

New infixes in spoken Mon

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Preliminaries and acknowledgments

An infix, according to Trask (1993:141) is “an **affix** which occupies a position in which it interrupts another single morpheme. [...]” There is no restriction concerning the semantic or grammatical function of an infix. The infix phenomena discussed in this paper apparently have arisen in the spoken language at some point after the main split between Thai Mon and Burmese Mon in the 18th century, i.e. less than 300 years ago, which in linguistic terms can be considered recent or new.

There is no standard dialect of Mon, and the dialects vary considerably, both among each other and from the written language. In the present paper, I apply a phonemic representation of Mon, which is intended to cover all dialects. The second (or breathy, chest) register of Spoken Mon (SM) is indicated by.. beneath the main vowel of the syllable. IPA symbols are used with their usual values, the only exception being *y*, which stands for the palatal approximant [j] in order to avoid confusion with the voiced palatal stop written <j> in quotations from written sources. Quotations from older stages of the language and from Literary Mon (LM) are given in the established transliteration for Southeast Asian and Indic scripts (cf. Shorto 1971). Quotations from other authors are given in the original spelling where available. The data of the spoken language are drawn mainly from dialects spoken in Ye township, but data from other dialects were used as well. Literary Mon sources include classical texts, such as the 550 *Jātaka* tales by Acā Hwo’ and the historical work *Rājāwam̐sakathā*, as well as modern publications, such as journals and newsletters written in contemporary Mon.

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1. Introduction

Infixation has been a widely used grammatical process in the Mon language since earliest times. The grammatical functions of infixes in Old Mon (OM) include causatives <-u->, frequentatives <-in-, -um̃->, attributives <-am->, nominalization <-ir->, among others (s. Shorto 1971:xxiiiiff.). Of the above infixes only one phonetic shape remains in SM, the vowel ə, but different spellings in LM sometimes indicate the origin of the infixes. Thus, OM <gluṃ̃> ‘be much, many’ had an infixed attributive form <gamluṃ̃> ‘much, many’ and a nominalized form <giriṃ̃> ‘extent, quantity’. Both forms merged in SM in *hə laŋ*, with *hə-* being the regular spoken reflex of LM <ga-> and <gam->. In LM, the two forms are kept apart, viz. <gamluiṃ̃> ‘much, many’ vs. <galuiṃ̃> ‘quantity’. From the OM verb <blaḥ̃> ‘be free, escape’ the causative <bulaḥ̃> ‘set free, release’ was formed with the regular -u- infix. In SM the root verb is *pləḥ* with the causative derivate *hələḥ*, *hə-* here representing the written form <ba-> (LM <blaḥ̃>, <balah̃>). OM infixation as a morphological process has left traces in SM and in the modern literary language, but it is not productive anymore.

Table 1. Sums up the development of infixes from OM to SM.

gloss	form	OM	MM	LM	SM
be big	BASE	<jnok>	<jnok>	<jnok>	<i>hnək</i>
(big) size	NML	<jirnok>	<janok>	<janok>	<i>hənək</i>
increase	CAUS	<junok>	<janok>	<janok>	<i>hənək</i>
chief	ATTR	<jum̃nok>	<jamnok>	<jamnok>	<i>hənək</i>

The productivity of the old system of infixes was lost probably during the Middle Mon (MM) period. In the texts of Acā Hwo’, who is considered the classical Mon author *par excellence* and who lived through the destruction of Haṃsāvātī (Pegu) in 1757, the MM forms survive, but distributional irregularities show that the formation *per se* was not understood anymore. In LM the nominalized form of <klon> ‘to do, work’ is often spelt <kamlon>, which represents an old attributive with -m- infix, rather than the original nominalization with OM -ir- infix *<kirloṃ̃> (not attested in OM, LM <kalon>). Both spellings <kamlon> and <kalon> are pronounced *kəlon* in SM. Correctly, the spelling <kamlon> should be reserved for the attributive ‘(royal) attendant’, the historically correct spelling for ‘work’ being <kalon>.

