LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE PLANNING IN BURMA

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1. THE EVOLUTION OF BURMESE AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE

A glance at an ethno-linguistic map of Burma shows that the country is populated not only by Burmans but also, to the extent of about half its surface area, by several other major ethnic groups - namely Shans, Karens, Chins and Kachins - as well as numerous other minor ones. It is Burmese however, the mother-tongue of the majority ethnic group, which is the national language, the common language of communication, of administration, and of most stages of education for all citizens of the present-day Socialist Republic of the Union of Burma.

Recent estimates of the population of Burma put it at 36.68 million,[1] but it is difficult to state with any certainty the numbers of speakers of the various languages. The last census which provided detailed information on racial groups and languages was taken in 1931. Further censuses have been taken by the Government of the Union of Burma (henceforth referred to as GUB) in March 1973 and April 1983 but numerical information about ethnic groups and languages has not been made available from these; it is not even known (at time of writing) what questions relevant to these matters were included in the census form. In the annual supplement to the *Burmese Encyclopedia* (1982), the population figures for each of the seven divisions and seven states are given, as also the number of inhabitants of some of the major towns: thus Sagaing Division has 3,114,172 inhabitants, and is said to have people from the following ethnic groups living in it - Burman, Kachin, Chin, Naga, Shan, Kadu and Kanan, but no indication is given of their relative numbers. Similarly the Chin State has a population of 349,571 and includes the following ethnic groups - Chin, Arakanese, Naga and Burmese, listed in that order. This decision to refrain from giving detailed numbers of language speakers, which would only draw attention to the size of the different ethnic groups within the country, would seem to have been the natural result of the present government's policy of de-emphasising the separate interests of the various ethnic minorities in order to encourage national unity. The 1931 census gives the proportion of the population speaking each language as a mother tongue as follows:

Burmese	67%	(including Arakanese, Intha and Tavoyan)
Karen	9%	
Shan	7%	
Kachin	3%	
Chin	2%	
Mon	2%	
Palaung	1%	

All other languages score less than 1% each. In 1931 speakers of Indic languages (Indian migrants who had come in to work in Burma) also amounted to 7%

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of the population. In Rangoon more than half the population spoke an Indian language, while only about one third spoke Burmese. The 1931 census report gives detailed figures of numbers of speakers for all parts of the country, for example paragraph 102 states "In other districts of the Delta, except Thaton, the proportion speaking Burmese varies from 65% in Maubin to 91% in Tharrawaddy. In Thaton 50% speak Karen languages, 31% Burmese and 11% Mon." (Bennison 1933).

There is no possibility of quoting precise figures of this kind for today. Writing in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* in 1974, Dr Htin Aung gives the following estimates:

Burmese	22 million (including dialects)
Karen	3 million
Shan	1½ million
Chin	1 million
Kachin	1 million
Kayah	100,000
Chinese	400,000
Indian	120,000, and a total population of 30,310,000.

This means that the proportion of Burmese speakers now stands at about 73% of the population, of Karens speakers about 10%, whilst the number if Indian language speakers has fallen drastically. It is interesting to note that the proportion of Burmese mother tongue speakers appears to have remained almost unchanged since the time of the 1921 census. In that year people were asked to say what language they ordinarily used in the home, and the number who returned Burmese amounted to 70.1% of the population. In the following census in 1931 people were asked to state their mother tongue, and not the language ordinarily used in the home. The result was a drop to the figure of 67% mentioned above. The point to be remembered is that, then as now, Burmese was the language most widely known and spoken throughout the country, and many persons whose mother tongue belonged to another language group would have moved into, or married into, Burmese-speaking communities. Certainly this process can be observed taking place in Rangoon all the time today. Almost all the numerous marriages between Burmans and Karens or Shans or other minority races lead to Burmese-speaking families whose children think of themselves as Burmans. And there are many Chinese couples in their 70s who speak both Chinese and Burmese, whose children, now aged 50, have Burmese spouses and whose grandchildren know no Chinese and do not think of themselves as Chinese any longer. The present government has also followed a very strict immigration policy since 1962 which has made it almost impossible for foreigners, whether from India, China or the West, to enter the country to settle permanently.

1.1 Historical background

Burmese is the most important member of the Burmese-Lolo subgroup of the large Tibeto-Burman family which comprises many hundreds of languages. The Tibeto-Burman family is part of a larger linguistic stock, Sino-Tibetan, which also includes Sinitic or Chinese. Typically Sino-Tibetan languages are tonal. These languages are also largely monosyllabic, but words may consist of one, two, three or more syllables. Phonologically the syllables are characterised by a restricted number of initial consonant clusters, and the disappearance in pronunciation of most syllable-final consonant contrasts although in Burmese final k, s, t, p and final ng, ny, n and m are retained in the spelling.

The earliest dated examples of written Burmese are from the early 12th century, one of them being the famous Rajakumar or Myazedi inscription of AD 1113, from Central Burma. This inscription is in four languages, Pali, Mon, Pyu and Burmese, indicating that from an early date Burmese was coming under the influence of languages from different linguistic families. Mon, from the Mon-Khmer family of languages, is found on inscriptions in Burma from as early as the 7th century. Pali, an Indo-European language, was the language of the Buddhist scriptures; when the Burmese King Anawrahta (1044-1077) sacked the Mon capital in AD 1057 and carried these scriptures back up to Central Burma he also took back with him Mon scholars who not only promoted Pali scholarship among the Burmese but also helped to adapt their own Mon script for the purpose of writing the Burmese language.

The Mon, and hence the Burmese, script derives ultimately from the ancient Brahmi script of Eastern India, probably through a common South-East Asian script in use in the Menam-Mekong area roundabout the 1st century AD; as a consequence the Burmese alphabet now includes a considerable number of redundant symbols devised originally to render Indic vowel and consonant distinctions which do not occur in the Burmese phonological system. For example, Burmese has no aspirated voiced plosives and no retroflex consonants. In the earliest written Burmese the tones are marked only inconsistently because Indic languages had not needed to devise a system for indicating different syllable tones; regular tone marking only becomes fully established by the 18th century.

With the adoption of Theravada Buddhism by King Anawrahta, Pali became the language of high prestige, the language of scholarship, to be used in royal and religious contexts. For example, all reigning monarchs were given elaborate Pali titles, and monks and pagodas were given Pali names. But at the same time as Pali scholarship flourished in the monasteries we find that from the time of the Myazedi inscription onwards Burmese was increasingly used for inscriptions on stone to record the details of economic and social history such as the dedication of lands or the building of a pagoda.

