



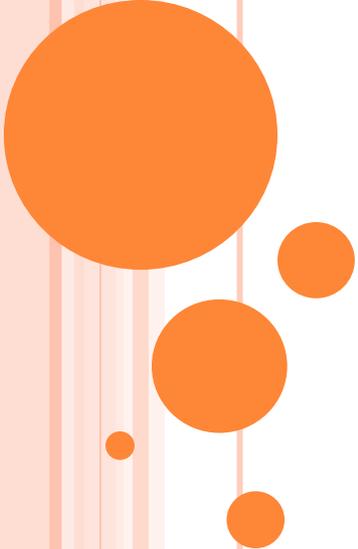
RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

Produced by Graduate Students in the M.Ed. In TESL Program
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Language Group: Burmese
Author: Jeff Grifka

Program Contact Person: Nancy Cloud (ncloud@ric.edu)



THE BURMESE LANGUAGE

Jeff Grifka

TESL 539

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BACKGROUND

- ❑ The Burmese or Myanmar script came from the Mon script, which derived from a southern Indian script during the 8th century. The earliest known inscriptions in the Burmese script date from the 11th century.
- ❑ c. 1058–present
- ❑ Burmese is spoken by 32 million as a first language and as a second language by 10 million, particularly ethnic minorities in Burma and those in neighboring countries.



CLASSIFICATIONS AND FEATURES:

- ❑ The language is classified into two categories: Formal and Colloquial.
 - ❑ Formal is used in literary works, official publications, radio broadcasts, and formal speeches.
 - ❑ Colloquial is used in daily conversation and spoken.
- ❑ Diglossia occurs in Burmese, it is quite evident in speech and writing.
- ❑ The language type is called Abugida. The language system is based on consonants. Vowel use is secondary in this language.
- ❑ Type of writing system: syllabic alphabet - each letter has an inherent vowel [a]. Other vowels sounds are indicated using separate letters or diacritics which appear above, below, in front of, after or around the consonant.



FEATURES CONTINUED:

- ❑ Script Features:
 - ❑ The rounded appearance of letters is a result of the use of palm leaves as the traditional writing material. Straight lines would have torn the leaves. The Burmese name for the script is *ca-lonh* 'round script'.
- ❑ Tone Burmese Symbol: Letter a
 - ❑ [ɲà] Normal phonation, medium duration, low intensity, low (often slightly rising) pitch.
 - ❑ [ɲá] Sometimes slightly breathy, relatively long, high intensity, high pitch; often with a fall before a pause.
 - ❑ [ɲa] Tense or creaky phonation (sometimes with lax glottal stop), medium duration, high intensity, high (often slightly falling) pitch.



CONSONANTS:

| | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| က | ခ | ဂ | ဃ | င |
| စ | ဆ | ဇ | ဈ | ည |
| ဋ | ဌ | ဍ | ဎ | ဏ |
| တ | ထ | ဒ | ဓ | န |
| ပ | ဖ | ဗ | ဘ | မ |
| ယ | ရ | လ | ဝ | သ |
| | ဟ | ဣ | အ | |

- ❑ The Burmese alphabet consists of 33 consonants.
- ❑ The first 25 consonants are distributed into five classes: gutturals, palatals, cerebrals, dentals and labials.
- ❑ The rest are called liquids, sibilant and aspirate.

Judson

[\(http://www.worldtranslationcenter.com/\)](http://www.worldtranslationcenter.com/)



LANGUAGE USE TODAY:

- ❑ Diglossia occurs to a large extent in the Burmese language and is fairly noticeable in writing and speech.
- ❑ The written/literary form of Burmese has undergone only a few changes and tends not to accommodate the spoken/colloquial phonology of standard Burmese language today.
- ❑ Due to innate pronunciation rules, literate Burmese speakers are able to intuitively interpret ancient Burmese despite the potentially ancient nature of the inscriptions.
- ❑ Demonstrating that the modern method of expression makes the language clearer and more comprehensible.