At least one of the infixes in Mon has a prefixed (or proclitic¹) allomorph, viz. the attributive marker <-am->, which is clearly connected to the prefix <ma->. This variation survives in LM in pairs like <gamluiṃ̃> ~ <ma-gluiṃ̃>, SM *həlaŋ* ~ *mə-kləŋ*, ‘much, many’. In SM and LM, the attributive, when overtly marked, usually takes the prefix, the infixed forms surviving only as

¹The pronunciation and in a few cases also the spelling suggest an analysis as a prefix rather than a clitic.

frozen lexicalized items, e.g. *hənɔk* (LM ⟨*jamnok*⟩) ‘chief, headman’ from *hnɔk* (LM ⟨*jnok*⟩) ‘be big’. The attributive usually is *mə-hnɔk* in SM and LM.

While the productivity of the process of morphological infixation was thus lost by the 18th century, a new type of infixation arose after that time. These new infixes are the topic of the present paper. It will be seen that the new infixes started out as allomorphs of prefixes or proclitics in some environments.

The phenomenon must have arisen after the final fall of Haṁsāvātī in 1757 A.D., when large numbers of Mon migrated to Thailand and settled there, as these early Mon (Rāmañ) settlers in Thailand apparently do not share this innovation, which is found in all Mon dialects in Burma.

2. The negation infix²

Negation in SM is achieved by prefixing³ the negation particle *hɯʔ* to the verb to be negated. Only verbal elements can be directly negated, a feature also known to Burmese and Thai. In classical LM, the usual form found is a prefixed ⟨*h-*, *ha-*⟩, which seems to have had no effect on the register of the main syllable⁴. The negative of *nɯm* ‘to exist, have’ is not **hɯʔ nɯm*, but *hɯʔ mɯə* (from ⟨*mway*⟩ ‘one’). In classical texts, the expression ‘there is no...’ is most often spelt ⟨*hmay*⟩. In newer LM, this becomes ⟨*hwa*’ *mway*⟩, and *hɯʔ mɯə* in SM, the only case of a non-verbal element (the numeral ‘one’) directly negated⁵. This can be regarded as an elliptic construction, leaving out the verb *nɯm*. The numeral *mɯə* as postverbal negation intensifier is common in Mon.

- (1) *hɯʔ* *kiəŋ* *chɤ* *mɯə*
 NEG EXPR to.meet one
 ‘I have never seen one.’ > ‘I have never seen it.’

²I would not consider negation in Mon a morphological process, but rather a syntactic one. If the phonological process of infixing the negation particle becomes established in the language, though, we can speak of a morphological negation in Mon at least for a small set of words. The -*y-* infix on the other hand exhibits characteristics of derivational morphology, which is arising (or has arisen) from a phonological process.

³The negation particle *hɯʔ* appears as a prefix in pronunciation and in at least one case regularly also in spelling.

⁴Another prefix that obviously had no effect on the register of the main syllable is the hypothetical *s-*, which in OM and MM could be prefixed to virtually every verb.

⁵Bauer (1982:521) states that “Historically, numerals [...] function as simple verbs [...]”. The evidence given is far from convincing, though, and throughout the recorded history of Mon, the syntactical behaviour of numerals is certainly not verb-like.

The origin of the negation particle in modern Mon is rather unusual, being the reinforced form of a weak form of the OM negation particle ⟨*sak*⟩ (s. Shorto 1971:354). In SM the pronunciation of the negation particle varies between *hɯʔ*~*hɣʔ* and *hə*.

There is a set of verbs in SM that show a particular development of the proclitic or prefixed negation particle, namely a split of the phonetic material in *h-* and *-u-*, the former being prefixed to the verb, the latter infix, giving rise to a new simulfix (simultaneous pre- and infix) with the function of the negation particle⁶. The prefixed *h-* results in preaspirated stops, in one case as *hkh-*. This preaspiration is usually lost in rapid speech, though, leaving only an infix. The original (but unexpected) second register value of *hɯʔ* is lost; the negated verb retaining its own register, whether first or second. The following sentences illustrate the change in SM in Burma as compared to LM and Thailand Mon:

	SM Burma	LM	SM Thailand	English
(2)	<i>ʔuə h-kwet</i>	⟨ <i>'ay hwa' ket</i> ⟩	<i>ʔuə ʔao ket.</i>	'I don't want it.'
(3)	<i>h-kwə ʔa</i>	⟨ <i>hwa' kuiw 'ā</i> ⟩	<i>ʔao kw ʔa.</i>	'not let go.'
(4)	<i>ʃiəʔ h-kwɣʔ.</i>	⟨ <i>ca hwa' gwa'</i> ⟩	<i>ciəʔ ʔao kɣʔ.</i>	'You can't eat.'

