Certification course for Myanmar Language Studies:

"Language and society in Myanmar and beyond"

July 26 - August 20, 2021

Mo, We, Fr 2pm - 3pm (Myanmar time)

Lesson 11: Non-national languages - Myanmar

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Languages of Myanmar -

six language families:

- **Sino-Tibetan**
- **Austroasiatic**
- **Tai-Kadai**
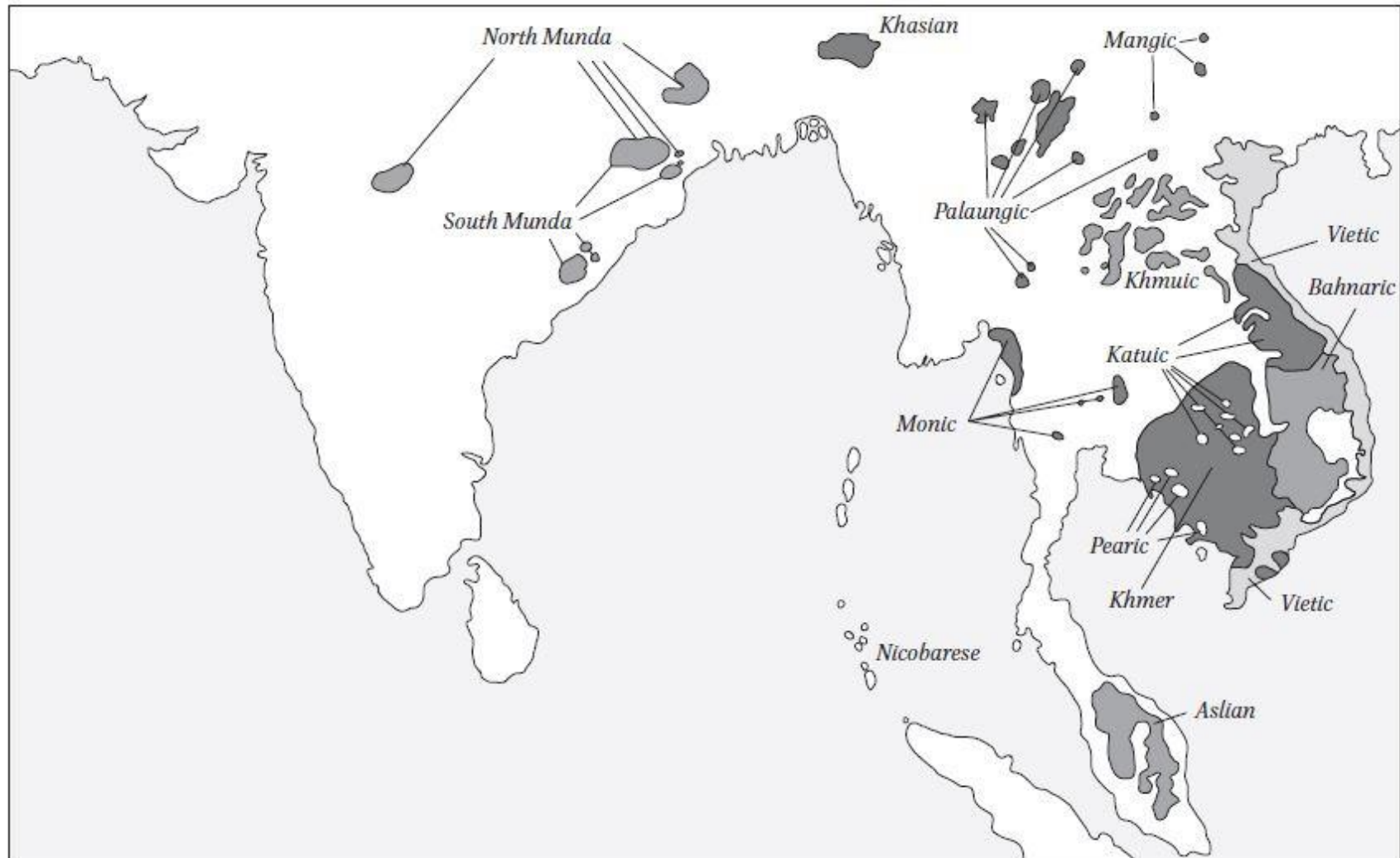- **Austronesian**
- **Hmong-Mien**
- **Indo-European**

