

(Myanmar)

BURMESE

An Introduction to the Script



John Okell

with U Saw Tun and Daw Khin Mya Swe

Parallel with this course

Burmese—An Introduction to the Spoken Language, Book 1

Burmese—An Introduction to the Spoken Language, Book 2

Burmese—An Introduction to the Literary Style

(Myanmar)

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and Daw Khin Mya Swe



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I would also like to acknowledge the part played by my colleague at SOAS, Mrs. Anna Allott, who heroically shouldered a heavy load of teaching and other duties for part of the time I had arranged to be away; and the contribution of my wife Sue, who generously and without complaint took on more than her share of the care of the house and family so that I could make progress with writing.

I received valuable comments on parts of the draft from U Saw Tun, of Northern Illinois University, and from Daw Khin Mya Swe and Daw San San Me in London. The recordings were made at SOAS under the supervision of the Technician Jahan Latif, and the speakers were —

U Aung Khin
U Aung Naing
Dr. Ba Maw
Ma Kay Thwe
U Khin

Dr. Daw Khin Hla Thi
Daw Khin Mya Swe
Ma Khin Nan Oo
Dr. Nay Tun
Daw San San Me
Saw Yu Win

Ma Thuza
Ma Tin May Aye
U Tun Min
Wa Wa Tin
Daw Yi Yi Mya

I am grateful to them all for their willing cooperation and perseverance: the second and third hours in a stuffy recording studio with picky microphones demand a high degree of concentration and discipline.

Prototype versions of the course were used by the beginners' classes at SOAS in the four years from 1990/91 to 1993/4, and at the SEASSIs held at Cornell University in 1990 and at the University of Washington in 1992. Members of all these classes made many helpful comments, as well as finding numerous typing errors, and I would like to thank them for being so tolerant and constructive.

My greatest debt is to many friends in and from Burma, who not only answered my questions about their language and customs with immense patience and goodwill, but also made me welcome in their homes and daily lives, and went to staggering lengths to ensure that my needs were met in generous measure. To them all I extend my heartfelt thanks.

The photograph used for the cover is of a carved wooden doorway in the Shwe Inbin Monastery in Mandalay. It was taken by Dr. Elizabeth Moore of SOAS, and the design of the cover was implemented by Alfred Birnbaum, who was attending my class at the time. The photographs used in the text were taken on my visit to Burma in 1991. The remaining illustrations are from books, magazines and other material published in Burma.



I am responsible for typesetting the text, which includes three home-made fonts, and for editing the tapes. Professionals would have been more skilled but also more costly, so readers are asked to be indulgent when my lack of expertise shows through.



A NOTE FROM THE AUTHOR

Change of publisher

Publication of all four volumes of *Burmese: An Introduction*, first published in 1994, has been transferred to the Northern Illinois University Press and the books are now re-issued with minor revisions.

Change of audio format

At the time of initial publication, the audio component of *Burmese: An Introduction* was issued on cassette tapes. Now that digital recordings are more widely used than tapes, the audio material has been converted to digital. Two advantages of this change are, first, that digital files are less bulky to store and transport than cassette tapes and, second, that it is far easier to find a particular section in the audio.

Neither the printed text nor the audio files have been changed to reflect the transfer from tape to digital. So when you read or hear a reference to a particular tape, please understand it as referring to the corresponding track in the audio files.

Changes in Burma since the publication of this course

Sixteen years have passed since the first publication of this course. During that time several aspects of life in Burma have changed.

First and most obvious are price levels:

- A cup of tea that cost K4 in 1993 now costs K150, and costs may well rise further. So, when practicing prices in the exercises, bear in mind that most prices need to be multiplied by 30 or 40 to correspond with the cost of living today.

Second, some institutions that appear in the course have been renamed, relocated, or discontinued. For example:

- Tourist Burma has been renamed Myanmar Travel and Tours.
- The National Museum has moved from Pansodan to Pyay Road.
- The Diplomatic Store is no longer operating.

If you search in Burma for places mentioned in the course, remember that they may no longer be there.

Third, digital cameras have largely replaced film cameras, and most telephones now have keys to press rather than dials to turn. References in the Lessons to film and dialing should be understood as reflecting technology at the time of writing.

Apart from such obvious physical changes in the life of the country, the language of the course is still the language that you will hear and read in Burma today.

Errata lists

While using the course over the years, teachers, colleagues, and students have helpfully pointed out some errors and inconsistencies in the text. These have been listed and are to be found, with their corrections, on a page at the end of each volume.

INTRODUCTION

Scope and method

Burmese: An Introduction to the Script (referred to henceforth as *BIS*) aims to enable students with no previous knowledge of Burmese to become competent in reading and writing Burmese script.

Traditionally, script courses have relied on a romanization as a way of indicating to the learner the sound associated with a given Burmese letter: “the letter ဝ represents the sound b,” and so on. This approach works up to a point, but romanizations have serious disadvantages. Learners often confuse the sounds the roman letters are meant to stand for: pain sometimes gets read as ပိုင် (like English *pine*) and sometimes as ပိုင် (like English *pane*). And romanizations suggest mistaken pronunciations: lay makes people rhyme လေ with English *lay*, and Mìn makes them rhyme မင်း with *pin*. (On ways of representing Burmese in roman letters, see below: *Burmese in roman letters*.)

Now that cassette tape players are within reach of most students, using tape recordings seems the obvious escape route from the romanization problem. *BIS* presents the sounds associated with the characters of the Burmese script as sounds, on tape, and not as roman letters on the page. (The romanization *is* used, but sparingly, to aid the memory when characters are first presented.) The aim is to cut out the intermediate step of romanization and its pitfalls, and thereby to enable the learner to establish a more immediate and accurate link between sound and symbol.

It is assumed that students who are working through *BIS* will at the same time be learning to speak Burmese, and that their spoken language lessons will include some guidance and practice in pronunciation. For this reason, *BIS* does not give exercises in pronunciation. However, some coverage of pronunciation is unavoidable: you can't learn what sound a letter represents unless you can recognize the sound. So *BIS* includes some observations on sounds, and even here and there an opportunity to practise sounds, but this element is kept to a minimum. Where there is an overlap between what *BIS* says about pronunciation and what you are told on the subject in your spoken language course, you will often find that a little repetition is not unwelcome, and may even be helpful.

