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# **Tracing Patterns of Contact and Movement in the Greater Burma Zone**

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October 17, 2014, MPI Leipzig



## Outline

- Social and linguistic factors in language contact
- The Greater Burma Zone in space and time
- Contact scenarios in the southern plains - Mon between Thai and Burmese
- Contact scenarios in the northern hills - Burmese, Jinghpaw and Shan
- Expectations and findings
- Outlook



## Social and linguistic factors influencing language contact (received ideas)

### Linguistic factors facilitating contact-induced change

Structural similarity of SL and TL

Transparency of constructions in SL

Compactness of expression in SL

Prominence of expression in SL

Presence of similar patterns in TL

Presence of look-alikes in TL

Gap in TL



## **Social factors influencing outcome of language contact**

Hierarchical structure

High prestige vs. low prestige

Political power

Language attitude/ideology

Number of speakers of each variety

Intensity and domains of interaction

Bilingualism rate in individuals and society



## Language change in language contact

Process	Major factors involved	
Bilingual speaker forms utterance, based on their communicative goals and their linguistic repertoire	Linguistic	Matras 2009, 2012
The chosen pattern may not match the communication situation → innovation	Linguistic	
Innovative utterance is replicated by other speakers	Social	Croft 2000, Ansaldo 2009, Mufwene 2008
Replication of innovative utterance spreads	Social	

Actuation

Propagation

## Our assumptions:

**Pattern replication of SL features leading to grammatical hybridization starts with bilingual speakers and can spread to monolingual speakers of TL in certain socio-cultural settings.**

The propagation of an innovation crucially depends on socio-cultural, rather than linguistic factors.

Different socio-cultural settings are therefore expected to lead to different outcomes in language contact situations.

→ The spread of features can be an indicator of socio-cultural contact settings

Matter replication is more visible (i.e. more conscious) than pattern replication

→ Different factors are at play in the propagation of matter replication (language ideology, prestige) and pattern replication (number of speakers, frequency of construction)

Matter replication reflects hierarchical social relations, pattern replication reflects intensity of contact

Matter and pattern replication can reveal chronology of contact

## The Greater Burma Zone in Space and Time

Position of a society as whole in a hierarchy is key to understanding outcomes of language contact

Lower Status Society/Language vs Higher Status Society/Language





## Key indices to hierarchy:

### Ecological and Economic Niche:

Upland	vs	Lowland or Valley Dweller
Dry Rice	vs	Wet Rice

(see Scott 2009)

### Religion:

Animist, more recently Christian	vs	Buddhist
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(see Woodward & Russell in Russell 1989)

### Political:

Relative Egalitarian or “Acephalous”	vs	States with Royalty
Less internal stratification or differentiation	vs	More internal stratification or differentiation

### Cultural:

Low prestige	vs	High prestige
Non-literate (until recently)	vs	Literate, using scripts of Indic origin



Not all Social/Linguistic movement from low to high.

Oscillation between poles, people become other pole

“Dyadism” between societies in Zomia, or Upland Mainland Southeast Asia, based on an idea of complementarity (based on Leach 1959)

Dyadism found elsewhere in the region, such as in Malaysia between “downriver” Malays and “upriver” Orang Asli (Benjamin 2002)

## Both poles have push and pull effects

### UPLAND (LOW STATUS)

vs

### LOWLAND (HIGH STATUS)

Subsistence lifestyle

vs

greater possibilities for ambitious “bright lights, big city”

No state or state demands,  
freedom from control

vs

state demands of labor and taxation

Distance allows flourishing  
of heretical sects

vs

strict control of religious orthodoxy

However, cultural and linguistic dyads can also form between two societies of the same level, such as Burmese and Mon.

In the Greater Burma Zone, there are two prominent hierarchy-based types of interactions, or dyads:

1) Oscillatory between high and low, between upland and lowland. Leach's example of the Shan and Kachin/Jinghpaw.

2) Assimilationist, as between two high-status languages, Mon and Burmese. Today assimilation tends to be Mon towards Burmese. Assimilation involves no fundamental shift in religion, ecological niche, etc.

-Assimilation also possible in the oscillatory dyads, but underlying social dynamics fundamentally different.

General Observations:

- Lower status languages tend to replicate higher status patterns
- Language ideology can block matter replication
- Higher status languages replicate lower status patterns under unique local conditions (Khamti Shan)
- Many languages in area in in-between stages:  
Turung appear to be a Tai people who have quite recently adopted Singpho (Jinghpaw in India)  
The Tai Sa and Tai Loi also speak an Austro-Asiatic language, at least at home.
- Ethnicity, identity, and language are not closely bound.
- Generally, the more languages an individual speaks, the lower their status.

## Contact scenarios in the southern plains - Mon between Thai and Burmese

Long documented history:

Mon: 6th century in Thailand, 11th century in Burma

Burmese: 11th century

Thai: 14th century

- Kingdoms/states with fluctuating political dominance at different times and in different places
- Plains societies occupying the same economic niches
- Fluctuating but equal distribution of dominance, similar social structures



- Heavy Burmese and Thai influence in Mon on all levels, structural and lexical since 14th century and mid 20th century
  - Mon becomes subordinate language at different times
- Mon influence in the structure of modern Southern Burmese, no Mon loanwords in Southern Burmese
  - Matter replication is not necessary for pattern replication
  - Structural influence is possible from subordinate to dominant language (local dominance)
  - Bilingualism is not necessary in TL speakers
- No evident Mon influence in local Thai varieties
  - It's social, rather than linguistic reasons that trigger contact induced change



## Contact scenarios in the northern hills - Jinghpaw and Shan

- Less time-depth to the written record than in Lower Burma
- Less time-depth in the contact than in Lower Burma
- Tai speakers appear only in the 13th century, no written records of Jinghpaw speakers
- Contact often obscured by oscillation between groups
- Reflecting the geography there are greater differences in the positions on the hierarchy of the languages
- Reflecting the nature of the hierarchy, there are manifestations of
  - replication of Shan matter in all Jinghpaw varieties
  - replication of Shan patterns in some Jinghpaw varieties in close contact with Shan



## Structural influence from Shan only in Jinghpaw in or near Shan State (Muhse)

MK	<i>ndai</i>	<i>laika-buk</i>	<i>ɕi</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>e</i>	<i>dzɔʔ</i>	<i>thi</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>i.</i>
	this	book-paper	3SG	OBJ	give	read	FUT	Q

MS	<i>laika</i>	<i>ndei</i>	<i>ɕi</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>e</i>	<i>dzɔʔ</i>	<i>thi</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>kun.</i>
	book	this	3SG	OBJ	give	read	FUT	Q

‘Will you let him read this book?’

MK	<i>ɕi</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>e</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>ɕəkhun</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>i.</i>
	3SG	OBJ	go	CAUS	FUT	Q

MS	<i>ɕi</i>	<i>p<sup>h</sup>e</i>	<i>dzɔʔ</i>	<i>sa</i>	<i>na</i>	<i>kun.</i>
	3SG	OBJ	give	go	FUT	Q

‘Will you let him go?’



## Expectations and findings

### Based on our work in Lower Burma and initial observations in Upper Burma:

- Understanding the historical and hierarchical relations between the languages, we can make predictions about the linguistic manifestations of their contact.
- In the absence of written records we can use the linguistic manifestations of contact to reconstruct the history of that contact.



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