As would be expected Burmese has borrowed heavily from Pali, and loanwords are found even in the earliest inscriptions particularly in the fields of religion, philosophy and ethics (e.g. *merit, nirvana, karma*) but also everyday words such as *vehicle* yana, *wheel* cakka; in the 20th century scholars and administrators have turned to Pali as a source of elements with which to create new vocabulary required by institutional change and technological advance: words for *university, BA degree, professor, lecturer*; rather in the way that English uses Latin and Greek. For example, Pali bhūmi+veda *earth + knowledge* gives Burmese bu-mí bei-dá *geology*. In addition to the major part Pali has played in the development of Burmese vocabulary, it could be argued that Pali has also to a limited extent influenced Burmese syntax, particularly the syntax of the formal, literary style of the language (see 1.3 below). This is the result of generations of Buddhist monks making literal translations (called nissaya in Burmese) from Pali into Burmese, with the aim not only of conveying the meaning but also of teaching the grammar of the original Pali to the Burmese learner. Syntactic patterns foreign to Burmese were introduced into this nissaya-style Burmese in order to parallel certain Pali constructions, after which they came to be used more generally in literary style works.[2]

Loanwords from Mon also date from the earliest period but unlike Pali loans are less often identified by native speakers as being borrowed. This is partly because they have adapted more closely to the phonological patterns of Burmese and partly because they are mostly words of everyday life, including names of foods, flora and fauna, textiles, boats, crafts, architecture and music. There

is also a small number of early loans from Sanskrit, from Chinese and from Indic languages.

Much later, in the 19th century and overwhelmingly in the 20th century, came the influence of English, both as a source of new vocabulary and also as a competing language of government and administration during the period of colonial rule. Loanwords from English are found predominantly in the technical and scientific fields, also in clothing and fabrics, and above all in the vocabulary of politics and international affairs, as for example in the words for *council, committee, corporation, party, unit, cadre, socialist, communist, democracy* and so on.

Most of the early examples of written Burmese, dating from the 12th century, are from the old capital at Pagan; the majority of them are inscriptions on stone, but there are also fragments written in ink on plastered walls of temples. This phase of the language is known as Old Burmese. Though there are some striking differences between Old Burmese and contemporary Burmese it is remarkable how little the literary form of the language has changed, in structure and basic vocabulary, over the centuries. Some writers refer to a Middle Burmese, covering the period from perhaps 1500 to 1700, and a modern Burmese from about 1700 on. These terms are however more relevant to the orthography of the language, which has undergone considerable changes between Old Burmese and Modern Burmese, and which has only finally been officially standardised in the 1970s.

1.2 Dialects of Burmese

In much of the area that it is spoken, Burmese is remarkably uniform, unlike the languages of some ethnic minorities such as the Karen. There are few major differences between the speech of Upper and Lower Burma; in major towns such as Rangoon, Mandalay, Prome, Toungoo, Moulmein and Bassein essentially the same dialect is spoken. There are some minor lexical differences, especially between Upper Burma as exemplified by Mandalay and Lower Burma as spoken in Rangoon. Writers who use local words or expressions tend to note this fact; in general Rangoon usage is preferred in writing. However some purists regard the Mandalay form of Burmese as more conservative.

There are some regional varieties of Burmese, such as Arakanese, Tavoyan, Intha and so on, which are somewhat different from standard Burmese. In most cases they are phonologically more conservative; for example Arakanese maintains an /r/-/y/ distinction which is still reflected in Burmese writing, but not in pronunciation, and Tavoyan further distinguishes medial /l/ in initial consonant clusters from /r/ and /y/. The Tavoyan medial /l/ was distinguished in Old Burmese inscriptions, but is no longer seen in Middle or Modern Burmese. In general, these dialects are spoken in the more remote parts of Burma: Arakanese in the west, Tavoyan in the south, and Intha in the east. There is a general tendency for dialect speakers to assimilate features of standard Burmese more and more, since Burmese is the national language and the language of education; thus there is considerable stylistic variation, with a more standard pronunciation in more formal situations or in formal vocabulary. Many younger speakers in dialect-speaking regions are more comfortable now in standard Burmese, but the dialects persist in rural areas.

1.3 Literary and colloquial style Burmese

Although Burmese has few regional dialect variations, it does have an important stylistic variation which is more immediately striking particularly to the foreigner. There is considerable difference between the literary or formal language on the one hand and the language which is used in colloquial conversation on the other. This difference was much greater at the beginning of the 20th century when J.E. Bridges was preparing a manual to enable British administrators to learn Burmese, as we can see from his introduction. He wrote:

> There is considerable difficulty in finding a suitable text for beginners, as all Burmese books are written in the literary tongue, which is full of long involved periods, obsolete expressions, and superfluous words. This literary Burmese has remained stereotyped for centuries and may be almost looked upon as a dead language; it is as different from the spoken tongue as the English of Chaucer from that of the present day, but it is taught in schools and read and spoken in books and plays so that all people understand its meaning.
>
> (see Bridges 1913)

The comparison with Chaucer is an exaggeration, but it is true to say that formal literary Burmese changed very little from the 15th to the early 20th century, and seemed, to the foreigner, with his limited command of the language, very different from what was being spoken around him. The native speaker, especially if he is educated, is far less aware of the difference, as Bridges makes clear. With the development of newspapers, magazines and popular fiction from around 1910 to 1930 the vocabulary and idiom of the literary language changed radically, bringing it much closer to the colloquial language though it still remained a different style. Today the distinction lies largely in which set of grammatical words or particles is being used; the lexical items of both styles can be virtually identical, though there are certain words, certain syntactic constructions and numerous doublets which usually occur only in the literary style.

It seems clear that the distinction has arisen out of the difference between the spoken language and the written, but it can lead to confusion, especially with Burmese speakers, if one uses the terms 'spoken style' and 'written style' in debating the matter.

To understand the problem it is necessary to know in some detail which style is normally used in which context. Colloquial style is used whenever one person is speaking to another, that is in ordinary conversation face to face, or on the telephone, or by teacher to pupils in class, or by a lecturer or politician to an audience. In the last two cases the Burmese speaker is faced with making a decision; whether to speak just from notes, or whether to write out his text and read it. As soon as he begins to write out a text he will automatically tend to slip into the formal literary style which he has from childhood, from his first encounter with a reading book in primary school, associated with serious written material. However the literary style is only appropriate for written material which is to remain on the written page and is not suitable for speaking to an audience. To be suitable for speaking one must use the colloquial particles and constructions which signal that one is talking to a listener. Hence politicians' speeches are delivered in colloquial Burmese and printed as such in the newspapers, while editorials and news reports are written in literary style.

Radio and television have established similar conventions. All radio news bulletins are composed and read out in literary style, as also weather forecasts; this style sounds more authoritative to the Burmese listener. News talks

emanating from a named individual however are written and read out in colloquial style. Television news broadcasts on the other hand are written and read in colloquial style, probably because the individual making the news broadcast is personally visible and would feel uncomfortable speaking to the (unseen) audience in literary Burmese. Of course certain lexical items and syntactic patterns of the literary style will be used by speakers in formal situations, such as teaching or lecturing, but the majority of the grammatical particles of the literary style are never *spoken*, they are only read out.

Conversely, all school readers from the first standard, all school text books, all descriptive and narrative prose is written in literary style; dialogue in novels however is today written in colloquial. All letters to and from officials, official reports, and instructions are in literary style, which is also required for examinations and theses. Even in children's comics the lines at the bottom narrating the story are in literary while the balloons containing the characters' words are in colloquial style. Personal letters show the greatest mixture of style; most correspondence between equals and intimates is in colloquial, while literary style is used as a sign of respect between strangers as well as in official letters.