In SM of Thailand, the verbs retain their original forms as *ket*, *kw*, and *kɣʔ*, as they do in written Mon.

The negation infix occurs with the following verbs and auxiliaries:

<i>hɯʔ ket</i>	>	<i>(h)kwet</i>	'NEG + to take, want'
<i>hɯʔ kw</i>	>	<i>(h)kwə</i>	'NEG + to give; CAUS'
<i>hɯʔ kiəŋ</i>	>	<i>(h)kwiəŋ</i>	'NEG + have ever; EXPER'
<i>hɯʔ kɣʔ</i>	>	<i>(h)kwɣʔ</i>	'NEG + to get; POT'
<i>hɯʔ kəŋ</i>	>	<i>(h)kwəŋ</i>	'NEG + to dare'
<i>huʔ khəh</i>	>	<i>(h)khwəh</i>	'NEG + be good'

With all but *kəŋ* 'to dare' and sometimes *kiəŋ* the use of the infixed form for the negative is obligatory, i.e. no non-infixed forms were heard from any informant, not even in reciting word lists. The simulfix on *khəh* 'be good' gives rise to the initial *hkh-*, which is not found elsewhere in the language.

kw and *khw* being the only allowed clusters with *w* in SM, the negation-infix does not occur with any other initial consonants, as this would give rise to uncommon initial clusters (and thus difficult to pronounce). There

⁶Shorto (1963:58) mentions this phenomenon in a footnote, without going into details or giving examples.

are, on the other hand, many verbs with initial velar stops that do not take the infix. Thus the negative forms of the following verbs are regular, using the negation prefix:

<i>kɔk</i>	>	<i>hɯʔ kɔk / hə-kɔk</i>	‘be cold’
<i>kok</i>	>	<i>hɯʔ kok / hə-kok</i>	‘to call’ ⁷
<i>kem</i>	>	<i>hɯʔ kem / hə-kem</i>	‘to grasp’
<i>*kaʔ</i>	>	<i>hɯʔ kaʔ / hə-kaʔ</i>	‘(not) to lack (only neg.)’
		etc.	

Especially noticeable is that the last word in the list does not take the infixed negation, as this word is used only in the negative form and one might thus expect it to be more closely linked to the negation particle.

There is no phonological reason why some *k-* words require the infixed form and others don’t. The difference full verb vs. auxiliary is not the determining factor, as the full verbs *ket* ‘to take’ and *khvəh* ‘be good’ show. The verbs *kə* ‘to give, let’ and *kʰəʔ* ‘to get, can’ always take the infixed form, also when functioning as full verbs, as in *kə hloə* ‘to give money’ ~ *kəv hloə* ‘not to give money’.

Frequency of use with the negation particle certainly is part of the explanation, but there is no evidence that *khvəh*, for example, is used more frequently in negated contexts than *kɔk* and *kaʔ*, which do not occur as infixed forms. For the time being we have to content ourselves with the observation that the negation particle in SM comes in three forms, i.e. as prefixed *hɯʔ / hə-* and as an infix *-w-* with optional *h-* prefix.

3. The y-infix

3.1 Pronominalization and adverbialization

While in the case of the negation infix described above the origin and development is rather clear, there is in SM another frequent infix, the origin and exact meaning of which cannot be determined. In SM, *ʔiʔ* is prefixed to female kinship terms⁸, as in *ʔiʔci* ‘aunt’, *ʔiʔnək* ‘grandmother’, and female personal names. This prefix goes back to an OM form *ʔya-* (s. Shorto 1971:305), LM *ʔi*. When prefixed to deictics, *ʔiʔ* turns the deictic into the corresponding pronoun: *teʔ* ‘that’ ~ *ʔiʔteʔ* ‘that one’, *nəʔ* ‘this’ ~ *ʔiʔnəʔ* ‘this one’. In this function the *ʔiʔ* prefix is not found in OM or MM and seems to be an extension of the use of the female onomastic prefix above. A similar development can be

⁷The infixed form *h-kvək* can be heard occasionally in some speakers’ pronunciation (Ye township area).

