
| *see* = see; plan; consider | |
| เห็น ว่า | ညာတ်ဂုံ |
| [*hen wa*, IPA: *hěn wâː*] | ɲat kɛh |
| *see say* = be of the opinion that, think | |
| เห็น ด้วย | ညာတ်ကို |
| [*hen duai*, IPA: hěn duây] | ɲat kɒm |
| *see also* = agree, be of an accord | |

No expression exists in Mon that corresponds neatly to the multiple uses of the Thai *hěn.* As in the case of finding an equivalent to the Thai term *kʺít*, we can observe that Burma Mon divides up the Thai expression into several distinct expressions. Nativized equivalents of these expressions are frequent throughout the text of *Rājādhirāj*. Because of their idiomatic, extended meanings, they pose significant hurdles towards comprehension for Burma Mon, especially the Mon equivalent of *hěn duây,* which sounds as though it means simply '*see also*'. The expression '*see say*' is one of the most frequently met with in the text of *Rājādhirāj*:

p 202:

| ညာတ် | ဂး | ဒး | အိုင်ဒုင် | လဝ် | ကွာ | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ɲat | kɛh | tɛh | ʔɔiŋ.tɜŋ | lɔ | kla | raʔ |
| see | SAY | HIT | endure | set-down | before | FOC |

*(I) think we will have to endure it for the time being*

In Burma Mon, this might be rendered as:

| ဒး | အောင်ဒုင် | လဝ် | ကွာ | ရ | အဲ | ထောင်။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| tɛ̤h | ʔɔiŋ.tɔ̤ŋ | lɔ̤ | kla | raʔ, | ʔoə | tʰeəŋ |
| HIT | endure | set-down | before | FOC, | 1S | think |

The Burma Mon rendering not only employs a Mon rendering of the Burmese *tʰɪ́*, English '*think, have an opinion*', but even replicates Burmese word order by placing the quotation before the verb, as is done in languages of subject-object-verb word order as Burmese.

There are two variations on the expression '*agree, be of an accord*', reflecting two different ways that this is rendered in Thai. The first in Mon is *ɲaṭ kɒm*, literally '*see also*', while the second is *ɲaṭ kʰɒh* (*kɒm*), reflecting another Thai phrase 'เห็นดี' [*hen di*, IPA: *hĕn di:*], literally, '*see good*'. This phrase has perhaps more the nuance also of '*approve of*'. In Burma Mon, *ɲaṭ kʰɒh*, a more natural expression would be *tɔp cɒt* literally '*mind equal*', or *cih cɒt*, literally '*fall mind*', depending on the context.

p 391:

| တ္လဲး | ဖရင် | မင် | ဂံင် | ဂ့ံ | မိင် | တုံ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| təlaʔ.ɲɛ̤h | pʰəraŋ | mɛ̤əŋ | kɔ̤ŋ | kɜ̤ʔ | mɔiŋ | tuy, |
| lord | Pharaṅ | Maṅ | Kåṅ | GET | hear | FIN, |

| ညာတ် | ခိုဟ် | ကို | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|
| ɲaṭ | kʰɒh | kɒm | raʔ |
| **see** | **good** | **also** | FOC |

*Bayin Min Gaung, having heard, agreed.*

## Miscellaneous Examples of Thai Syntax

There are many more examples of individual expressions and words that occur just a few times in the text. We find instances where the word order of certain expressions follows Thai. In the first example, the word for '*exist*', or in the context, '*arise*', is placed first

in the sentence following the usual position of 'มี' [*mi*, IPA: *mi:*] in Thai:

p 200:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| နှံ့ | စိုတ် | ဆာန်ဍူ | တုံ | ရ။ |
| nu̱m | cɒt | cʰan.ɗu | tɒn | ra? |
| **EXIST** | mind | pity | GO.UP | FOC |

Literally, *(S/he) felt pity arising,* or more naturally, *(S/he) felt pity.*

In Burma Mon, the *nu̱m* must come after the main phrase, in this case between the cʰan.ɗu and tɒn.

The next example is a collocation involving a metaphor of the 'mind', the figurative seat of emotions in Mon, Thai, and Burmese. In the following, we find the Thai collocation 'น้อยใจ' [*noi chai*, IPA: *nɔ́:y cay*), literally, '*few mind*', rendered into Mon:

p 204:

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| လွ | ချပ် | **အောန်** | **စိုတ်** | ဉ့ | ဗြပ္ပါန် | ပို | ရ။ |
| ləpa? | cʰɔp | **?on** | **cɒt** | pəɗoə | pɜ̱.pənan | poy | ra? |
| do.not | think | **few** | **mind** | in | forces | 3P | FOC |

*Do not feel insignificant because of our forces.*

The Burma Mon equivalent means *mind small*, as does the equivalent phrase in Burmese, and we also note that, at least for the literary language, the two parts of the sentence are reversed:

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ဉ့ | ဗြပ္ပါန် | ပို | ဂ့် | လွ | **စိုတ်** | **ဆွောတ်** | ရ။ |
| pəɗoə | pɜ̱.pənan | poy | kɔ̱h, | ləpa? | **cɒt** | **ɗot** | ra? |
| in | forces | 3P | TOP, | do.not | **mind** | **small** | FOC |

## "Translationese" – Translation or Retelling?

As many of the above examples suggest, many sentences and passages in the Mon-language *Rājādhirāj* do not make good Literary

Mon as understood in Burma. At the same time, these same sentences, when translated word-for-word back into Thai, are not smooth native Thai sentences. How can we know whether the text of *Rājādhirāj* was translated directly from a written Thai model, or simply retold in Siamese Mon? Unfortunately, there does not appear to be a body of research on this topic.[20] We may speculate that retelling in natural language – however syntactically similar it has become with another model language – would likely have a certain flow and cohesiveness that a translation may not. We have already established that the Mon-language version of this text does not match up to any one printed Thai-language version. Parts of the *Rājādhirāj* narrative appear to Burma Mon speakers to flow and cohere more so than others, but this reflects their judgement of the (un)naturalness of Siamese Mon. Hence, I can make no conclusions on the matter of translation or retelling, noting only that both are possibilities. I here consider some examples of sentences that seem to be un-interpretable without reference to a Thai original.

The following are examples of "translationese," a term I use to describe language that is still rather close to the model language to be considered natural examples of the host language. I am referring not to non-native speech, but rather attempts by native speakers to render foreign speech into their own language, often following certain formulas and conventions. The results may not be particularly natural and have a distinctly foreign flavor, which may in fact be valued aesthetically. At other times, there may be no need to render the foreign language more naturally into the local language because speakers are already familiar with the foreign expression. Being able to determine that level of familiarity, however, requires knowing the cultural, linguistic, and educational context of the speech. As discussed earlier, it appears that the Mons of 19th century were likely quite familiar with at least spoken Thai. For the non-native speaker, judging the naturalness or acceptability of any given utterance can become extremely difficult. I have had to rely on the reactions of

[20] Discussions with Mathias Jenny and Tobias Weber of the University of Zürich have led to no leads on a body of literature that discusses any of these phenomena.

Burma Mon speakers to these passages, although they themselves may accept great opacity in language.

The first example is startling because I have been able to locate a similar, though not exact, sentence in Chao Phrayā Phrakhlang's Thai-language version of *Rājādhirāj*. The meaning of the sentence is, 'It is up to you, my Lord.' The Thai word 'สุดแต่' [*sut tae*, IPA: *sùt tæ̀:*], literally 'end from', but meaning, '*it is up to [you]*', and which may be somewhat unusual, has been used in the Mon sentence. There may be something in the expression that was not easily captured in the Mon, or perhaps the Mon speakers who recorded this text may have been unfamiliar with the Thai expression. Yet again, people of the time may have been familiar with the expression or passage in Thai and a more nativized rendering was not necessary. In this passage, Mu Ai Lea is talking to Mahādewī, telling her that he will work on her behalf, to which Mahādewī replies:

p 198:

| သုတ် | ဆ | တ္ | အဲ | ရ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| sut | cʰa? | təla? | ʔoə | ra? |
| *sut* | only | lord | 1S | FOC |

Contextually, we can surmise that it means, '*It is up to you, my Lord*', or, '*As you like, my Lord*', although it sounds like '*Silk only as much as my lord*'. *Sut* in this context is meaningless in Mon: this spelling renders the pronunciation *sɔt*, meaning '*silk*' or '*sūtra*'. This sentence is wholly unintelligible without reference to the T sentence:

p 82 (Thai-language *Rājādhirāj* of Chao Phraya Phrakhlang):

| สุดแต่ | พระเจ้า | พี่ | คิด | เถิด |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| sut tæ̀: | pʰrá?.câw | pʰî: | kʰít | tʰɜ̀t |
| end from | Lord | older.sibling | think | EXHORTIVE |

*It's up to you; think of it.*

The next sentence is unusual in that it appears to use honorifics with the first person. Here the monk Acā Ma Peṅ is speaking, offering

to do something on behalf of Smiṅ Ma Rū. The position of the grammaticalized '*give*', used in both Mon and Thai in this context to mean '*allow*', would seem to change the subject, but from the context, that does not appear to be the intended meaning:

p 210:

အဲ ညှ ကိုဲ လုပ် ဂျိ တ္ဂ တိ ဇော် စိင် ဗ္ဘာင်၊
ʔoə ɲaʔ kɒ lu̯p klạy təlaʔ tɔeʔ cənǫ̣k coiŋ pətaiŋ,
1S HON GIVE enter SEARCH lord land great elephant white

အဲ ဇျဲ အာတ် ဒုဟ် ထောံ။
ʔoə cʰo̯ə ʔat tu̯h tʰɔʔ
1S help request sin throw

This sentence appears to mean not, *I will let him go to the Lord of the White Elephant and apologize (for you)*, but rather, *I will go to the Lord of the White Elephant for you and apologize on your behalf.* We can note a calque of the Thai expression asking for forgiveness 'ขอโทษ' [*kho thot*, IPA: *kʰɔ̌ː tʰôːt*] literally, 'request sin', here rendered in Mon but otherwise unknown in Burma Mon.