It was not until the advent of the Revolutionary Council in 1962, followed by the adoption of the Burmese Way to Socialism as the program of the new government, that suggestions for change began to be heard. These came not from any official government body but from a group of writers based in Mandalay, called the Upper Burma Writers' Association. They suggested that it would be advantageous for the nation as a whole and in particular for the uneducated peasant and worker if the literary style could be abandoned and replaced by the colloquial style of Burmese in all contexts. They supported their proposals by publishing books and articles written in the colloquial style, and even some M.A. theses were accepted by the History Department at Mandalay University in this form. This movement for 'modernisation'[3] which has enjoyed considerable support among younger writers (especially those outside Rangoon) has been firmly opposed not only by the government, who seemed to see in it a political movement led by people whose sympathies lay with Communist China, but also by most of the Rangoon-based literary establishment, who maintain that serious matter written in colloquial style lacks dignity and authority. There for the moment the matter rests. Today it is no longer the complexity of the thought nor the gravity of the subject matter which determines which style is used, as seminar papers, presidential speeches and books on cultural history have been published in colloquial style. Conversely, elementary school readers, government health publicity for newly literate hill peoples, and popular fiction is all written in literary style. It seems to be partly a matter of convention. With the spread of television, introduced only in 1980, and a continually increasing number of colloquial particles finding their way into literary style prose, it is probable that in the not too distant future the colloquial will become generally acceptable. It would be relatively easy for the government to implement a policy of change by deciding to publish all newspapers and government controlled periodicals in colloquial style, if it wished to do so.

The degree of difference between literary and spoken Burmese is illustrated by the following example (Minn Latt Yekhaun 1966:68).

i	lu-thi	thu-ʃ	yì-zà	nei-thàw	ywa-hnaik	alun	pyaw-nei-thi	Literary
di	lu	thú	yì-zà	nei-té	ywa-hma	theik	pyaw-nei-te	Spoken
this	*man*	*his*	*sweet-heart*	*live-* ATTRIB.	*village-at*	*very*	*happy-being-* VB.SENT.	

This man is very happy in the village where his sweetheart lives.

The main difference between the two styles is in the postverbal, postnominal, and clause-final particles, which occur very frequently in any sentence. The following tables give some examples.

	LITERARY	SPOKEN
MAIN CLAUSE		
realis	V-thi	V-te
irrealis	V-myi	V-me
negative	ma-V	ma-V-hpù
SUBORDINATE CLAUSE		
nominal	V-thi-hma	V-ta
nominal	V-thi-hnín	V-ta-né
nominal	V-thaké-thó	V-thalo
relative realis relative realis	{V-thí V-thàw}	V-té
relative irrealis	V-myí	V-mé
conditional *if*	V-hlyin	V-yin
purpose *because*	V-ywéi	V-ló
purpose *for*	V-yan	V-phó
concessive *though*	V-thaw-lì	V-pei-mé
temporal *before*	ma-V-hmi	ma-V-hkin

Table 1: Literary and spoken particles: verbal

	LITERARY	SPOKEN
subject	N-thi	N-zero
location	N-twin	N-hma
	N-hnaik	N-hma
from place	N-hmá	N-ká
towards	N-thó	N-ko
object	N-à	N-ko
possession	N-í Noun	N-yé Noun
like	N-ké-thó	N-lo
as much as	N-hmyá	N-lauk
plural	N-mya	N-twei/tei
because	N-caún	N-mó
approximately	N-hkán	N-lauk

Table 2: Literary and spoken particles: nominal

	LITERARY	SPOKEN
also	-lì	-lè
just, only	-pin	-pè/hpè
indeed	-tì	-pè/hpè
but	-kà	-táw
quote	N hú	N ló

Table 3: Literary and spoken particles: clause-final

2. ENGLISH AND BURMESE

After the annexation of Lower Burma by the British in 1852, English naturally became important as the language spoken by those who governed the country. By the time the government had evolved an educational policy for the new colony in the 1860s, its decision that education should be modern in content, and so far as possible in the *Burmese language*, already appeared to be in conflict with the desire of the Burmese for schooling in English. It had fast become evident to Burmese parents that an English education brought great social and economic advantages. A government resolution on Public Instruction is recorded in the *British Burma Gazette* in 1879 to the effect that they were compelled much against their will to give a far larger place to English than they thought right, because of the 'disinclination of the parents and pupils to be guided' by the official intention that English should only be learnt optionally as a 'classic' - we should today probably say 'second language' - and that all other subjects should be taught through the language of the country.[4]

In support of its policy of education in Burmese, the government set up a Vernacular Education Committee in 1872, reconstituted as the Text Book Committee in 1879, in order to prepare suitable Burmese text books for use in primary and middle schools. But at the same time because of the heavy demand from parents to include all the English instruction possible in the school system, the government certainly did nothing to prevent the establishment of missionary schools and Anglo-Vernacular high schools in which English became more and more important. The government policy of giving the greatest importance to Burmese studies and to the development of the language to enable it to cope with the modern world became steadily less realisable.

> As far as the Burmese were concerned the reason for paying for their children to attend school - all traditional monastery schools were free - was to make money, and English was the key to the world in which money was to be made. It was just an office skill. It is often said that the purpose of developing western-style education in the British Empire was to ensure a supply of English-speaking clerks for government offices. This is not so; government offices did not at first require English-speaking clerks to any great extent. It was their availability which increased their use in government offices. The pressure for English came the other way, from outside government, from the commercial world, European, Chinese and Indian, and from Burmese parents.
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> (Bagshawe 1976:99)

It was a constant struggle especially in Lower Burma to prevent Burmese from being swamped.

The first step towards higher, that is university, education was taken in Burma in 1874 with the foundation of Rangoon High School, a government run, elitist high school on which funds were lavished, staffed mostly by non-Burmese speaking teachers. In 1879 a 'College Department' was set up and affiliated to Calcutta University with four students working for the First Year Arts exam. In 1883 the College Department became Rangoon College, a constituent college of Calcutta University. A full range of subjects was taught at the College in English, including Pali and Pali literature, but Burmese and Burmese literature were not even considered as possible subjects of undergraduate study. This reflected a temporary decline in the prestige of Burmese language and literature around the turn of the century.

Perhaps one of the most important moves taken to halt this decline was the inauguration in March 1910 of the Burma Research Society, its purpose being the "investigation of the Arts, Science and Literature in relation to Burma and neighbouring countries" - as well as the fostering of good relations between the British and Burmese communities. The Society, founded by a civil servant, J.S. Furnivall, saw itself as dedicated to the study of all aspects of Burma's culture, its history and religion, and in particular its language and literature. It required continuous efforts to establish the Society, and in particular its journal, but Furnivall persevered. After six years, in 1916, he gave the members a 'pep-talk' in an article (Furnivall 1916:7) in which he refused to countenance the idea that the society might have to give up. He suggested recruiting young Burmans who had been to study in England, and older Burmans working in the old tradition of literary scholarship who would both be able to contribute articles in Burmese. His appeal was successful. The society flourished.