Lesson structure

The typical Lesson begins by presenting one or two new characters — in the text you see their shapes and how to draw them, and on the tape you hear the sounds they represent. Then there is a Practice section: a list of words that are both printed on the page and read out on the tape. Learners can use the words either (a) as reading practice, by pausing the tape, reading a word aloud, and listening to the tape again for confirmation; or (b) as writing practice, by listening to the word first, then pausing the tape and writing down the word, and checking with the printed list for confirmation. You can use the whole list for reading and then again for writing; or use part of it one way and part of it the other.

In the first three Lessons there are two separate lists of words: one set for reading and one for writing.

Letter names. Most of the letters in the Burmese alphabet have a descriptive name. In reading classes in English primary schools, teachers sometimes tell children that “Cap” is spelled with “curly k-,” but “Keep” is spelled with “kicking k-.” Burmese letter names are similar: “twisty S,” “capped P,” and so on.

While you are learning to read Burmese script it is often useful to be able to refer to the letters by name, so the names are introduced in each Lesson. At this stage it is only necessary for learners to be able to recognize a name when they hear it, so there are no Exercises to help learn the names.

Later on, when you can speak Burmese a little, it is handy to be able to ask how something is spelled — there are a number of sounds in Burmese that can be spelled one way or another — and to be able to follow the answer. I hope to write a supplement to *BIS* designed to help you acquire this skill.

Review. For those who simply want to review the ground they have covered, or who are coming back to Burmese after a break and need to brush up their reading, *BIS* provides Review Exercises. The Review Exercises are recorded on a separate tape, and are not accompanied by explanations. The text to be used with this tape is printed at the appropriate point in this booklet: the Review of material presented and practised up to Lesson 12 is printed following Lesson 12, and so on.

Take heart

Learning a new script imposes a heavy load on your memory, not at the very beginning, but after a few Lessons, when your mind begins to bulge under the strain. You feel your recognition of the writhing mass of symbols and sounds is rapidly diminishing, and each new arrival weakens your hold on the old. Don’t despair: persevere. There comes a phase after that, when you wonder why you thought it was difficult. And remember that the Burmese alphabet only has 33 consonants and some eight vowels (and no capitals), as against the 26 lower case and 26 capitals of the roman alphabet.

To the teacher

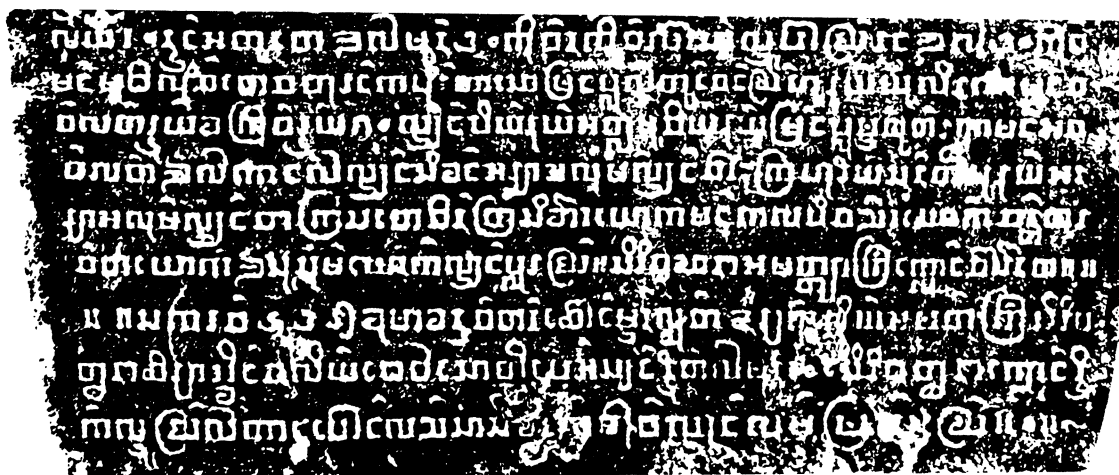
BIS is written in such a way that Learners can work through it on their own, without a Teacher. However, a Teacher can help in two ways. First he or she can present the material of the next Lesson in class, so that when the Learners come to study it in their own time it will already be partly familiar. Secondly, after the Learners have worked through a Lesson on their own, the Teacher can practise the material in class. Here are some activities you may find helpful.

1. The teacher gives the number of an example in the text, the Learners find the example on the page and one (or more) of them reads it aloud.
2. The Teacher (or a Learner) reads a word aloud, and the other Learners find where it is on the page.
3. The Teacher (or a Learner) writes a word on the blackboard, and one of the Learners (or more) reads it aloud.
4. The Teacher (or a Learner) says a word, and the other Learners write it down. Their work is then checked by the Teacher (or another Learner).

If you wish to give some extra homework tasks to provide variety, you can try the following:

1. The Teacher issues a passage from a book, and the Learners mark on it any words or syllables they recognize.
2. All the examples in Part I of *Burmese: An Introduction to the Spoken Language* are written in both script and romanization. The Teacher can specify a set of lines in that volume, and the Learners' task is to identify which words are not pronounced as written.
3. The Teacher issues a list of words written as pronounced, and the Learners' task is to write out the correct spelling — looking it up if they need to. This activity cannot start till after the first mismatch words have been introduced in Lesson 13.1 or later.