Official status: only Burmese

Examples of non-national languages of Myanmar in their contexts

➢ **Mon**

➢ **Shan and Khuen**

➢ **Gorakha and Rohingya**

1. Mon

Austroasiatic languages

Mon as literary language

Since the 6th century in Thailand:

Transliteration	Translation
duṁpoh cwas	seven-ty
moy dnow	one *dnow*
hāṅ klam ti ḍey	? hundred earth in
...ra' sraṅ kyāk wihār	... cast Buddha temple
laṁ-ur sra rāṅ	*lam-ur* silver (?)
doṅ ḅār ǝɛ 'awo'	shaman two ǝɛ this
...r taṁ brāw bihār	... tree coconut temple

(Jenny 2005)

In Bagan, Mon was the main literary language besides Pali
11th-12th centuries
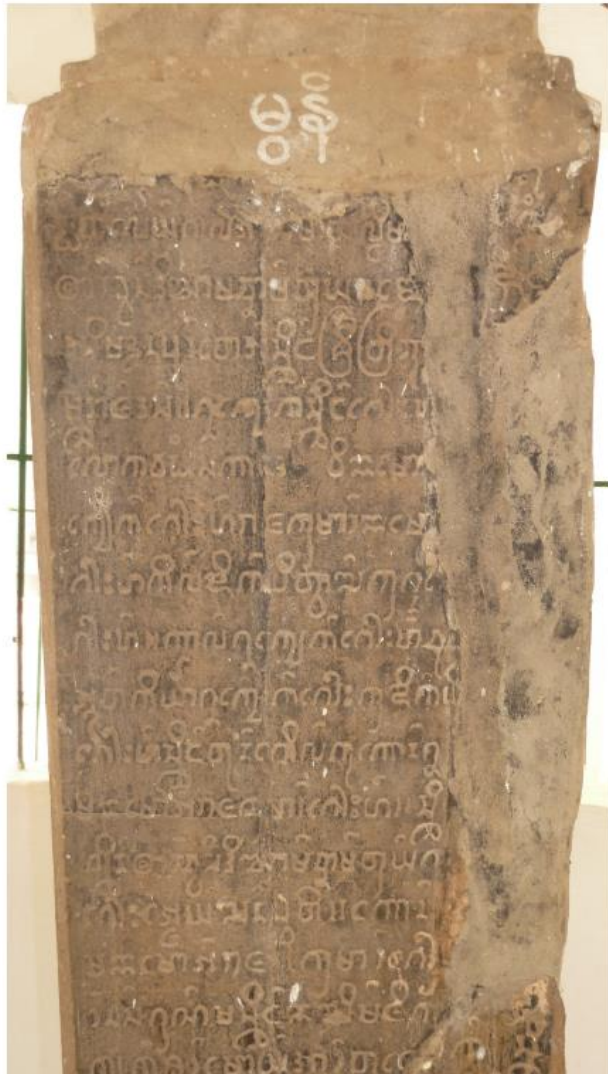
The Mon inscriptions show us the development of Mon

Decreasing political power, increasing Burmese influence in the language

Old Mon (Kubyaukgyi inscription)

yal	kcit	sak	ñaḥ	ma	yām.
if	die	not.exist	person	REL	weep

'If they die, there is no one to weep for them.'

Conditional clause with clause-initial subordinator *yal* 'if'

Conditional clause with clause-initial subordinator *yow* 'if' and clause-final topic marker *mā*

Middle Mon (Kalyani inscription)

yow	dah	*mā*
if	be	TOP

'if it should be the case that'

Middle Mon (Ajapala inscription)

pḍay	paṭisandhi	ey	kəp.tlā	gah,	kwon	truh	mway	ey	goʔ	*mā*	...
LOC	confinement	1SG	first	that	child	male	one	1SG	get	TOP/if	

'If in my first confinement I get a son, ...'