2.1 Rangoon University and the revival of Burmese in the 1930s

In 1918 a committee was set up to prepare for the establishment of an independent University of Rangoon; it included one Burmese member, U Pe Maung Tin, who was to play a significant part in the revival of the Burmese language. The committee's task was to establish proper standards for the new university; one proposal was to introduce more exacting standards, especially in English, for the high school final examination, thus ensuring even more the dominant role of English in higher education. Student opposition to the proposed entry requirements combined with popular discontent over the new constitution being offered to Burma led to the university strike of December 1920, and to the launching of a movement to set up national schools in which teaching was to be conducted entirely in Burmese. Most of these hastily set up national schools had ceased to function by about 1922 but the political effects of the university strike and the national schools movement were far reaching; in particular they fuelled the movement to raise Burmese to the position of the national medium of education.

The first tangible advance made was the establishment of a course leading to an honours degree in Burmese at the university, thanks to many years of preparatory work done by U Pe Maung Tin, Professor of Pali and editor of the Journal of the Burma Research Society. Included in the degree was the study of Burmese inscriptions from the 11th-12th centuries, modelled on the teaching of Anglo-Saxon at Oxford. By 1927 the first student had graduated with Honours - U Sein Tin, a talented writer whose clear, straightforward prose style and new approach to literary genres was to have a major influence on Burmese language and literature.

Realising that it was the standard of Burmese teaching in schools that would determine the future supply of honours students, U Pe Maung Tin helped to write new school readers for the five junior standards, and selected suitable texts - Burmese prose versions of the ten major jataka stories - for the senior classes. (These readers were first revised in the 1950s.) There were those among the English staff of the university who spoke scornfully of Burmese as a language only suited for writing poetry and love-letters but completely lacking modern scientific and technical vocabulary. It was true that Burmese prose tended to be verbose and long-winded, but it was changing, and new terms could be coined. U Pe Maung Tin urged all Burmans to use and write in Burmese, and himself headed a committee (in 1928) which was to coin Burmese equivalents for the bodies and procedures connected with the new university.

Thus by the beginning of the 1930s the study of Burmese was fully established at the University of Rangoon and its affiliated intermediate college at Mandalay. Graduates were emerging many of whom were involved in Buddhist organisations or in the nationalist movement and who were eager to restore Burmese to what they felt was its rightful position as the official language of the country, and to enhance the standing of Burmese literature. One of the leaders of the All Burma Youth League (1931), Maung Bá Thaùng, later known as Thahkin Bá Thaùng, composed a rallying cry for the Dóbama Asì-ayòn (We Burmans Organisation) founded in 1935, which challenged all patriotic Burmans to unite in support of their language:

> The land of Burma is our land,
> Burmese writing is our writing,
> Burmese language is our language -
> Love our land,
> Promote our writing,
> Respect our language.

Numerous articles in Burmese newspapers and magazines from 1931 onwards began to urge that Burmese be made the medium of instruction in all Burmese schools. At that time the Burmese-based schooling available in monastery schools and government sponsored vernacular schools did not lead to any form of higher education. This could only be obtained, as has been mentioned above, by attending Anglo-vernacular high schools (or private missionary schools) which alone prepared students for the tenth standard examination in English and for university entrance. For example, the *Sun* newspaper for 19 January 1933, under the headline 'Burmese the medium of instruction', wrote (in Burmese):

> It is important to base teaching in schools upon Burmese. It is better to know 1000 words of one language than 500 words of two languages. The time has come to base teaching upon a single language (Burmese) so that future pupils are spared the expense of time and money of learning two languages.

The paper goes on to applaud the decision taken at a recent annual education conference that from 1935 all subjects except English at the Anglo-vernacular High School final examination should be examined in Burmese, and suggests to the Education Department that in all schools all native speakers of Burmese should be taught primarily in Burmese.

Irresistibly the tide was turning against the English language as the demand for self-government and independence from English rule grew stronger. The dominant position which English had attained in the system was felt to be the result of a definite policy formulated by the government rather than the natural end product of the colonial situation. Popular feeling demanded and obtained a change in the situation.

2.2 After independence: the position of English from 1948 to the present

When Burma became independent in 1948, one of the provisions of the new constitution was that "the official language of the Union shall be Burmese, provided that the use of the English language shall be permitted". It was only to be expected that having regained their independence, the Burmese should wish to restore their national language to its rightful status; at the same time this formulation showed a realistic awareness of the fact that changes involving language only take place slowly and that Burmese could not replace English overnight.

One area in which English was very firmly established was higher education. When the University of Rangoon was set up English was the most important department with the largest number of staff and students; English was a compulsory subject for all students, and English Honours graduates were considered an elite. For a short time after the war the department expanded, and a strong department developed in Mandalay when it became a separate university. However from 1952 onwards English studies began to decline in importance for two main reasons: strong nationalist and anti-colonial feeling resulted in a prejudice against English studies, and the existence of a developed native language with a long literary tradition, formerly overshadowed by English, began to attract more students. This situation can be contrasted with that of countries in Africa and South-east Asia where English studies have become very important. In Thailand and Indonesia, which had not been under British rule, there was no prejudice against English; in the countries of Africa there was mostly no written national literature.

At the same time as the decline in interest there was also a decline in the standard of English teaching in schools after the war. All state schools - vernacular and Anglo-vernacular - were merged into one type. English was to be taught in all of them but only from the 5th standard. However the number of qualified English teachers remained much the same as before the war while the population expanded rapidly, with the result that a large number of poorly qualified English teachers were brought into the schools. The results of this decline in teaching began to be felt in the universities from 1951 onwards when the standard of teaching had to be aimed at the weak majority, and examination standards grew lower and lower.

The syllabus for the BA Honours in English language and literature remained much the same from 1920 to 1960. Then the special honours degree was abolished and a general honours degree was introduced, with a much reduced syllabus. In March 1964, with the adoption of the New University Education System, the Revolutionary Government made it clear that its policy was to teach all subjects at the university in Burmese as soon as possible, and to reduce the status of English from a major subject to that of a foreign language to be taught as a tool. In 1966 the Chair of English at Rangoon University was abolished, the department became a minor one and no further students were allowed to major in English studies. These revolutionary changes in the aims and methods of teaching English were the result of a joint proposal put forward by the heads of the English departments at Rangoon and Mandalay at a seminar held by the government in 1964 (U Myo Min and Moonie 1964). From then on English became a minor subject to be taught as a foreign language, aiming at comprehension: 'comprehension of material written in English pertinent to the content subject under study and at a level to which the student has attained in his class work.' Arts students were to be taught for two years and science students for one year. No literature was to be taught, nor was too great an emphasis to be laid on correct pronunciation. All serious study of English was transferred to the Institute of Education where a new Chair had been established and where all students wishing to proceed to advanced English studies were to go.

As part of the new system introduced in 1964 higher education had been divided up between the vocational institutes, of medicine, engineering, education, agriculture and technology on the one hand, and the re-named Arts and Science Universities on the other.[5] The new approach to English teaching was fairly successful in the institutes as the students were generally of high calibre, mostly used textbooks in English and were wholly or partially still taught in English; they at least achieved a comprehension of a specific type of English.