Lines from a Burmese inscription dated A.D. 1274



Taken from an inked "rubbing" (List n° 349), in which the letters incised in the stone appear white against a black background

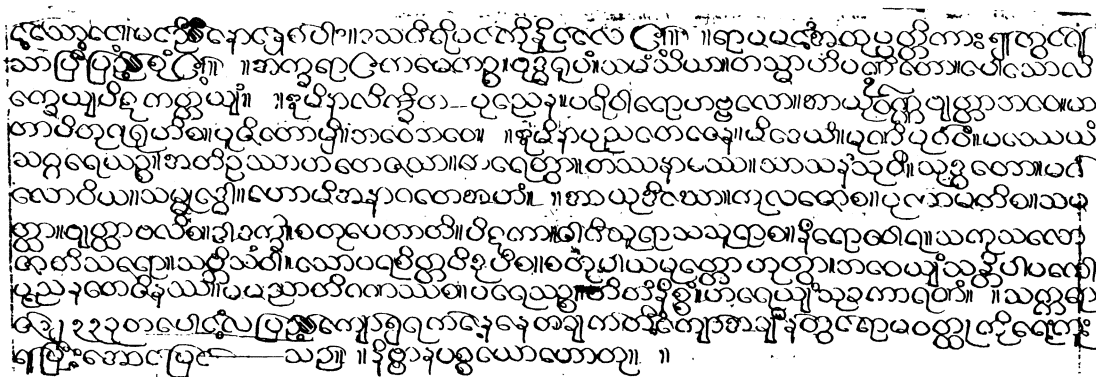
HISTORY

The earliest examples of writing in Burmese are found on stone inscriptions dating from the 11th and 12th centuries. The letters of the inscriptions are square, as opposed to the rounded shapes of the present day, and some of the spellings have changed over time, but otherwise the writing system has changed little. The script was probably acquired from the Mon people, who inhabited the Moulmein-Pegu area at the time, and the Mon in turn seem to have adopted a script used in the area of Madras on the east coast of India. (For more detail see Roop's *Introduction to the Burmese Writing System*, p. ix f.)

The purpose of most of the inscriptions is to make a permanent record of the dedication of land, buildings and other property to the religion. Other texts produced before the advent of printing in the 19th century were written either on paper or palm-leaf.

The paper was like a thick lightweight card about 18 inches wide. It was made in lengths of several yards, then folded like a fan to form books (ပုရပိုက် p̄r̄ābaiq) with pages about 6 inches long. In one type of parabaik the paper was coloured black, and you wrote on it with a white steatite rod like a slate pencil. In the other, the paper was white, and written on in ink. For further information on this subject, see *The Life of the Buddha*, by P. Herbert (London, The British Library, 1993).

Lines from a palm-leaf manuscript copied in 1871



Last leaf of ရာမဝတ္ထု from the facsimile edition by တက္ကသိုလ်များ စာအုပ်ပြုစုထုတ်ဝေရေးကော်မိတီ (ပေပုရပိုက်စာစဉ် ၃)။ Published by စာပေဗိမာန် Rangoon, 1974.

Palm-leaf is a longer lasting material. The leaves were selected and prepared, then cut into even strips about 18 inches long and 4 inches wide, and stacked up and provided with covers to form a book (ပေစာ pe-za). The letters were incised in the surface of the leaf with a sharp metal stylus, then rubbed with black to make them more legible.

The main texts for which the Mon-Burmese script was first used were not in Mon or in Burmese, but in Pali. Pali is a dead language of ancient India, related to Sanskrit and the other Indo-European languages, and is the language in which the scriptures of Theravada Buddhism, the branch of Buddhism practised in Burma, are written. As the language of the sacred texts Pali is held in high esteem in Burma. The texts and their language have been studied by the Burmese for over nine centuries, and Pali is used as a source for loanwords in the same way that Greek and Latin are used for new words in English.

As the Mon-Burmese script was developed for Indian languages, of which Pali is one, it was ideally suited for writing Pali (which can also be written satisfactorily in Thai, Cambodian, Lao, Sinhalese and other scripts — all descended from the same source as the Burmese script), but less suitable as a vehicle for Burmese and Mon. Predictably, there are sounds in Pali that don't exist in Mon and Burmese, and vice versa. This has had two results. One is that the early Mon and Burmese scholars had to devise modifications of the characters to represent the Mon and Burmese sounds that were missing (just as European languages have had to devise combinations like *ch* and *sh*, and characters like *ü*, *ç*, *ø*, and so on). The other is that the Mon-Burmese alphabet still contains a residue of letters that are not needed for writing Mon or Burmese words. However, this doesn't mean that they

are never used in Burmese texts. When Burmese borrows a word from Pali, it still spells the word in the way it is spelled in the Pali texts, including the characters that are not used for writing Burmese words (just as we write *fiancé* in English although we don't use *ç* and *é* for writing English words). Many of the words that use these non-Burmese characters belong to learned vocabulary (religion, grammar, medicine), but some of them are current in everyday speech, such as မဝေ “moment” (which uses Pali ဝေ rather than the standard မှ), and ဌဝေ “department” (which uses Pali ဌ rather than the standard ဝေ).

Burmese pronunciation of Pali words

The pronunciation of Pali words in Burmese differs in two ways from their pronunciation in India, Sri Lanka and elsewhere. Firstly, there are the sounds that are needed for Pali but not used in Burmese (like German *ch*, which is not used for native English words). These are given the Burmese sound nearest to them (like the English pronunciation of German *Bach* as “bark”); for example, the voiced aspirate Pali sound written ဝ in Burmese script and *gh* in romanized Pali: in Burmese this character is given the same sound as the unaspirated ဝ, romanized *g*. Secondly, there have been changes in Burmese pronunciation since the script was established, and these changes are also applied to words from Pali; for example, the Pali word ဝဉ္စမ = pañcama “fifth” is pronounced /pyin-zǎmá/, because the earlier /c/ has changed to /s/ and has then been voiced to /z/. As a result it is not always easy for foreign and Burmese scholars of Pali to communicate orally. Where the foreigner says: *Buddhaṃ saraṇaṃ gacchāmi*, the Burmese says: *Bouq-dan thǎrǎnan giq-sha-mí*. There is a similar mismatch in the pronunciation of Latin by, say, a Spaniard and a German.

BIS has a section towards the end for learning to read words with Pali characters, though one or two characters are introduced earlier because they are used in common words.

BURMESE IN ROMAN LETTERS

Because Burmese has its own script, people writing about Burma in roman-script languages (like English) have been obliged to devise ways of representing Burmese names and words in the roman alphabet. People who are more interested in the spelling of the words than in their sound (such as historical linguists, epigraphists) have established a set of correspondences between Burmese letters and roman letters, so they can represent Burmese words in roman by consulting a table of equivalents and simply substituting roman letters for Burmese letters. We call this letter-for-letter method a “transliteration.” There is an example of a transliteration table at the end of this book.

The transliteration tables are constructed to match similar tables for classical languages of India, like Pali and Sanskrit, and because the pronunciation of Burmese has changed over time, the roman letters used for transliterating are not a very helpful guide to the way the words are pronounced today; so, for people who are more interested in the *sound* of Burmese words than in their spelling, transliteration is not an appropriate method of romanization.