Conditional clause with clause-final topic marker *mā*

Ongoing activity in Mon

Mon National Schools

2011 statistics (Hall&South 2012):

Schools   272

Teachers   808
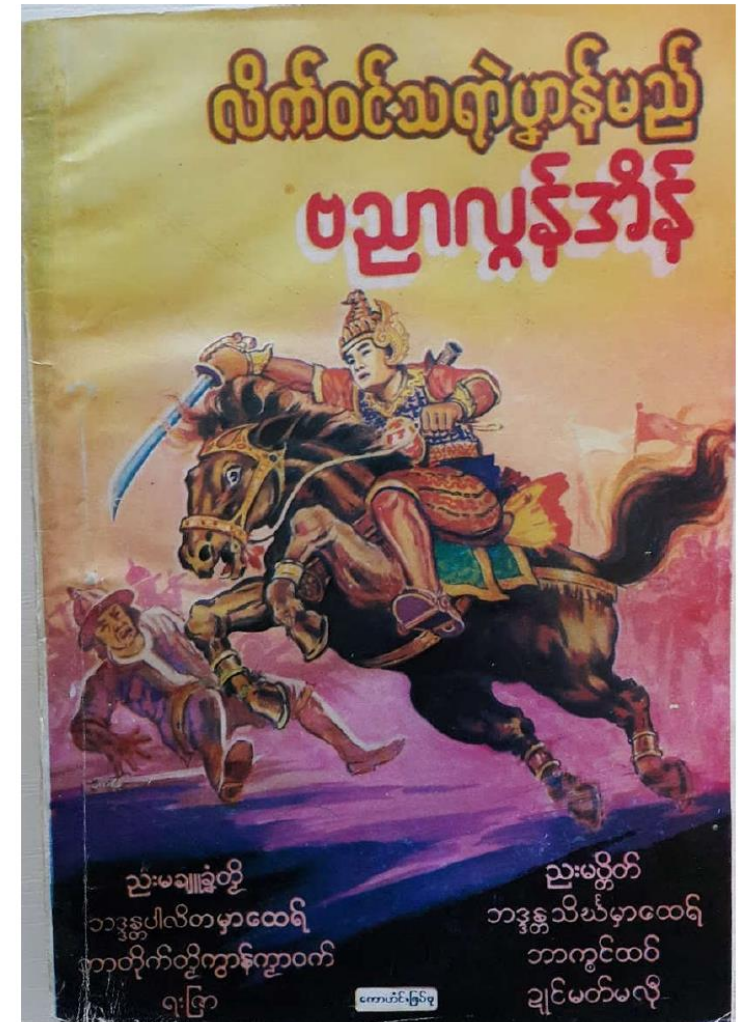
Students   36,227
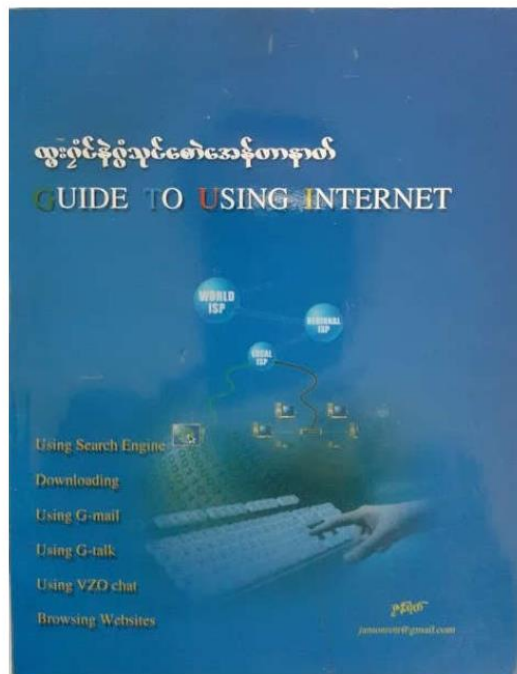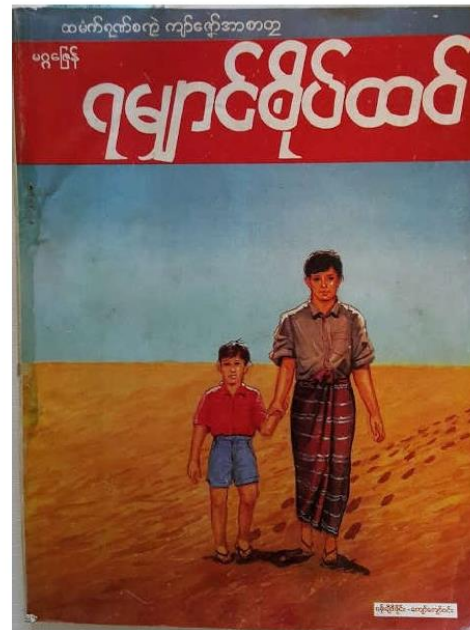
Primary: all subjects in Mon