In the Arts and Science Universities however students were of less high calibre and of very varying grades of intellectual ability; their classes were too large and their comprehension of English was only of a very general kind. In addition 10th standard students in the 1970s were coming into the university with a knowledge of English inferior to that of the 4th standard of colonial times, with the result that after two years of English many of them soon forgot what English they had learnt and their standard on leaving university was far below the level aimed at by the 1964 changes.

By the late 1970s the decline in the standard of English in schools and institutions of higher education began to cause the government concern; post-graduates and trainees sent abroad for further training in scientific and technological subjects were being hampered by their inadequate command of English. At a Seminar on Education sponsored by the Council of State in October 1979, President Ne Win set his seal on approval of a new attitude towards the learning of English when he declared that it was necessary for a person to have not only mastery of the Burmese language but also fluency in English.

Perhaps the most important result of the presidential concern over English was the series of high-level seminars which it encouraged. The first of these, held in October 1978 under the aegis of the Ministry of Education, had discussed 'English Language Teaching in Burma with focus on the specific needs of students in higher education'. English language teaching had been reviewed, direct-method audiolingual language teaching which had been introduced at the end of the 1960s was pronounced a failure, and a return to more traditional methods based on grammatical explanation (in Burmese) and written exercises was advocated (U Ohn Pe 1979). From October 1979 onwards the government-subsidised weekly paper for children, *Shwei Thwèi* began to appear in a parallel English version. The second seminar, in March 1980, was entitled 'English language teaching in Burma with focus on the training of teachers'. This gathered together in Rangoon the heads of all the major English teaching departments and all the state and regional inspectors; their wide-ranging discussions were led by a visiting expert from Scotland, D. McKeating. The seminar concluded, inter alia, that there was "much room for improvement in Burmese English language teacher-training programs in all secondary schools"; also that "no one particular approach or method should be adopted to the exclusion of others in any ELT work". Perhaps most importantly for all teachers at the seminar, they had a chance to learn about developments that had taken place in ELT during the previous decade. Two further seminars were held in October 1981 and 1982 on 'English for Academic Purposes', after which the government announced that it would be desirable by 1984 for all university departments, except Burmese and History, to carry out all work at the post-graduate level, that is all Honours classes and MA teaching, in English. The change which has had the greatest nationwide effect however has been the introduction, from June 1981, of English teaching from the first standard in all primary schools.

For the present, the learning and teaching of English is booming in Burma. Teachers are being retrained, civil servants are attending short courses, university staff have been sent to the UK and Australia for further study for the first time after an interval of some ten to 15 years. In January 1984 the British Council was invited to send an expert to help set up a diploma course for teachers of English at the Institute of Foreign Languages; and private 'tuition' schools are flourishing as a result of the nationwide desire to learn English.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF BURMESE AS THE NATIONAL LANGUAGE: INDEPENDENCE TO 1962

Having announced in the new constitution that Burmese was to become the official language of the Union of Burma, it was necessary for the government to take steps to develop the language to the point where it could replace English in all fields. After 1948 this work was largely entrusted to the Burma Translation Society and to the Department of Translation and Publication within the University.

The idea for a national organisation that would undertake the translation of important foreign works into Burmese had been conceived before the Second World War, as a natural result of the demand for education in the mother-tongue. In fact the first steps had been already taken by J.S. Furnivall personally when he retired from the Indian Civil Service in 1924 in order to set up the Burma Book Shop and found the Burma Book Club with the aim of encouraging young Burmese to read widely in English. Instead of a book catalogue he decided to publish a monthly magazine called *World of Books*. Not satisfied with this, in 1928 he founded the Burma Education Extension Association with the challenging aim of 'promoting the intellectual advancement of the country'.[6] It was to encourage translations into Burmese, establish public libraries, form reading circles and study classes throughout Burma, and publish a monthly periodical *World of Books* with articles on literature, social problems, political economy and so on. By August 1928 the monthly had been enlarged to include a Burmese section, and in 1930 it began to appear under the equivalent Burmese title *Gandá Làw-ká*. Shortly before the war the British government had set up a State Translation Bureau but it was overtaken by events, though a small translation and library department continued preparing material, none of which could be printed.

In August 1947 the Burma Translation Society was established - 'to pierce the darkness of ignorance with the light of knowledge' - with the aim of translating important and useful books from western languages into Burmese as quickly as possible. Ù Nú, the Prime Minister of the soon-to-be-independent Union of Burma, was the first chairman of the Society, which had an independent management committee but was subsidised by the government. It must have been gratifying for Furnivall to see that the declared aims of the BTS were the same as those of the association which he had founded. In addition to translations, the BTS undertook the preparation of a Burmese Encyclopedia, the first in the language. The first volume was ready in 1953; the 15th and final one appeared in 1976, and is being followed by annual supplements. Lastly, the important task of drawing up lists of new scientific and technical terms, coining new words and rejecting ones felt to be unsuitable was entrusted to the BTS. One of the first persons in charge of this work was U Pe Maung Tin.

The BTS was working at a national level; in order to prepare for the use of Burmese at university level a Department of Translation and Publication was set up in the University of Rangoon in 1948. Work proceeded on the translation

and editing of textbooks, and on a large *University Burmese Dictionary* with the general aim of making possible university instruction in Burmese. However at that time opinion was divided over the desirability of such a change, no firm policy was adopted and no deadlines were set, though by June 1957 an Education Enquiry Commission recommended that Burmese be used for all subjects at the university starting with Intermediate, Part A, in June 1960.[7]

4. THE LANGUAGE POLICY OF THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT SINCE 1962

One of the most important actions of the Revolutionary Government (GUB) has been the adoption of a firm policy for the development of Burmese as the official language of the Union. New textbooks and new technical terms were not the only things needed if Burmese was to assume the role of a national language; there was as yet no standard monolingual dictionary to serve as a guide to correct usage and to establish the preferred orthography. The large-scale *University Burmese Dictionary*, begun during the war, which was being prepared in the Department of Translation and Publication (under the editorship of Ù Wun) had made only slow progress and when finished would have been too large for general school and office use.

In August 1963, the Revolutionary Government set up a Literary and Translation Commission charged with the

> ... urgent publication of an official standard Burmese dictionary, a Burmese spelling book, a manual of Burmese composition, and with the compilation of Burmese terminology, with the compilation, translation and publication of needed textbooks, reference books, periodicals, etc., to enable science, engineering, medicine and other subjects to be taught in schools and universities in Burmese.
>
> (*Forward* 2/3:4, 1963)

In translation work the Commission was to deal with books prescribed by the universities and the Education Department which were written in foreign languages: it was to publish and distribute these works, and also compile adaptations if needed by teachers. Some 30 scholars were appointed to the Commission; Ù Wun was asked to set aside the large dictionary to lead the work on a concise dictionary and a spelling book.

From the beginning, Ne Win took a keen personal interest in the work of the Commission. The first draft of the spelling book, which appeared in 1968, included suggestions for changes which though favoured by the scholars were not generally acceptable to the man in the street, including Ne Win himself, and the Commission was obliged to revise the work fundamentally. It was finally published in 1978.