Source: Omniglot



PHONOLOGY ISSUES:

- ❑ Vowels cause many problems for Burmese learners of English.
- ❑ The language consists of 10 vowels (a, i, u, ou, o, [O], ei, e, [E]).
 - ❑ The tone of each vowel is expressed in either a high pitch or low pitch tone.
 - ❑ Example: Low /k^hà/ "shake"
 - ❑ High /k^há/ "be bitter"
 - ❑ Creaky /k^ha/ "fee"
 - ❑ Checked /k^haʔ/ "draw off"
 - ❑ The least marked high vowels take the creaky tone (a special kind of phonation in which the arytenoid cartilages in the larynx are drawn together, as a result, the vocal folds are compressed rather tightly, becoming relatively slack and compact) the mid vowels take the level tone and the low vowels take the heavy tone.
- ❑ The rules in English are much different and confuse learners.



PHONOLOGY CONTINUED:

- ❑ The Burmese language is pronounced by the placement of the tongue and this can be an issue when learning English:
 - ❑ Ex: “k” is used in the English language one way, the letter can be translated to mean something by the way it’s pronounced.
- ❑ Regional varieties that could pose a problem to Burmese English language learners:
 - ❑ Ex: people in New England pronounce the English language much different from someone in Texas. Learners may get confused with the different accents.
- ❑ Letter issues:
 - ❑ Ex: few Burmese people can pronounce the letter “r” and in their language substitute the letter “y” instead.



GRAMMAR: SYNTAX

- ❑ The basic word order of the Burmese language is subject-object-verb.
- ❑ Burmese is monosyllabic (i.e., every word is a root to which a particle but not another word may be prefixed).
- ❑ Sentence structure determines syntactical relations and verbs are not conjugated. Instead they have particles suffixed to them. For example, the verb "to eat," (ca: [sà]) is itself unchanged when modified.
- ❑ Burmese is not a tense-marking language.

LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES:

- ❑ Errors learners make in translations from the Burmese language to English:
 - ❑ Myint Su (1971) outlined many errors in her study that exhibit non-discrimination by the learner between items which have fewer meaning equivalents in Burmese:
 - Ex: Pyo can mean: ask, talk, speak and say
 - ❑ This results in the following errors:
 - Ex: Listen what the teacher speaks.
They talk that they get a new car.
My mother talks me to try for an examination.
 - ❑ These language issues can lead to miscommunications when words are used in this manner.



LANGUAGE DIFFICULTIES CONTINUED:

- ❑ The lexical set of lend, borrow, hire, rent and let pose translation issues. There are two Burmese equivalents:
 - ❑ Hoi means either lend or borrow.
 - ❑ Hgna can mean any of the five (lend, borrow, hire, rent, or let)
 - ❑ This non-isomorphism explains the following errors that are commonly made:
Ex: He lends the book from his friend.
I will borrow my bicycle to your father.
Landowners hire their wide lands to the poor.
- ❑ Their inabilities to use the vocabulary properly can be confusing to the person they are communicating with.