⁸The only apparent exception is *ʔiʔtaʔ*, ‘father’, where *ʔiʔ* is prefixed to a male term.

The prefixed pronominal form *ʔiʔkəh* ‘that one, the mentioned one’ in rapid speech becomes *cəh*, exhibiting the plain palatal initial stop in most areas instead of the expected *ky-*. The form *kyəh* is heard in the speech of Sangkhlaburi, which can be considered a leveled variety of SM due to the fact that speakers of many areas have settled in the village. The new infixated form seems to be developing a semantic difference from the original prefixed form. The more recent prefixed form *hɛʔ kəh* here clearly takes the place of the older one, while *cəh/kyəh* drifts towards adverbial use. When beginning a sentence, *cəh/kyəh* is used as a connective particle (‘this being the case ...; then ...’) and in this position it is often reinforced by the TOP marker *kəh*, resulting in *cəh kəh* for LM <‘igah gah’.

- (6) *cəh kəh ʔayɛŋ siəŋ, dɛh raʔ ʔiʔ-prɛə muə*
 thus TOP Ayang right? 3 PRED PREF-woman one

siəŋ klɛŋ nu kɔ ʔadi...
 right? to.come ABL OBL Adi

‘Well then, as for Ayang, that one, right, there was a woman who came from Adi ...’

The semantics of all infixated forms have been expanded from pronouns to include adverbs (‘here, there, where’) as well, though the older adverbs with the *ʔə-* prefix still survive and are used in SM, in some cases obligatorily.

- (7) *ʔa ʔəlv rɔ* ‘Where are you going?’ (**ʔa yv rɔ*)
- (8) *dɛh mɔŋ ʔətɛʔ* ‘He is there.’ (also: *dɛh mɔŋ cɛʔ*)
- (9) *mɔŋ ʔənvɔʔ raʔ* ‘I’ll stay here.’ (als: *mɔŋ nɔʔ raʔ*)

In SM, the infixated forms are freestanding pronouns or adverbs, while the basic forms are deictic modifiers suffixed to a noun phrase (or clause in the case of the topic marker *kəh*). The non-contracted prefixed forms occur only in very careful and slow speech.

In addition, the plural marker *tɔʔ* can be pronominalized by prefixing *ʔiʔ*, which gives rise to an infixated form:

*ʔiʔ tɔʔ > *tyɔʔ > kyɔʔ > cɔʔ* (PL marker, also 2pl, fam)

In SM, *cɔʔ*, like the basic form *tɔʔ*, can be used to indicate the plural of nouns (especially referring to people), in which case it is sometimes shortened to *cə*, as in the following sentence. This shortening happens mostly before the deictics *nɔʔ* and *tɛʔ* and the topic marker *kəh*.

- (10) *ʔe rəð cə kəhkəh*
 eh fellow PL TOP TOP
 ‘Well, those fellows we were talking about.’

Another use of *cəʔ* is as pronoun of the second person plural in familiar contexts. The following sentence is from a mother talking with her son:

- (11) *sa-ʔup⁹ kəh ʔəpa cəʔ tɛh mənrk*
 book TOP father 2pl must to.hide

laʔ həməɛə tən kəh
 when Burmese go.up TOP
 ‘Your father had to hide that book when the Burmese came up.’

The pronominalized form <‘*ita*’> occurs in classical Mon in manuscripts dating back as early as the 18th century, e.g. in the Rājāvamaṁsakathā (reprinted from palm leaf manuscripts in 1997), where it stands for the third person plural:

- (12) *ma ‘ita’ byu ‘ā, hwa’ pa nāy ray, dui’*
 father 3pl be.old to.go NEG to.do master fellow to.stop

hwa’ ‘ā swa’ rān.
 NEG to.go to.sell to.buy
 ‘Their father grew old, he did not act as the master of his merchants anymore and he stopped going to sell and buy.’ (p.91)

It is impossible, of course, to retrieve the exact pronunciation of the text at the time when it was written, therefore nothing can be said about the stage of palatalization at that time.