Middle: geography and history in Burmese, explanations in Mon, Mon modules

High: all subjects in Burmese, explanations in Mon, Mon modules

Popular literature (magazines, modern poems, short stories) and online resources

Challenges for the Mon language

Social challenges: In spite of a strong national/ethnic feeling of being Mon

- Mon National Schools don't enjoy a high reputation everywhere

- Mon is not seen as a useful means of communication

- Literacy in Mon is not seen as necessary

- Low or no presence in the media and modern technology (no Mon font for chats)

- Low budget and low return of investment for Mon-specific productions

- Mon no longer seen as means of soft opposition against Burmese

2. Shan and Khuen

Endonym: *Tai* တႆး
                      (= Thai)

Exonym: *Shan* ရှမ်း <rʰamḥ> (early texts သျှမ်း <sʰyamḥ>)
                      (= Siam; As**sam**?, A**hom**?; Ptolemy *Sa**m**arade*?)

Intermediary position both in terms of topography and national boundaries

- Fertile high plateau, rice and vegetable cultivation, mining

- Buddhist culture (Theravada)

- Varieties spoken in Myanmar, China, India, and Thailand

- Economic ties with Thailand and China (and India)

- Linguistically and culturally closely related to Thai (Tai-Kadai family)

Status of Shan historically

- Traditional place of origin *Möng Mau* (Myanmar-China border)

- Shan (and Palaung, Pa-O) *möng* since 13th century (?)

- Language of state, education, religion, literature

- Partly retained official status under British rule

- Spread throughout northern Myanmar (Khamti)

- Spread into Assam (Ahom Kingdom ?1228 to 1826 AD)
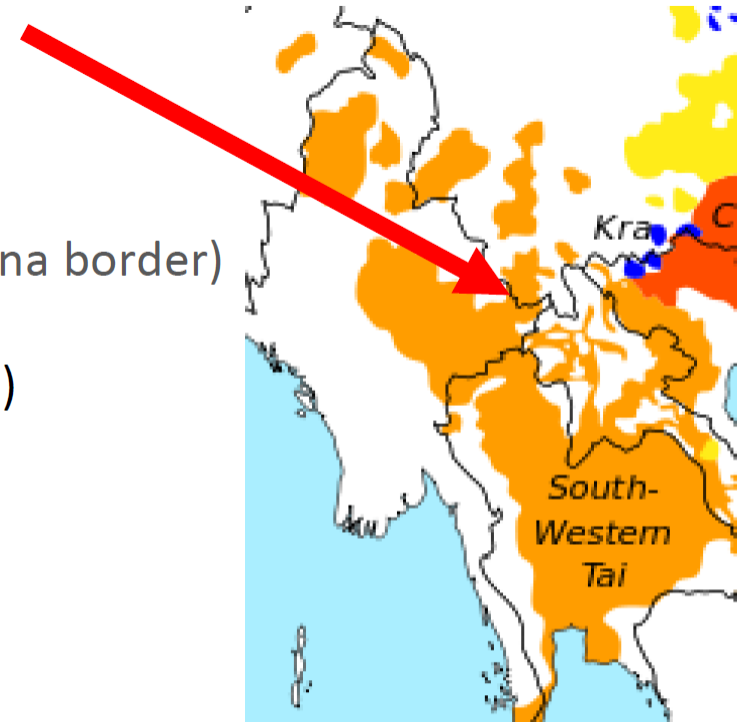
Noodles - who was first?

Burmese **ခေါက်ဆွဲ** *kʰauʔ-sʰwὲ* - because the dough is "folded and pulled" to produce noodles.

Or

Is it Shan **ခၢဝ်သွႆး** *kʰew-sɔj* "cereal cut in long slices"?

Maybe the word was borrowed into Burmese from Shan when Shan still had a higher status and was then re-interpreted as having a Burmese origin and meaning (**"folk etymology"**)?