To represent the sounds of Burmese words in roman letters, rather than their spelling, many different systems have evolved. There are two main approaches. In the earliest days of

contact between Burma and Europe, European travellers would write the best approximation they could manage to the sound of a Burmese word or name. Although a few of the details of the method have changed (for example, people now write *Wun* for the 18/19th century *Woon*), this approach is still widely used today by people writing about Burma in English and other European languages. For this reason we call this the “traditional romanization.”

One advantage of the traditional romanization is that, thanks to its widespread use, it is familiar to many readers, both Burmese and foreign. For some purposes, however, it has serious shortcomings. As I have written elsewhere,

For a language learner ... the traditional romanization is far from adequate. Words romanized in the ad hoc traditional way don't show tone, they don't reliably show whether a consonant is aspirated or not, and they don't always distinguish one vowel from another. As a result, the syllable written “pe” (for example) in the traditional romanization, may represent any one of 12 different syllables in pronunciation:

ပေ	ပေ့	ပေး	ပေံ	ပေ့	ပေ့
ပေ	ပေ့	ပေး	ပေံ	ပေ့	ပေ့

For the learner of the language, ambiguity of this order is intolerable. It is like providing, for a learner of English, one written syllable to cover the sounds of the eight English words *pat*, *bat*, *pet*, *bet*, *pad*, *bad*, *ped*, and *bed*.

A further deficiency is that traditional romanization often offers two, or sometimes three, different ways of romanizing the same sound. So the Burmese word ပေ, for example, may be romanized *me*, or *may*, or *mae*. This inconsistency is particularly rife in Burmese personal names, where some people deliberately adopt a variant spelling for their own name in order to make it more distinctive.

From: *Burmese: An Introduction to the Spoken Language*, parallel with this volume

For these reasons, linguists and others have devoted much ingenuity to devising systems of romanization where each Burmese sound is consistently and unambiguously represented by one roman equivalent — whether that is one letter or a sequence of letters. We call romanizations of this type “systematic romanizations.”

Unfortunately the problem of matching Burmese sounds and roman letters is so great that hardly any two linguists find the same system satisfactory. As a result, there are many variations on the same theme. Each system is entirely consistent and systematic within itself; but one will use the roman letter *e* (for example) for one Burmese vowel sound, and another system will use it for a different vowel sound.

Following this tradition with some reluctance, I have perpetrated yet another systematic romanization system to use in this course and its sister language books. I have done this because I believe the new variations are easier for students to use than the alternatives. However, the best solution to the romanization problem is the most radical:

Don't use a romanization: learn the script instead.

SELECTING VOCABULARY FOR SCRIPT PRACTICE

Linking script learning with learning the spoken language

How can you start to learn a language with a non-roman script? You have to be able to handle the script before you can read or write down any words to learn; but it's not easy to learn the script unless you can recognize the words you are reading: mouthing meaningless syllables is a demoralizing endeavour.

The obvious candidates for script practice are the first words you learn to speak: each new word you learn to say, you also learn to read and write in the script, so all the words you read and write are words you already know. With this advantage in mind, I intended originally to design *BIS* as a parallel course to the early parts of my spoken language course (*Burmese: An Introduction to the Spoken Language*, abbreviated to *BISL*).

When you get down to the details, however, you find that the assumed advantages of this plan are less enticing than they seem. The vocabulary you need in the early stages of a spoken language course contains a high proportion of words with spelling irregularities of one kind or another (see *Irregular spellings* below), and such words are not at all suitable as material for a well-graduated introduction to the (mostly) systematic way in which the letters of the Burmese script represent the sounds of the spoken language.

For this reason I abandoned the attempt to link the vocabulary used for practice in *BIS* with the vocabulary presented in the early stages of *BISL*, and decided to write *BIS* as an independent entity. This loses the rewards of running parallel with the acquisition of the spoken language, but it has some compensating advantages. You can still use the script course at the same time as you are working through a spoken language course — mine or any other. In addition, *BIS* can be taken at whatever pace suits the timetabling arrangements of the students, and they can start doing it when they like. They can start the script course before they start the spoken course, or defer starting it till after they are well into the spoken course; and they can either take it intensively, or space it out, to match the time they have to spend on it.

Irregular spellings in everyday vocabulary

The Burmese writing system has been in use in its present form for several centuries. During this time the pronunciation of a number of words has changed, but the spelling has not changed to match. As a result there are many words that look, from the written form, as if they should be pronounced one way, though in practice they are pronounced another way. Here are some examples:

written form	pronunciation in script		pronunciation in roman		meaning
	as spelled *	as spoken	as spelled	as spoken	
ဘုရား	/ဗုယား/	/ဖယား/	bú-yà	p'âyà	pagoda
ရွှေတိဂုံ	/ယွေတိဂုံနံ/	/ယွေဒဂုံနံ/	shwe-tí-goun	shwe-dägoun	Shwedagon
ခုနစ်	/ခုနစ်/	/ခွန်နစ်/	k'ú-hniq	k'un-hniq	seven
သုည	/သုည/	/သုန်ညာ/	thú-nyá	thoun-nyá	zero
နာမည်	/နာမျို/	/နန်မယ်/	na-myi	nan-meh	name

* = the pronunciation indicated by the spelling

A more systematic divergence between script and sound is due to “weakening,” a feature that is predictable in some words (such as number phrases with *one, two, seven*) but not in all; for example:

တစ်ဆယ်	/တစ်ဆယ်/	/တဆယ်/	tiq-s'eh	tăs'eh	ten
နှစ်ရာ	/နှစ်ယာ/	/နယာ/	hniq-ya	hnăya	two hundred
စစ်ကိုင်း	/စစ်ကိုင်း/	/ဇရိုင်း/	Siq-kain	Zägain	Sagaing [town]
ပုဂံ	/ပုဂံ/	/ပဂံ/	Pú-gan	Păgan	Pagan [town]
ပန်းကန်	/ပန်းကန်/	/ပဂံ/	pàn-kan	păgan	plate, bowl

But the most pervasive problem for the beginner is “voicing,” a feature that is often predictable (e.g in suffixes like *-တယ်* or *-တ*), but not always; for example:

ပြတိုက်	/ပြတိုက်/	/ပြတိုက်/	pyá-taiq	pyá-daiq	museum
ပန်းခြံ	/ပန်းခြံ/	/ပန်းဂြံ/	pàn-c'an	pàn-jan	park
လေးဆယ်	/လေးဆယ်/	/လေးဇယ်/	lè-s'eh	lè-zeh	forty
လာချင်ပါတယ်	/လာချင်ပါတယ်/	/လာဂျင်ဗာဒယ်/	la-c'in-pa-teh	la-jin-ba-deh	I want to come

Another set of words that present problems for the beginner student of the script are those with non-standard spellings — spellings that use rare characters or rare combinations of characters; for example:

non-standard element	orthography	pronounced as if spelled	pronunciation in roman	meaning
-ကြ	စက္ကူ	စက်ကူ	seq-ku	paper
-တံ	ဓာတ်ပုံ	ဒတ်ပုံ	daq-poun	photograph
—	မင်္ဂလာပါ	မင်ဂလာဘာ	Min-găla-ba	Good morning
-နွဲ့	မန္တလေး	မန်းဒလေး	Màn-dălè	Mandalay
-လံ	ဗိုလ်ချုပ်လမ်း	ဗိုဂျုပ်လမ်း	Bo-jouq Làn	Bogyoke Street
-နွဲ့	မဟာဗန္ဓုလလမ်း	မဟာဗန်ဒုလလမ်း	Măha Ban-dú-lá Làn	Maha Bandoola St

Learning a new script demands a sustained and committed effort from the learners. When they have just struggled through to the stage of being able to read ချင် and ပါ and တယ် as *c'in* and *pa* and *teh*, to have their teacher tell them at that point that “in some contexts these words are actually pronounced jin and ba and deh” is demoralizing and counter-productive. The same is true of having to tell students who are justifiably proud of having learned to read ဒတ် (daq) that in the word for “photograph” (daq-poun) you have to write not ဒတ် but ဓါတ်, introducing a character (ခ) and a combination (တံ), which they won't need for any other words for a long time to come. It is for these reasons that vocabulary from the early lessons of *BISL* is not used for script practice in the early parts of *BIS*.

Words suitable for script practice

Given that so many words in the normal everyday vocabulary are unsuitable as material for learning to read the script, words for practice have to be found elsewhere. To be suitable for this purpose, words have to meet two requirements: (a) they must be free from the voicing, weakening, non-standard letters, and miscellaneous irregularities exemplified above; and (b) they should be words that the learner can recognize, even though he may not yet know many words of Burmese.

There are two categories of words that meet these requirements. One is Burmese personal names, which almost always consist of discrete syllables without irregularities or rare letters. An added advantage of using personal names for practice is that learners will become more familiar with the elements and shapes of names. Names play a larger part in Burmese discourse than they do in the West (for example, Burmese often uses names where English uses “you” and “I”), and they are not marked in the script with capital initial letters, so the ability to handle and recognize names is an important skill for the foreign learner.

The second category of words that meet the requirements is foreign words that are used in Burmese (like ဟိုတယ် *ho-teh* “hotel”), foreign place names (like ဂျကာတာ *Jăka-ta* “Jakarta”), and the foreign first names that some Burmese use as nicknames (like မော်လီ *Maw-li* “Molly”). All these are written in Burmese script in a way that exactly reflects the way they are pronounced when spoken with a strong Burmese accent. A possible objection to using this category for practice is that the learners are not learning Burmese words. However, loanwords and foreign names do offer a high degree of regularity and recognizability, and they have one added advantage. Many students report that, after studying and using Burmese for a year or two, failing to recognize English and other loanwords in Burmese frequently causes them difficulty. Using loanwords for script practice, as *BIS* does, should give you sufficient familiarity with the sound correspondences to reduce the size of this problem.

It sometimes happens, particularly in the early portion of *BIS*, that there are not enough names or loanwords to provide sufficient practice with a given sequence of letters. In this situation *BIS* uses Burmese words that the beginner is unlikely to meet elsewhere (such as တာ *ta* “embankment”), or even made-up words that don’t exist in the language. As the learner progresses through the course and his/her repertoire of syllables grows, the need for words in this category eventually disappears.

Once the learner has mastered a number of common consonants and vowels, the course begins to introduce phrases with voicing and weakening and other unexpected pronunciations; so that the need for foreign or made-up words diminishes progressively and phrases from the spoken language take their place.

DETAILED CONTENTS (For use as a finder list)

Part 1: Standard characters and combinations of characters

Lesson heads	rhymes	other
1. လ- မ-	၁ ဝ	
1.1		figures ၁ ၂ ၃
2. ဘ- န-		suffix -နီ
2.1		figures ၄ ၅ ၆
L3.		suffix -လာ: -နာ:
3.1		figures ၇ ၈ ၉ ၀
4. တ- က-		
4.1		suffix -ကြီး
5. [န]	-နီ ဝ	suffix -လို prefix ကို [Name]
5.1		word မြန်မာ
6.	ေ- -င်	-လေး
7.		prefixes ဦး ဒေါ် မ (ကို) [Name]
8. သ- ဝ-	[-ါ]	
8.1		suffix -မှာ
9.	ေ-/ိ [-ါ/ါ]	
10. ဒ- ဂျ-	[-ါ]	this/that; is-stce qns ဒီ [noun]။ ဒါ [noun]-လာ:။
11.	ေင် ြ: [-ါ:]	prefix မောင် [Name]
12. ဝ- အ-		
12R REVIEW		
13.	်/ယ်	verb sentences in [Verb]-မယ်။ is-stce qns ဒါ ဘာ[noun]လဲ။ ဘယ်[noun]လဲ
13.1		voicing: is-stces in ဒါ [noun]-ပါ။
13.2		phrase ဟုတ်ကဲ့။ ဒါ [noun]-ပါ။ ဒီမှာပါ။
14.	း/ -့	prefix အ[vb]။ (မ[name])။ suffix: [noun]-မ။
14.1		phrase မဟုတ်ပါဘူး။
14.2		voicing: verb stces in [Verb]-ပါ
15. ရ- ဂ-		
15.1		stacked cons: ြ
15.2		voicing: vb stces in [Vb]ပါတယ်-မ[Vb]ပါဘူး။
15.3		weakening suspended: ရ,ပါတယ် and others
16.	-က် -တ်	
16.1		voicing: review
16.2		voicing: verb stces in ဘာ[Vb]သလဲ-[Vb]သလာ:။
16.3		stacked consonants: ကြွကြွနွနွ
16R REVIEW		
17. စ- ဆ-		
17.1		voicing စ-ဆ and generally
18.	ိင် -စ်	
18.1		voicing သ
19. ခ- ဝ- ဖ-		