Work on the dictionary was divided between three subeditors, each with a team of compilers working under him; as is the way with dictionaries, the work took longer than originally expected. One reason for this was that it was decided, with the enthusiasm characteristic of so many projects undertaken by the GUB, to seek the assistance of the entire Burmese-speaking population in gathering material for the dictionary. In June 1972 language committees were set up in all townships, charged with collecting 'local usages that might not be known to the compilers' and to 'study, discuss and make suggestions about the draft copies of the Burmese Dictionary to be sent to them by the Commission'.[8]

The dictionary was published in five parts, the first of which went on sale at the end of 1978 and the last in 1980. The *Concise Burmese dictionary* [*Myanma abeik-dan akyìn-gyok*] marks a very important stage in the development of the Burmese language; it has established the officially correct orthography of all items included in the work and it also gives pronunciations. This is of particular help to non-native speakers, including foreigners, who wish to learn the language. The work is clearly laid out, well printed, helpfully illustrated with line-drawings and colour plates, and above all contains simple, well thought out definitions of a broad range of vocabulary.

As for the grammar, or manual of composition, various drafts have been prepared but none has yet been found acceptable to a majority of members of the Commission. Traditionally the approach to normative grammar has been largely determined by monks trained in Pali or Sanskrit; this approach is now felt, especially by Burmans with a modern linguistic training, to be inappropriate, but there is as yet no general agreement on an alternative one. The lack of consistency in the description of the stative verbs of Burmese in this dictionary illustrates one of the points on which there is no agreement; some of the stative verbs are classed both as adjectives and verbs, some as verbs only, some as adjectives only.

Since the publication of the *Concise dictionary*, the Burmese Language Commission, *Myanma sa ahpwé*, as it is now called, has also prepared a *Pocket dictionary* which was ready to be printed and only waiting for supplies of paper in January 1983. The intention was to print 20,000 copies. In November 1981 a new lexicographical project was begun at the suggestion of President Ne Win, as part of the drive to improve the standard of English in Burma - namely a Burmese-English dictionary. The purpose of the work is to assist with the learning of English, and in particular to help Burmese to write English. It is to be modest in scope, containing about 15,000 entries, and the target date for completion, in January 1983, was December 1984. Most of the members of the advisory committee guiding the project are not in fact members of the Burmese Language Commission, but have been chosen from among English language experts. The Burmese entries are being chosen by a member of the BLC, based upon the *Concise dictionary*.

4.1 Government-sponsored publishing since 1962

In addition to its policy of standardising the Burmese language, the Revolutionary Council also wished to promote educative writing and high quality creative literature. The Burma Translation Society seemed a suitable organisation. In 1963 it was reconstituted as a government organisation under the Ministry of Information, and put under the direction of a ten-member 'Sarpay Beikman Management Board'. The headquarters of the BTS on Prome Road was known as the Sa-pei Beik-man, the Palace of Literature.

The tasks of the new body were spelt out as follows:

> ... to improve and enrich the general knowledge of all the nationals of the Union. To this end the Management Board will undertake projects to compile selective material from outstanding foreign literary works and other branches of knowledge for translation into Burmese or any other indigenous language; to print and publish such translations as well as approved textbooks which are in line with the

> Government's socialist policy; and to make such publications available to the people at the lowest price.
>
> (*Forward* 2/3:3, 1963)

In effect, the new body took as its keynote the word 'enrich'; in addition to the tasks listed above it has (1) encouraged reserach in Burmese literature and fine arts, as well as the writing of good fiction, by awarding prizes; (2) produced and distributed all kinds of reading material, especially that suitable for children; (3) sponsored yearly seminars on various aspects of writing and book production; (4) mounted training courses in journalism, librarianship, and printing; (5) started up a Sarpay Beikman book club; (6) opened a public lending library and reading-room, and a bookshop in Rangoon. Within the guidelines set out above, the policy of the Sarpay Beikman is to accept for publication, or itself commission, informative and educational books of all kinds suitable for a wide readership, sometimes with a specialist or minority appeal (e.g. Burmese art, traditional customs, popular science, health and welfare, texts for the newly literate). It restricts the amount of fiction it accepts, tending to support fiction for children (which is unprofitable for ordinary private publishers).[9]

After the adoption of the New University Education System in March 1964, the Revolutionary Council made it clear that it was now government policy to teach all subjects at the university in the mother-tongue as soon as possible. The Department of Translation and Publication, under the overall supervision of the Burmese Language Commission, was given the responsibility for translating and compiling suitable textbooks in Burmese; work went ahead with a new sense of urgency. University staff members were asked to help in choosing and translating material; the department edited the books to ensure consistency of terminology and style. It was also given the task of assisting the Main Terminology Committee (set up at the beginning of 1965 under the chairmanship of Ù Thèin Han) to complete the drawing up of lists of scientific and technical terms, wàw-ha-rá, to be used in translation work. Nearly 100,000 terms were collected by the 40 or so terminology subcommittees and sent in to the Department where they were checked. Those selected and approved by the main committee were then sent to the Burmese Language Commission for final approval. These lists of over 72,500 items were published in seven parts between 1971 and 1976, under the title *Pyin-nya-yat Wàw-ha-rá-myà*, Scientific and Technical Terms.

To help maintain the standard and scope of university teaching after the change to Burmese as the medium of instruction had taken place in many subjects, especially at undergraduate level, the Department of Translation and Publication began, in March 1966, to publish a quarterly journal, *Tet-gatho Pyin-nya Padeitha Sa-zaung*, University Resources Journal. Some of the articles present the results of new research work done in Burma, some survey work done in the west, some are the first statement in Burmese of a subject previously accessible only in English. In the first article of the first number of the journal, Dr Nyi Nyi, former Secretary for Education and chief architect of the New University Education System, explained why it was essential for the GUB to implement quickly and decisively the decision made in 1957 to adopt Burmese as the medium of instruction in higher education. As has already been stated above, this decision has been reversed in part since about 1983. The pace of scientific and technological change in the west has quickened so much that the translated textbooks rapidly become outdated, and it has become clear that if Burmese students are to keep up they must be able to read the latest books in English.

5. EDUCATION FOR THE MINORITY PEOPLES OF BURMA; BURMESE AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

One of the main tasks facing the Revolutionary Government when it came to power in 1962 was to ensure that the Union of Burma held together in face of the separatist challenges of the Karens, Shans, Chins and Kachins, all of whom had substantial guerilla movements fighting the Burma Army and maintaining a precarious hold over about 40% of Union territory. Ne Win used a mixture of military force, negotiation and conciliation to deal with the situation. One of the first gestures of conciliation towards the minorities was the setting up, in 1964, of a special school, named the Academy for Development of National Groups, *Pyei-daung-zú taìng-yìn-thà lu-myò-myà hpún-hpyò-yèi theik-pan*, at Sagaing in Upper Burma. After four years the school moved into new buildings at nearby Ywa-thit-kyì. It offered, at first, a four year training at state expense, to selected 15-18 year olds from all the minority peoples of Burma and to Burmans as well; the training amounted to a basic education in a range of general subjects including Burmese, English, general science, history, geography, politics, domestic science and child-care (for the women), technology (for men), together with a minimal amount of educational psychology in order to fit the trainees to return to their native regions as primary school teachers. All students, who were chosen for their qualities of leadership as well as for their intellectual ability, had to undertake to teach in primary schools in the minority areas for at least five years, and to contribute, to the best of their ability, towards the development of their native region.