Increasingly superseded in official domains by Burmese after 1962

- Replaced as language of administration, education, literature

- Becoming increasingly subordinate language, also locally

- Losing ground to Burmese in many areas (esp. South Shan State)

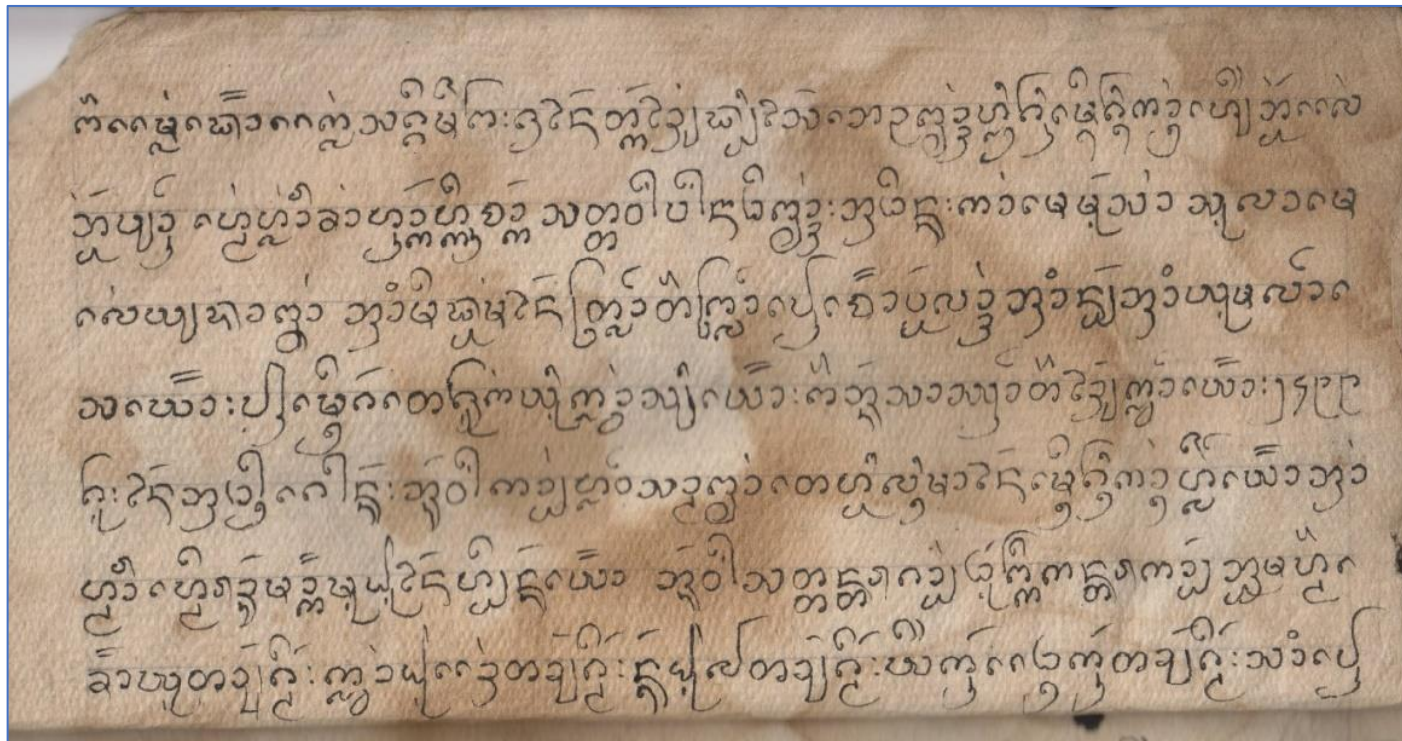- Increasing ties with Thailand/Thai language in border areas (esp. after 1988)

The case of Khuen

Literary language in eastern Shan State (Kyaingtone)

Closely related to Khammueang in northern Thailand and Lue in SW Yunnan

Written in its own script (Tham-script; similar to Lanna and Lue)

Undergoing increasing Burmanization in the lexicon

Vocabulary explanations in a Khuen reader from 1963:

Text	Explanation	Gloss	Burmese
kwáːm-kʰît	kwáːm-céːn.cáː	'thought'	sìɴ.zà
cənît	mjóː	'kind'	ʔəmjò
lūːk-sít	təpέː	'disciple, pupil'	dəbέ
ʔənûʔɲāːt	ʔəkʰwâːŋ	'allow'	ʔəkʰwín
pʰàːttʰənǎː	sú.tɔ́ːŋ	'wish, pray'	sʰú tàuɴ
hâːn	sɛ̄ːŋ	'shop'	sʰaiɴ
nɤ́ːn	kúŋ	'hill'	kòuɴ
nâm-təléː	nâm-pàːŋ.lāːj	'sea'	piɴlɛ (Shan pàŋlàj)
nɛ̄ː	ʔəmàːn	'sure'	ʔəhmaɴ
ɸût	pèː	'foot'	pe