19.1			voicing က-ခ
20.		◌်ကံ ◌်မ်	prac from <i>BISL</i> : ဒီလမ်း: ဘာလမ်းလဲ and so on verb stces in [Vb]-မယ်နော်။ [Vb]-ပါ။
20.1			voicing တ-ထ
20.2	c		
21.	ဟ- ချ-		
21R REVIEW			
21.1			voicing ချ
22.	ဝ- ရှ-		voicing ပ-ဖ
22.1			
23.		◌်တံ ◌်နံ/း	voicing suspended
23.1			
24.	ဗ- ဇ-		
24.1	ဈ		word ဈေး
25.	မှ န လှ		
25.1			weakening: နှစ်/တစ်-[noun]
26.		◌်တံ ◌်နံ/း	reading aid: voiced cons written in bold
26.1			weakening: ငါး သူ သား စာ et al
27.		◌်	
28		◌် ◌် ◌်	
28R REVIEW			
28.1			weakening: ပု- ကုလား- ငါး- ထန်း-
28.2			irreg splgs ခုနှစ်။ ဘုရား၊ ဘုန်းကြီး၊ မ-ဘူး။
29	ပြ-မြ		
29.1			irreg splgs စစ်ကိုင်း၊ ပဲခူး and other towns
30	ပျ-မျ		
30.1	မ		
31		◌်ကံ	reading aid: weak syllable written with ~
31.1			irreg spellings -ပြီ၊ ပြီး-
31.2			weakening: သမ္မတ၊ ဓမ္မာ and the like
32	◌် ◌် (excl-တံ/နံ) incl မွန်လှရွှင်		practice includes hotel names
32R REVIEW: fragments of dialogue			
32.1			double tones: သူ့ နီနီ မအော့ ကျနော် ဆယ့်
32.2			irreg splgs ဗန်းမော် ထားဝယ် ဟင်္သာတ
32.3			English finals incl ဘင်္ဂလားဒေ့ရှ်
33		◌်မ် ◌်	
33.1			irreg splgs ခါတ်ပုံ၊ နံပါတ် and other -တံ -တန်။
33.2			irreg splgs ရွှေတိဂုံ၊ ပုသိမ်၊ တံတား၊ တံခါး၊ စားပွဲ၊ ပြတင်းပေါက်
34	ကျ ကြ ချ ခြ		incl ကျ ကြ ချ ခြ but excl ◌်တံ/◌်နံ
34.1			irreg splgs မိုလ် and other ◌်လ်
35		◌် ◌် ◌်	prac word မိုလ်ချုပ်
35R1 REVIEW: <i>BISL</i> runthrough part 1			
35R2 REVIEW: <i>BISL</i> runthrough part 2			
36	ည ငြ ဥ		including ည ငြ ဥ ည ည

37	ဝိဝိ
38	ဝိဝိ ဝိဝိ ဝိဝိ
39	-ပိပိ
-pt1	= /ဝိ/
-pt2	= /ဝိ-/
-pt3	= /-ဝိ/
-pt4	mixed
39.1	
39.2	
40	-ပိ
40R REVIEW: sentences from <i>BISL Part 1</i> and newspaper headlines	

literary-style သည် and မည် words နာမည် and တစ်ယောက်တည်း

Part 2: Less common characters and combinations of characters

• Rare combinations

- Section 1 လျ
- Section 2 လျှ
- Section 3 သျှ
- Section 4 ယျ

• Free-standing vowel syllables

- Section 5 ဣ
- Section 6 ဣ
- Section 7 ဣ
- Section 8 ဣ
- Section 9 ဣ
- Section 10 ဣ
- Section 11 ဣ

• Abbreviated syllables

- Section 12 ဣ
- Section 13 ဣ
- Section 14 ဣ
- Section 15 ဣ

• Consonants used in Pali words

- Section 16 ဣ
- Section 17 -ဣ-
- Section 18 -ဣ-
- Section 19 ဣ

- Section 20 ဣ
- Section 21 ဣ ဣ
- Section 22 ဣ ဣ
- Section 23 ဣ ဣ
- Section 24 ဣ ဣ
- Section 25 ဣ ဣ

• Non-standard rhymes

— Stop-class finals

- Section 26 ဣ
- Section 27 ဣ
- Section 28 ဣ
- Section 29 ဣ
- Section 30 ဣ
- Section 31 ဣ

— Nasal finals

- Section 32
- All vowels with non-standard nasal finals
- Other finals
- Section 33
- All vowels with non-standard other finals

• Symbols for Sanskrit

- Section 34 Sanskrit ś-ṣ, ṛ-ṝ, ḷ-ḹ

Types of mismatch between spelling and pronunciation

Mismatch in initial consonant

- Consonant written plain or aspirate, pronounced voiced
- Consonant written plain, pronounced aspirate
- Consonant written voiced, pronounced aspirate
- Nasal consonant written plain, pronounced aspirate

Mismatch in medial consonant

- Consonant pronounced with unwritten ~j
- Medial consonant written but often not pronounced

Mismatch in rhyme

- Vowel written e- pronounced $/\text{e}/$
- Syllables written with stacked consonant, pronounced with high tone
- Unwritten final consonant
- Final consonant acts as initial of next syllable

Some unique mismatches



Lady in the costume of the Burmese royal court holding a parabaik, a fanfold book of stiff paper used for writing before the spread of printing.

The alphabet

Consonants

The Burmese alphabet has 33 consonants. There are no capitals.