As of 1981, the Academy trains 175 people a year, 75% men and 25% women. Students admitted are given a monthly stipend of 75 kyats plus travelling costs to and from Ywa-thit-kyì, free travel on research and regional outings, and free tuition, board and lodging and medical attention. While at the Academy students are encouraged to wear their own regional dress, present their own songs and dances, and in general maintain their own cultural diversity. At the same time they will receive a thorough grounding in the Burmese Way to Socialism and will be expected to support the ideal of a country united under central Burmese leadership. Apart from its political objectives the school is intended to train a corps of citizens who will have a greater understanding of minority problems, and who will provide educated leaders for the various national groups.

About 260 students graduated at the end of the first four year period; since then an average of 150 trainees has passed through each year. An official guide published in 1969 lists the different nationalities included in the first batches of students: thus in the first batch there were 15 nationalities, lu-myò, listed, with the Burmans in the majority followed by Shans, Karens, Chins, Kachins and Kayahs (all more than 20 students), and two or three each of the other races. In the second batch of 149 as many of 33 different groups are listed, with a Burmese group of 34.[10] Again, in the third batch of 146, 42 are Burmans.

Clearly an important part of the training to be given to all the minority students at Ywa-thit-kyì is a thorough grounding in the Burmese language, as they will be expected to teach, and if possible to teach in, Burmese when they go back to their native region. The presence of a largish number of mother-tongue Burmese speakers in the student body must help to ensure that all students both hear and speak Burmese throughout their time at the Academy. It is interesting to note that the 1969 guide shows that when the Academy opened in 1964 there were two teachers of English and one of Burmese on the staff. By 1969 however there were three teachers of Burmese and none of English. This seems to show that the amount of time devoted to Burmese language instruction was increasing.

The language learning is not all one way. The Burmese students are also expected to do a certain amount of language study of at least one of the main languages of the Union; in 1969 the teaching staff included mother-tongue speakers of Kachin, Chin, Shan and Sgaw and Pwo Karen. For a student of Sino-Tibetan there could hardly be a better place to do research. There is a possibility that the rich linguistic material available in this community of students may be used in a project that was under way in early 1983 to prepare a set of phrase books, for use by Burmans travelling in minority areas of Burma. The project, under the chairmanship of Daw Si Si Wìn, head of the Burmese Department of Rangoon University, is to select about 1,000 basic Burmese items and phrases, and then to enlist the help of the staff and pupils at Ywa-thit-kyì to provide a set of equivalents in Chin, Kachin, Shan, Mon, and Sgaw and Pwo Karen.

At the present time all schools throughout Burma use Burmese as the medium of instruction; hence all speakers of minority languages obtain their school education through what is their second language. In addition they are now, since 1981, being taught English as a foreign language. The writer was told in January 1983 that school readers in some of the minority languages were in preparation.

It is worth bearing in mind that in spite of the hunger for education which is evident to anyone who visits Burma, the drop-out rate from school is still very high. Of 100 children who enter primary school, 27 will reach the fourth standard; of these only eight will do so without repeating, while 37 of those who drop out will have repeated at least one standard. There are many reasons for this, such as the high pupil-teacher ratio - 55 to 1 - and overcrowded classrooms, and the lack of adequate teaching aids. More often it is simply the need to stay at home and help with the family work or look after younger siblings which is the deciding factor; more than 35% of the labour force are working mothers and there are almost no state child care services. To help improve the learning environment at school the GUB has agreed to embark on a primary school improvement program (PSIP), with the help of UNICEF, in over 800 schools throughout the country. In addition to this, UNICEF also supports a characteristically Burmese voluntary educational activity - a Primary Night School Program under which volunteers teach those children who cannot attend school in the daytime. UNICEF pays for the cost of textbooks for the children and stationery for the volunteer teachers (UN Information Centre 1983).

6. THE LITERACY CAMPAIGN - A NATIONWIDE OCCUPATION

The existence of a Buddhist monastery in nearly every village where all young boys could learn to read and write meant that in traditional Burmese society literacy was high in comparison to other countries of the region, particularly male literacy. Many Burmese sources claim today that one of the legacies of colonial rule was an increase in illiteracy; the figures quoted by Donnison for 1940 might seem to bear this out: of the population as a whole 36.8% were literate, though taking men and women separately, 56% of men were literate but only 16.5% of women (Donnison 1970:206). The usual figure quoted in Burmese accounts of recent years is nine million illiterates or 30% of the population at the start of the literacy campaign (Eì Sò 1980:88). The fullest recent set of figures is that for 1973 which includes literacy rates by State or Division and by sex, and shows a remarkable improvement over the 1940 position. The national rate is calculated at about 67%, with male literacy in 1973 79.35% and female literacy 59.66%. These overall figures conceal very large differences between the mainly Burmese speaking central divisions and the states. Male literacy in central

Burma averages 83%, but for the minority states as a whole it is only about 54%. And in the Karen, Shan and Kachin states less than half of the population is literate. In central Burma 61% of the women are shown as literate, but in the states only 35%.[11] There is one major problem with most of these figures and that is that they do not state what criterion has been used to establish literacy; only Donnison says that in 1940 the criterion used was the ability to write a letter and read a reply. However it seems likely that the recent figures refer to an ability to read the Burmese alphabet and syllabary and little more; at least this would seem to be the implication of frequent calls for suitable reading materials and follow-up classes for 'neo-literates' to prevent them lapsing into illiteracy again. For example in a detailed and informative account of the progress of the current literacy campaign in Burma, the author tells us that people are considered to have attained literacy if they can read and copy out material up to the standard of that found in the 26 lessons of the graded campaign texts (Eì Sò 1980:172). However, he continues, even though a person who has learn to read the full set of lessons for adults, thet-kyì hpat-sa, will be pronounced literate, his reading is not yet very assured and if he ceases practising he will rapidly lapse into illiteracy again.

Discussion about figures and their implications however should not be allowed to obscure the true significance of the nationwide literacy campaign, with its drive to eradicate illiteracy by the 1990s, which was started by the Revolutionary Government in 1964. The aims of the government go far beyond mere reading and writing; literacy is seen as an essential first step in the building of socialism. It will aid the introduction of new ideas to stimulate increased production and raise living standards; it will lead to better health and sanitation procedures, and to the establishment of 'correct' attitudes towards the policies and ideology of the government; in short the government is using the literacy movement as a powerful weapon in its struggle to unite the different racial and ethnic groups of Burma into a harmonious socialist state.