3. Gorakha and Rohingya

Migration of Nepali-speakers to central and northern Myanmar about 150 to 200 years ago
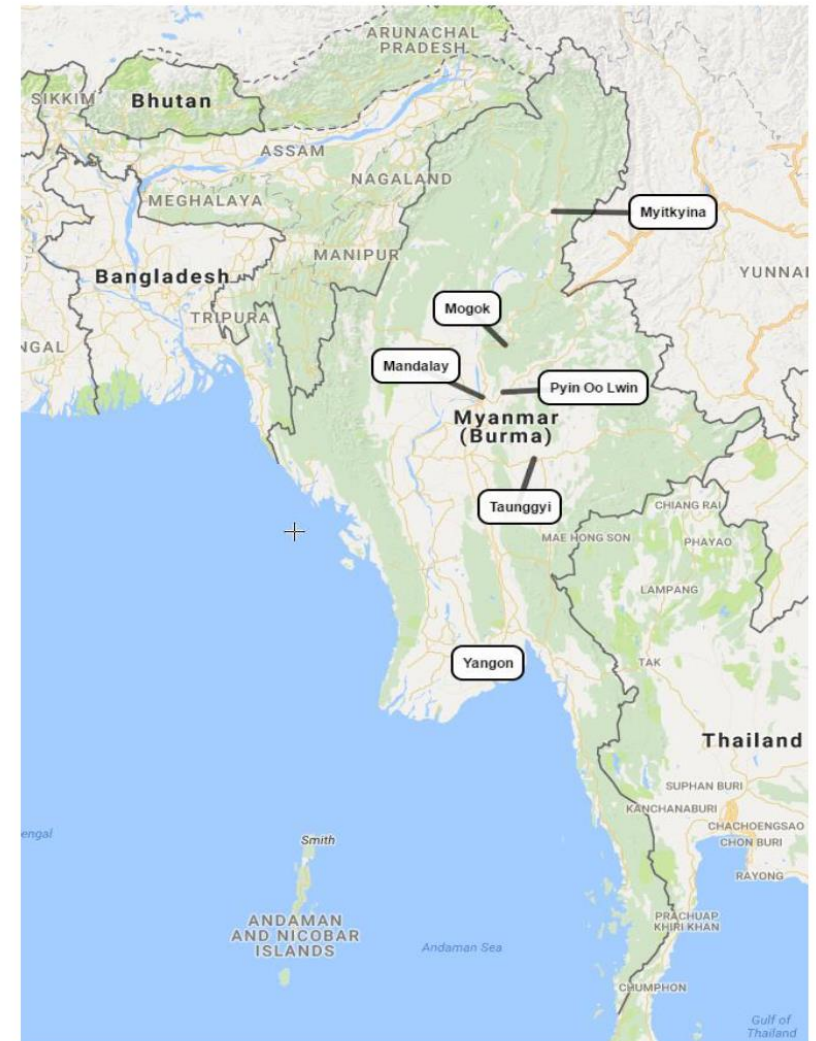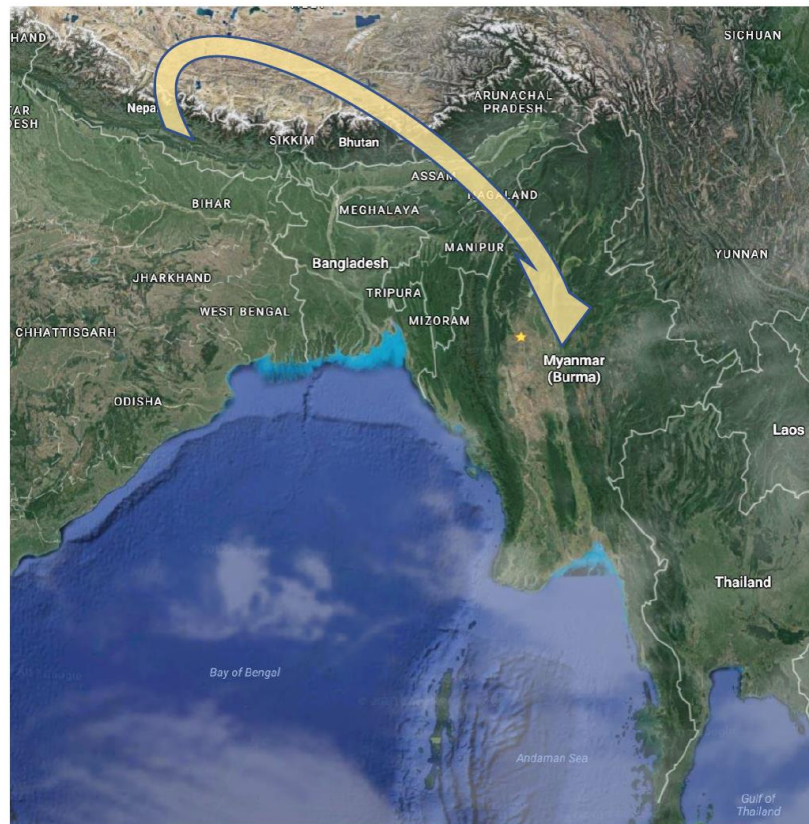
Background of the Myanmar Gorakha (MG)