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

Vowels

The vowels are less systematized than the consonants. Traditionally there are 12, written in the form of free-standing syllables as follows:

အ	အာ	အိ	အို	ဥ	ဦ
ဧ	အဲ	အွ	အော်	အံ	အာ့

This list has several omissions and anomalies. A more complete picture is gained from listing the vowel symbols in their “attached” forms: the forms used for attaching them to consonants to make syllables. In the following list a hyphen (“-”) is used to show the position of the consonant.

<i>low tone:</i>	- ဘ	မ	လ	ဂ-	- ယ်	ဂ- ည်	ဝ
		မ	လ	ဂ-	်	ဂ- ဘ	ဝ
<i>high tone:</i>	- ဘး	မး	လး	ဂ-	်	ဂ- ဘ	ဝး
		မ	လ	ဂ-	်	ဂ- ဘ	ဝ
<i>creaky tone:</i>	-	မ	လ	ဂ-	်	ဂ- ဘ	ဝ

Other rhymes are represented by adding a final consonant to these consonant+vowel combinations. For a full listing of combinations and additional symbols see Appendix 1: Conspectus.

Part 1

Standard characters and combinations of characters

LESSON 1

Read through the text below, down to the heading "Reading practice," then listen to the tape for Lesson 1, keeping the book open.

"Heads" and "rhymes"

Words written in Burmese script are made up of a series of distinct single syllables; and when you are learning to read and write the script it is often useful to think of each syllable as made up of two parts:

- (a) a consonant, or sometimes two consonants together; and
- (b) a vowel, or a vowel and a final consonant together.

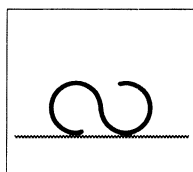
In the notes that follow we shall call that first part of the syllable the *head*, and the second part the *rhyme*. As an example, here is the same principle applied to some English words:

(a) head [consonant or two consonants]	+	(b) rhyme [vowel or vowel and consonant]	=	syllable
T	+	EE	=	TEE
T	+	ICK	=	TICK
TR	+	ICK	=	TRICK
TR	+	EE	=	TREE

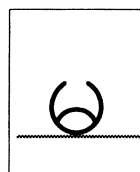
In each Lesson below we shall present some new heads, or some new rhymes, or sometimes both, and give you some exercises to practise reading and writing both the new characters and the characters you learned in previous Lessons.

New letters

Heads



o = 1
l-

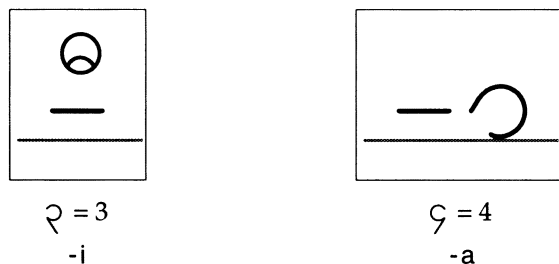


j = 2
m-

The dotted line under each letter is there to show whether they are written on, or above, or below the line on the page.

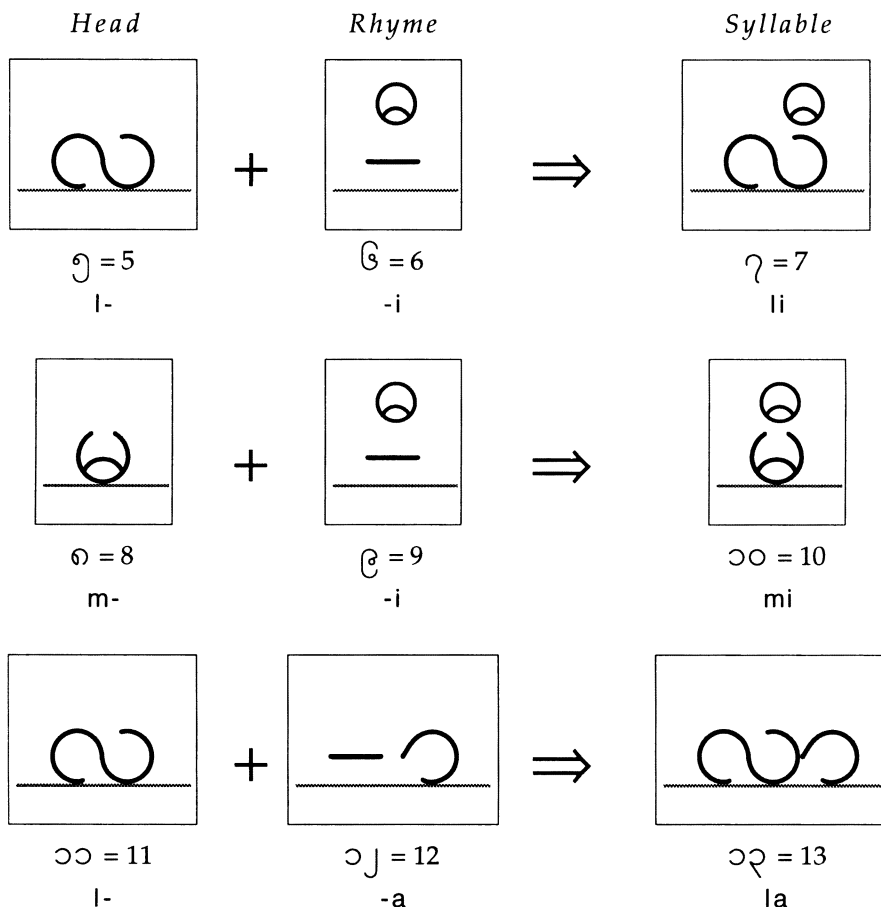
Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce *ei* as in *vein*, *ai* as in *Thailand*, *ou* as in *though*, *au* as in *Sauerkraut*.