The literacy campaign began experimentally in April 1964 in a village in Meik-hti-la township with a few volunteer teacher-trainees and a group of 200 illiterates. The following April over 2,000 volunteers from the Institute of Education and the Teacher Training Colleges went out for a month into selected rural areas and, together with local volunteers and school teachers, conducted lessons. In order to establish the campaign on a firmer base, the Burma Central Literacy Committee was set up in 1966. By 1969 sufficient mistakes had been made and experience gained to lead to a replanning of the whole campaign strategy. The aim now was to make it a mass popular movement involving the whole country, but to concentrate efforts on a small area at a time and to proceed region by region. The earlier efforts had been spread too thinly and over too wide an area. There was also a change in timing - from being merely a summer effort to a year-round campaign, as it was found that progress and enthusiasm generated during the visits of the student volunteers quickly fell away if not followed up.

The organisational basis was broadened to include all educational, administrative and party officials when setting up the local township literacy committees. Newspapers, radio, films and colourful ceremonies were used to publicise the start of the campaign in a new area. Student volunteers were given better guidance in how to use the prepared instruction material, and were encouraged to set up teaching points near the villagers' place of work, so as to make the most of their free time. Much greater provision of follow-up reading materials was organised, much of it donated by the student volunteers themselves, the rest prepared by the Sarpay Beikman and the BCLC, and now to some extent being funded by UNDP.

By 1970 it was decided to extend the work to Sagaing and Kyauk-hse districts. These areas were chosen because they adjoined the original focus of the campaign - Meik-hti-la - and had good communications; because the majority of the illiterate peasants in them were in government employment, and because the campaign had the general support of the local population. This factor became particularly important when extending the campaign into the hill regions. In 1971 activities were extended to Mon-ywa, Shwei-bo, Myin-gyan and Magwei, and in 1972 to Mandalay, Yame-thin, Hpya-pon and Prome. By now an immense amount of preparatory work was going into each stage of the campaign. In 1971 Burma was awarded the Mohammed Reza Pahlavi Prize by UNESCO for its literacy activities.

The extent to which the movement relied on the student volunteers can be seen from the fact that during the years 1974-1976, when the universities were frequently disrupted by student unrest, literacy campaign work was not completed as planned. From the list of place names given by Eì Sò (1980:145), it is evident that the movement was initially conducted in predominantly Burmese-speaking areas, and was indeed a campaign to teach mother-tongue speakers to read their own language. However by 1980 activity had been extended to Tiddim (Chin State), Mohnyin (Kachin State), to Sandoway (Arakan State), to In-daw (Sagaing Division), to Hparu-hso (Kayah State), to Tavoy (in Tenasserim) and Nyaung-shwei (Shan State) among other places. Many student volunteers were now faced with the much more difficult task of teaching mixed groups, some of whom used Burmese as a second language, some of whom spoke no Burmese at all. A recent account (*Forward* 20/12 1982) of the opening of a literacy drive in Machambaw township illustrates this, as well as giving the typical flavour of the government publicity:

> The people of the Kachin State were mostly illiterate during colonial rule .... Only after the advent of the Revolutionary Council were the people of this locality given the chance of getting an education. By then most of the people past school age were illiterate ....
>
> (from the speech made at the opening ceremony)

The account continues:

> ... we dropped in at teaching point no.2, where we found May May Oò of Henzada College (in Lower Burma) together with local volunteers (3 Kachin girls) - one of whom, Ma Khawn Din, was a 3rd year student from the Academy for the Development of National Groups (see above). The locals assisted May May Oò by translating the explanations into the local language for the pupils to understand them.

The literacy campaign has come a long way since its inception in 1964, and is now clearly part of a long-term plan to spread the knowledge and use of Burmese as a national language throughout the Union.

The question might arise as to whether there is any feeling of resentment on the part of the minorities to the priority given to Burmese. Nothing is known to the writer on this point. However there is ample evidence to show that the manner in which the campaign is organised and conducted promotes friendship and understanding between different races and different classes throughout the country. Every April eager students vie with each other for inclusion in the teams to be sent out to the districts to teach, even though they and their families have to bear the cost of the fare and pocket money for the month. The receiving township feeds and lodges the volunteers, and indeed usually accords them a rapturous welcome and a tearful farewell. According to published reports the numbers involved in a local area at one time can be quite substantial; in

Maw-lamyaing-gyùn in April 1981, 713 outside volunteers joined with 3,114 local people to help a total of 12,499 illiterates.

A final point worth making about the literacy campaign is that many more women than men participate in it; the figure of 12,499 illiterates given above is broken down into 1,615 men and 10,884 women. Often the reports tell of the school children helping their mothers and even grandmothers with their reading homework (Maw-lamyaing-gyùn met-gazìn, April 1982:155).

7. CONCLUSION

Since independence in 1948, Burma has made substantial progress on all fronts in the development of Burmese, the national language. The necessary terminology has been devised, approved and disseminated; an encyclopedia, a standard spelling, and various standard dictionaries have appeared. Education in and about Burmese has been widely disseminated, through universities, institutes, a special academy for training teachers of minority groups, and a nationwide literacy campaign. Publication in Burmese, both of translated textbooks and of original literary material, has been fostered by various official bodies. The existence of two varieties of Burmese, one literary and the other spoken, creates some additional difficulty for students, minorities and others; but the distinction between them is becoming less absolute. Another problem area is the provision of education for the non-Burman minorities; and a third relates to the standard of English language training. However, the Burmese authorities are facing up to these questions and trying to solve them. Even though there are various official bodies involved, they are well coordinated; so the language policies of Burma are quite advanced and effective.

NOTES

1. This is the estimate for 1982/83 given in the *Report to the Pyi-thu Hluttaw 1983/4*, Burma: Ministry of Planning and Finance.
2. See Okell 1965 for a more detailed discussion of nissaya Burmese.
3. For a very detailed examination of the literary vs spoken issue, see Mìnn Latt Yèkhaun 1966, especially p.286. By choosing to label the literary style 'classical' Burmese and the colloquial style 'modern' Burmese he brings the language reform in China to mind. He also makes clear his belief that a change to using 'modern' Burmese will assist the process of social revolution in Burma.
4. *British Burma Gazette*, 1879, supplement p.248, quoted in Bagshawe 1976:4.
5. In Burmese both *institute* and *university* are tet-gatho; Rangoon University became known as RASU, and Mandalay University as MASU.
6. *World of Books* 19/112:150, 1934; the first issue of this publication appeared in February 1925.
7. For a discussion of the recommendations of this commission, see Hnìn Myá Kyi 1963.

8. *Guardian*, 21 June 1972.

9. For further details of the government's publishing policy, see Allott 1981: 8-9.

10. Government Information Department, January 1969, in Burmese. The greater diversity results from more attention to ethnic subgroups: three kinds of Shan, three kinds of Naga, four Karen groups, and five Chin subgroups are represented.

11. Information for this section is based on Steinberg 1981:94. See also Burma: Ministry of Health 1978.

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BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE: The pocket dictionary (see p.145) has not so far (1985) been printed. The Burmese-English dictionary has been enlarged to about 30,000 entries and is to serve foreigners as well as Burmese. The first part is due to be published in December, 1985; the second part in 1986; the third part in 1987. -A.J.A.