Migration from different parts of Nepal, different ethnic groups/castes

Gorakha no ethnic group in Nepal, but seen as such in Myanmar
    Gorakha obliterating original ethnicities/castes
    but: not much intermarriage between different castes

Soldiers of the British colonial army and families in search of better opportunities

Well integrated in Myanmar, both in urban and rural settings

Isolated from Nepal until around 2000 AD

Increased influence from Burmese (media, education)
at the same time increased exposure to Standard Nepali

Burmese influence in Myanmar Gorakha

SN	*tricalis* forty.three	*wʌʈa* CLF	*kitab* book	'forty-three books'
MG1	*kitab* book	**calis-tin** forty-three	*wʌʈa* CLF	'forty-three books'
MG2	*kitab* book	**lè-zɛ́-ϑòun** four-ten-three	**ʔouʔ** CLF	'forty-three books'
B	*sa.ʔouʔ* book	*lè-zɛ́-ϑòun* four-ten-three	*ʔouʔ* CLF	'forty-three books'

The past and future of Myanmar Gorakha

MG use has been stable over several generations

Factors favoring retention:

- increased consciousness of identity
- formal education in SN
- increased contact with Nepal
- business opportunities
- online and entertainment media in SN

Factors favoring shift to B:

- increased use of Burmese in daily life (work, school)
- improved mobility and communication in B
- more widespread state education
- more widespread state and private media in B

And finally … a quick look at Rohingya

These kings (mentioned elsewhere in fourteenth-century inscriptions of the Chindwin valley)[18] have Indian, not Yünnanese titles, and are said to have been Muslims, against whom (?) the three tribes were enlisted by Pagán kings in making war on the Indian side of the border.

While this dating back to the Pagán period may be questioned, the tradition is old, and not easily rejected. The main inhabitants of the Mayu river region east of the Naaf, who are known today as the Rohinjas, are a fine type of devout and scholarly-minded Muslims, who claim to have inhabited this region for over a thousand years. This is an exaggeration. But Muslim invaders, we know, occupied Bengal in 1202,[19] and soon thereafter reached the Arakan border, doubtless destroying the last Buddhist kingdom of Patikkarā (Comilla), well known to the early kings of Pagán. It is likely enough that fighting occurred on this frontier, involving the local tribesmen, and that some Muslim generals or converted local chiefs established themselves on the Burma side of the frontier.

Luce, G.H. *Phases of pre-Pagán Burma.* (1985)

Rohingya, like Gorakha and Pali, is an Indo-Aryan language belonging to the Indo-European family. It is closely related to the Chittagong dialect of Bangla.

Rohingya has been spoken in what today is northern Rakhine State for several hundred years.

The name **Rohingya** probably derives from **Rakhine**. (k and h [h~x] can be interchangeable, as seen in Rohingya *dehé* and *deké* 'see')