3.2 Perfect marker

ʔiʔ is listed in Shorto (1962:1) and Tun Way (2000:47) as ‘perfect particle’ which is always followed by the “assertive” marker *raʔ*. Halliday (1955:24) has “*Ira* verb. affix denoting the past, chiefly applied to speaking.” In Sakamoto’s Mon-Japanese Dictionary, one finds the form *ʔiʔraʔ*, which is translated as “-(*shite shimau*) *ta*”, ‘have finished, have done, did’, i.e. the Japanese past or perfect form (1994:1169). Sakamoto’s dictionary, which is based on the Mon dialect of Pakkret near Bangkok, shows that the form was in use before the main Mon migration to Thailand (then Siam) in the 18th century.

⁹*sa-ʔup* is of course the Burmese *sa-ʔouʔ*, written <*cā* ‘*up*’>. For the analysis of Mon, especially the newer spoken varieties in Burma, at least basic knowledge of Burmese are necessary. Burmese words can occur in different forms with different speakers, often exhibiting a mixture of written and spoken Burmese, as the example of *sa-ʔup* illustrates.

In Burma, the full form *ʔiʔraʔ* is seldom, if ever, heard in SM, while the infix form *yaʔ* is very frequent. In classical texts, only *raʔ* occurs, *ʔiʔraʔ* being conspicuously absent. Obviously *ʔiʔraʔ* always was a colloquial form, not found in the written language until fairly recently. The origin of *ʔiʔ* in this context is not certain. It is probably an abbreviation of an auxiliary verb, or may be a merger of different verbs (one might think of *ʔa* ‘go’ and *toə* ‘finish’, both of which frequently occur before *ʔiʔraʔ*¹⁰).

In SM, the compound *ʔiʔraʔ* becomes *yaʔ*, presumably along the following lines:

ʔiʔ raʔ > **ryaʔ* > *yaʔ* (perfect marker)

Unlike the predicate marker (Shorto’s “assertive”) *raʔ*, the infix form *yaʔ* has a restricted distribution in SM. It does not occur in negated contexts and not with all verb classes, or rather not in all situation types. Being basically a postterminal aspectual marker¹¹, *yaʔ* requires a change of situation, i.e. it can not be combined with fully stative situations. *yaʔ* most frequently occurs after telicizing auxiliaries *ʔa* ‘to go’ and *toə* ‘to finish’, which reinforces its function as perfect marker. More detailed study of the distribution of *yaʔ* in the spoken language is necessary for a more definite analysis.

Of all the infix forms presented in this paper, apart from *cəh*, *yaʔ* is the only one that can be found in newer written texts (newspapers, magazines), where it is spelt ⟨*yya*⟩, consistent with its first register pronunciation¹².

4. Conclusion

The phenomena of infixation in Mon discussed here must have arisen after the main migration of Mon people to Thailand after 1757. The forms are not found in the Thailand dialects of Mon¹³, but in all recorded dialects in Burma. It cannot be seen as a purely phonetic process occurring in rapid speech, although the process is restricted to a small set of initial consonants. It has to be noted, however, that not all words with the possible initials actually take the

¹⁰Contrary to what Bauer states (1982:394), *ʔiʔ raʔ* frequently co-occurs with *toə*. The most common way of stating the one has finished doing something in SM is ‘*V toə ʔiʔ raʔ/toə yaʔ*’.

¹¹For the terminology “postterminal”, s. Johansson (2000).

¹²In a few book printed in recent years in Moulmein, one finds forms like ⟨*kwuiw*⟩ for ⟨*hwa’ kuiw*⟩, ⟨*gwui*’⟩ for ⟨*hwa’ gwa*’⟩, etc.