BURMESE COMMUNICATION STYLES

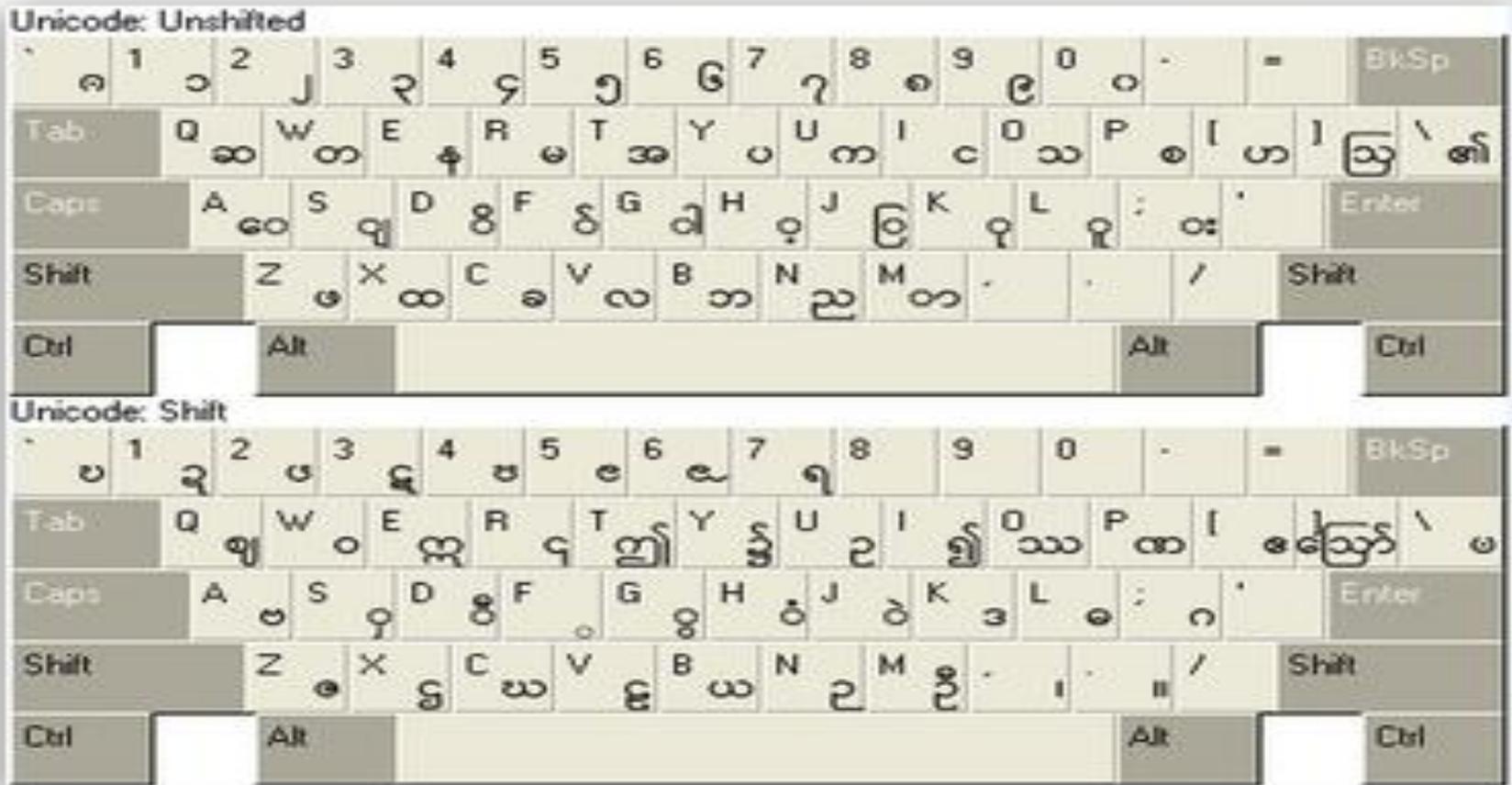
- ❑ Never touch a person's hair, head or cheek, even if you consider it as a friendly gesture. Myanmar people would not consider it friendly, and will think you are rude.
- ❑ Don't touch any part of a lady's body. You might end up in a police station.
- ❑ Never raise your underwear above your head. This is considered very rude.

<http://www.myanmar2day.com/myanmar-culture-custom/2008/12/myanmar-etiquette-general-rules>

- ❑ Patting a child on the head not only is improper but is thought to be dangerous to the child's well-being.
- ❑ It is considered improper to lose one's temper or show much emotion in public
- ❑ A person should not point the feet at anyone

<http://www.everyculture.com/Bo-Co/Burma.html#ixzz1OV511Z37>

STANDARD BURMESE KEYBOARD



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burmese_language

- If you notice, the capitalized symbols are much different from the lower case symbols in the Burmese language.

HELPFUL ONLINE SITES:

- <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K3McoyGA4SI>
- <http://viss.wordpress.com/2009/01/04/10-things-i-hate-about-the-burmese-language/>
- <http://www.seasite.niu.edu/burmese/language.htm>
- http://www.sil.org/~hoppelp/dissertation/chapters/Chapter_2_Burmese_Grammar.pdf



RESOURCES:

Books

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- Laufer-Dvorkin, B. (1991). *Similar Lexical forms in interlanguage*, x + 250, DM 124. Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag.

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Maps

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Images

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M.Ed. in TESL Program
Nancy Cloud, Director
Educational Studies Department
Rhode Island College, HBS 206 #5
600 Mt. Pleasant Avenue
Providence, RI 02908
Phone (401) 456-8789
Fax (401) 456-8284
ncloud@ric.edu

The M.Ed. in TESL Program at Rhode Island College
is Nationally Recognized by TESOL and NCATE



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