Rohingya has been written in the Roman alphabet since 1999:
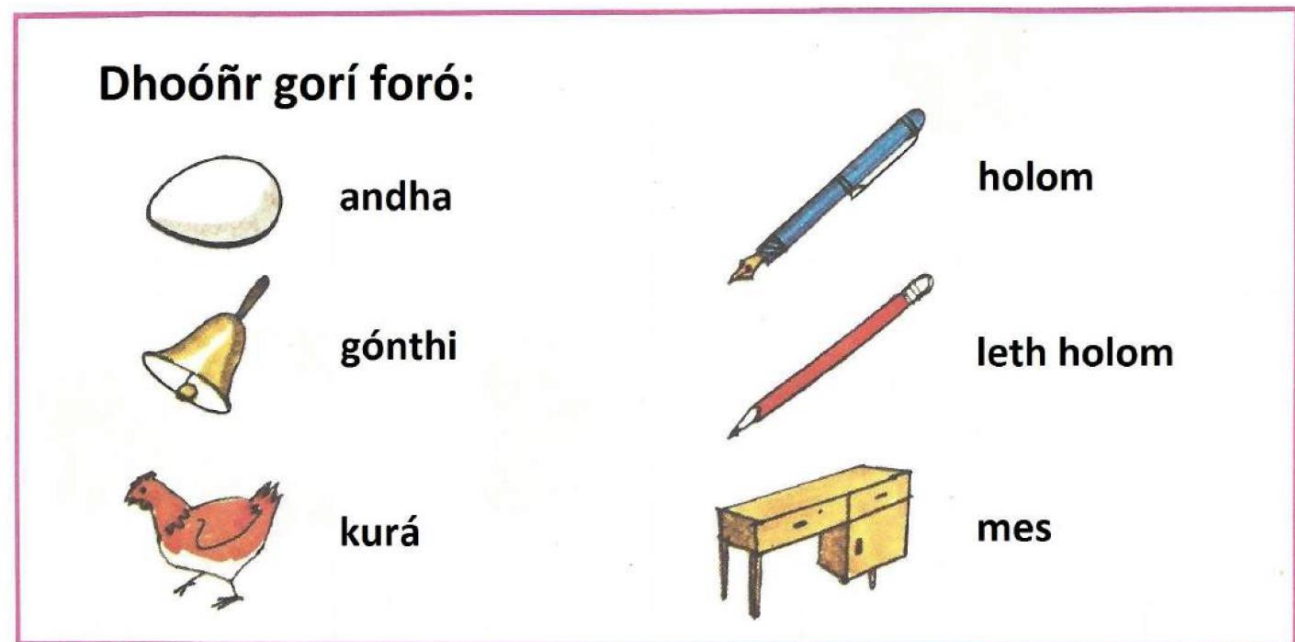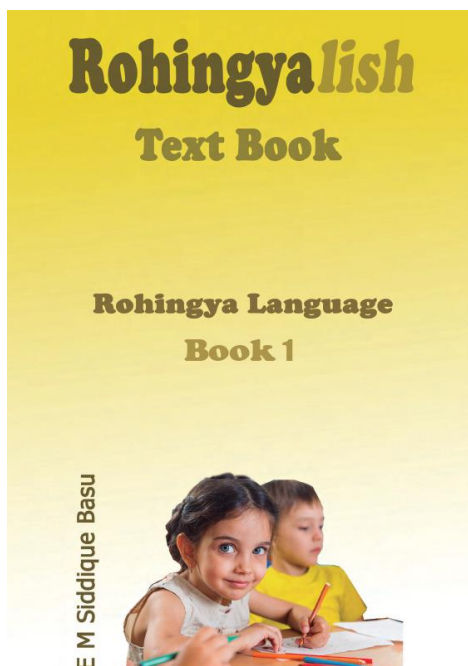
Days of the week and numbers in Rohingya

Cónibar   'Saturday'
Rooibar   'Sunday'
Cómbar   'Monday'
Mongolbar   'Tuesday'
Buidbar   'Wednesday'
Bicíbbar   'Thursday'
Cúkkurbar   'Friday'

Rohingya Numbers

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
sifír	ek	dui	tin	sair	fañs	só	háñt	añctho	no

→ **Can you see the connection to the Burmese words?**

And what about sheep?

Burmese သိုး *ϑò* corresponds to Mon သိုဟ် *sɒ* (and similar in Karenic and Chinic).

→ But where does it come from?
no likely cognates in Sino-Tibetan or Austroasiatic

Maybe Rohingya *sóol* 'sheep' can give a hint ...

- No obvious cognates in other Indo-Aryan languages.

- Final /-l/ shows that the word is not borrowed from Burmese.

- Loan from Rohingya into Mon/Burmese?

- Shared loan from unknown third language?

In the final lecture, we will sum up the course and have a look how the linguistic knowledge can be applied in different fields.