¹³Data were collected from Mon locations in Ko Kret, Bang Kradii, Phra Pradaeng, Bang Kracao, Ban Khanmaak, and Ban Pong, covering all major Thai-Mon dialect areas except for the Lamphun region. The speech of newer immigrants from Burma was of course not considered, as these migrant workers retain their village dialects showing all features of Burmese Mon. Sangkhlaburi on the Thai-Burmese border is linguistically part of Burmese Mon, although geographically it is located on Thai soil.

infixes. While *ʔiʔtɔʔ* ‘plural; you, they’ becomes *cɔʔ*, the equally fixed compound *ʔiʔtaʔ* ‘father’ remains unchanged. Similarly, the frequent expression *V+ʔiʔ kɔʔ* ‘V is possible, it’s O.K. to V’¹⁴ is never pronounced **cɔʔ*, while the negation of *kɔʔ* ‘to get, POT’ always takes the infix. It is noteworthy that while the negation infix *-w-* occurs only with velar initials, which can form a cluster with *w*, the *ʔiʔ* prefix can be infixes also to words beginning with consonants not forming clusters with medial *y*. The resulting uncommon clusters are reduced to simple palatal consonants. A similar development might be expected in now impossible *w*-clusters such as *<tw-*, *<dw->*, which existed in MM and were later changed to *kw-*, e.g. *<twə>* *kwɔh* ‘to announce, say’, *<dwək>* *kwɛək* ‘song’, etc. Had the infixes forms already arisen at a time when these clusters were still pronounced as such, one would expect infixes forms also for such verbs as *tɔh* (LM *<dah>*) ‘to be; be able’ and *tɛm* (LM *<tim>*) ‘to know’, both of which are frequently used in negated contexts. That no forms like **kwɔh* (for older **twɔh*) or **kwɛm* (for older **twɛm*) are found is further proof of the relative recentness of the process in SM.

In most cases, the infixes form has replaced the original prefixed form in SM, so that it is not easy to describe a semantic development. The only exception is *ʔiʔkɔh* vs. *cɔh*, both of which are in use in the spoken language. While *ʔiʔkɔh* seems to be more clearly a pronoun, *cɔh* is developing towards an adverbial particle with the meaning ‘then, thus, so, therefore’. The place of *ʔiʔkɔh* as a pronoun is being taken by the newer form *βɛʔ kɔh*, though, in the speech of many speakers.

Only two of the infixes forms are used to some extent in the written language, one of these (*cɔh*) only rarely.

¹⁴*ʔiʔ* in this context seems to be a weak form of *lɛ* ‘also, too’ (from Burmese *lè*).

Table 2. Gives the complete list of the infix forms found in SM in Burma, together with presumed intermediate forms.

Base	LM with prefix	interm. form	SM in Burma	alternative form	LM
<i>ket</i>	<hwa' ket>	*hukwet	(h)kwet		
<i>kɔ</i>	<hwa' kuiw>	*hukwɔ	(h)kwɔ		
<i>kiəŋ</i>	<hwa' keiŋ>	*hukwiəŋ	(h)kwiəŋ	hɯʔ kiəŋ	
<i>kɔʔ</i>	<hwa' gwa'>	*hukwɔʔ	(h)kwɔʔ		
<i>kəŋ</i>	<hwa' gáŋ>	*hukwəŋ	(h)kwəŋ	hɯʔ kəŋ	
<i>khɔh</i>	<hwa' khuih>	*hukhwɔh	(h)khwɔh		
<i>kəh</i>	<'i gah>	ʔikyəh	cəh	ʔiʔkəh, ʔəkəh	<jah>
<i>teʔ</i>	<'i te'>	*ʔityeʔ	ceʔ	ʔiʔteʔ, ʔəteʔ	
<i>nɔʔ</i>	<'i na'>	*ʔinyɔʔ	ɲɔʔ	ʔiʔnɔʔ, ʔənɔʔ	
<i>lɔ</i>	<'i luiw>	*ʔilyɔ	ɲɔ	ʔiʔlɔ, ʔəlɔ	
<i>tɔʔ</i>	<'i ta'>	*ʔityɔʔ	cɔʔ	ʔiʔtɔʔ	
<i>raʔ</i>	<'i ra>	*ʔiryaʔ	yaʔ		<yya>

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