Finally, I want to consider a short example of Literary Mon from a text contemporaneous with *Rājādhirāj* that was recorded in Burma. I here consider two extracts from the 19th century text *Wotthu Mi Doṅ Keh Htaw* "The Story of Golden-Nib Mi Dong":

p 25:

နကိုဲ ဂလာန် ဍုန်ဓုတ် ပြ ရတ်ထဝ်ဏှာ ဟိုဲ တိုန် သာသာ
nɛ̤əʔ.kɑ kəla̤n ɗɑn.ɓɔt prɛ̤ə rɔ̤t.tʰɔ.ṇa hɑm tɑn sa.sa
with word soft woman Rat Thaw Ṇha say GO.UP gently

ပ့ဲ လက့် ရ။ ယွံလေဝ် မ့ဲ တံ၊ မ့ဲ တံ ညး
pədoə ləkɔ̤h raʔ. yɔ̤ʔ.lɛ̤ ɓɔ̤ə tɔʔ, ɓɔ̤ə tɔʔ ɲɛ̤h
in time=that FOC. VOC older-sister PLU, older-sister PLU people

| ဂမျိုင်၊ | လ့ | ဒ့် | လ့ | စံင်တ့ | ပ့ဆာ | အိုတ် | ညိ။ |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| kəmlaiŋ, | ləpaʔ | tɔ̤h | ləṇim | cɔŋ.tao | pao.cʰa | ʔat | ɲi̤ʔ |
| PLU, | do.not | become | worry | distress | distress | all | LITTLE. |

*Then, with soft words, Rot Htaw Hna said gently, "Sisters, please do not worry or be distressed."*

Although there are some examples of elaborated speech and expressions in *Rājādhirāj*, the language there features less repetition, such as we find here, of 'older sisters', and of *ləṇim, tao.pao,* and *cɔŋ cʰa,* each of which convey the same idea. In the above passage, there is no formal quotation marker, but rather the verb of saying precedes the quotations.

## Conclusion

I have tried to present my findings as persuasively as possible without going more deeply into the nature of Thai, Mon, and Burmese syntax. It is remarkable that someone with a circumscribed familiarity with Thai and Mon has been able to see the parallels between Thai syntax and the syntax of the Mon of this text. Scholars with greater familiarity with literary Thai may find more profound confluences between the languages. At the same time, not everything that is unusual in the Mon *Rājādhirāj* may be attributable to Thai models. We do not know much about the circumstances of the creation of the text. I hope this study is a starting point for new lines of inquiry.

We do not yet have a sufficient state of knowledge to definitively situate the language of the Mon *Rājādhirāj*. Many scholars believe the language reflects dialectal differences between Burmese Mon and Siamese Mon, with the latter preserving words that have died out in Burma. While Thai scholars have researched modern Thai Mon dialects, [21] more work has to be done on variation within

[21] See bibliography for some of these listings.

Burma Mon.[22] Scholars may argue that since the Mons were first in the area, any similarities between Mon and neighboring languages must come from Mon. This logic continues that if the Mon *Rājādhirāj* has been influenced by Thai, then Thai itself was influenced by Mon. We cannot escape the primary explanatory power of Mon.

The texts of the *Rājāvaṁsa Kathā* may have been created at a particular turning point in local history writing. Influenced by Siamese ideas of a national history, members of the Siamese Mon community may have decided to compile a national history. At the time, the idea of "translation" as a process crossing different national essences may not have been as firmly entrenched as it is now. The narrative was simply retold in another medium, as may have been happening for centuries.

My intention here is not to paint the Mon language as passive and receptive, with Mon speakers mimicking the speech of their more powerful neighbors, the Thais and Burmese. Rather, I believe that a careful examination of the actual language of historical and literary texts can reveal the cross-cultural contact and exchanges that has been occurring between at least these three languages for centuries. The Mon language of *Rājādhirāj* reveals a particularly vivid and unexpected example.

[22] While Diffloth has surveyed Mon phonology, little has been done on variation in syntax, usage, and vocabulary. See Gérard Diffloth, *The Dvaravati Old Mon Language and Nyah Kur* (Bangkok: Chulalongkorn University Printing House, 1984).

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