Rhymes

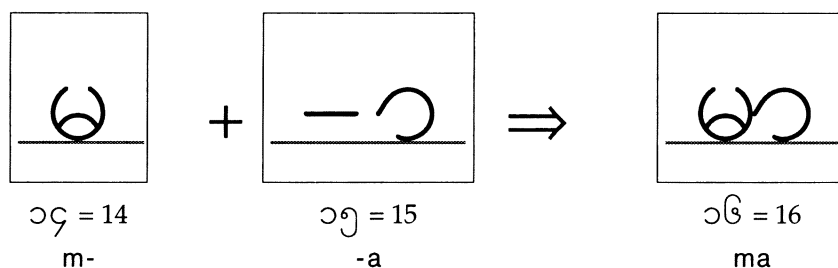


The hyphen. Vowels in Burmese script are always attached to their head — they’re not letters in their own right, like the *a, e, i, o, u* of the roman alphabet, and they are not normally written independently. When we extract them for presentation purposes, as in boxes 3 and 4, we write a hyphen (“-”) to show the position of the vowel symbol in relation to the head. As you see, Burmese vowel symbols don’t always come after a consonant, like the vowels in English. Some of them do, like the symbol for the vowel -a in box 4, but the vowel -i comes over the consonant, and there are other vowels that are written underneath the consonant, or even in front of it. Some are written with a pair of symbols, above and below, or before and after. That’s why you need the hyphen when you write a vowel without its consonant.

Example syllables



Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
 pronounce *ei* as in *vein*, *ai* as in *Thailand*, *ou* as in *though*, *au* as in *Sauerkraut*.



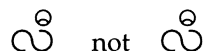
The roman transcription under the characters above is only there in case you need to jog your memory. Try and ignore it as much as you can. Transcriptions of Burmese sounds in roman letters often interfere with a learner's pronunciation and reading.

Notes

Position of vowel symbols. The shapes of most consonants in Burmese script are based on circles: either a single circle, like မ , or two circles side by side, like မမ . Notice that with a single-circle consonant the symbol for the -i vowel is positioned directly over the centre of the circle:



Over a double-circle consonant it is placed over the right-hand circle, not over the centre of the whole consonant:



The vowel ဝါ is written after the consonant, like vowels in English, but it's always an attachment to the consonant, so you write it almost touching the consonant: မာ and မမာ .

Names

Most of the letters of the Burmese alphabet have descriptive names. It is convenient to be able to use these names to refer to elements of the script while you are learning it, so there is a section in each Lesson giving the names of the letters introduced in the Lesson. If you have a teacher he or she may give you some practice in spelling out words letter by letter. At this stage all you need to know is that when the tape uses the phrase ရေးချ် (yè-c'á), for example, it is referring to the symbol ဝါ . There is a full list of the names of all the letters in the alphabet at the end of the text in Appendix 4.

- မမ no descriptive name: referred to as မမ , pronounced /မမ/ = lá
 မ no descriptive name: referred to as မ , pronounced /မ/ = má

The names of vowel symbols don't include the sound they represent, like the consonants: they just describe the shape of the symbol.

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.

◌ ◌ ◌	in script: pronunciation: meaning:	လုံးကြီးတင် ဆန်ခတ် /လုန်းဂျီးတင် ဆန်ခတ်/ = loùn-jì-tin s'an-k'áq a big round placed on top, with a kernel set inside
-◌ -◌ -◌	in script: pronunciation: meaning:	ရေးချ /ယေးချ/ = yè-c'á a line set down

At this point, switch on the tape.

Reading practice for Lesson 1

Tape format for reading practice:

Prompt: Read word number 1.

Learner (during silent gap on the tape): လာ

Burmese speaker on the tape: လာ

... and so on

Syllables

◌ = 1	လာ	◌ = 5	မိလီ
◌ = 2	မာ	◌ = 6	လာလာ
◌ = 3	မီ	◌ = 7	မိလာ
◌ = 4	လီ	◌ = 8	လီလာ

Words

Mask the English equivalents in the right-hand column when you are reading these words. Some of them give you too much help.

◌ = 9	လာ-	come
◌◌ = 10	မာ-	be tough, hard
◌◌ = 11	-လီ	times [multiplication]
◌◌ = 12	မာလီ	gardener
◌◌ = 13	မာလာ	flower [also girl's name]
◌◌ = 14	လီလီ	Lily [girl's English name]
◌◌ = 15	လီမာ	Lima
◌◌ = 16	လာမာ	Lama

A note on the glosses. For reasons given in the Introduction, the words we use for practising reading in the early stages are restricted to certain categories. Most of the words best suited to this purpose are Burmese personal names, and foreign words and names that are used in Burmese. We supplement these with sets of syllables selected for practising, which aren't necessarily words that have a meaning in Burmese. As your script repertoire widens, we shall be able to use more real words and fewer made-up ones. It is not vital for you at this stage to know the words you are practising with, but to save you working in the dark, the glosses give some meanings.

Some of the words in the lists are followed by a hyphen (like မှတ်-). This shows that they are verbs. The hyphen is there because in actual language use Burmese verbs are (almost) always followed by a suffix (a word that is attached to the ends of other words). Other words have a hyphen before them, which is to show that they are suffixes: words that cannot stand on their own but have to be attached to the end of another word, like the *-ing* in the English word *talking*.

Burmese who have learned English will usually pronounce English loanwords with a good English accent. Others will produce a heavily Burmanized version. The script, being designed for Burmese sounds and not for English ones, coincides with the Burmanized pronunciation, and this is the version we record on the tapes.

Forming the characters

At this point turn off the tape, and practise writing the new characters until you are ready to do the dictation exercise below.

If you're going to write letters that are clear to read and pleasing to look at it's important to make the strokes in the right direction and the right order — at least to start with. When you're writing at a reasonable speed you may find you want to take some short cuts; but for now practise making the strokes in the way that's set out below. This is the way Burmese children learn to write the characters in school. Knowing the right direction and order also helps you to interpret fast cursive handwriting, when parts of some of the letters become separated. For more on cursive shortcuts see Appendix 7B.

You will see that most of the strokes are drawn clockwise. Make them as circular as you can. One of the commonest words of praise for handwriting in Burma is

လက်ရေး သိပ် ဝိုင်းတာပဲ။

"Your writing is so round!"



Order of strokes: 1 2 1 2

For cursive shortcuts see Appendix 7B.

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.

When you write syllables with ^၉ or -၉, write the consonant first, and the vowel symbol second.

Stages in writing လိ — (1) လ (2) လိ

Stages in writing မာ — (1) မ (2) မာ

Writing practice for Lesson 1

Copying. Write out the following, making the strokes in the right order:



Dictation. When you've written the syllables enough times to feel at home with them, turn on the tape again, and do the Dictation Exercise. This is the procedure:

- First close the book, or at least cover up the Key to the Dictation Exercise printed below.
- Next, have a pen and paper ready, switch on the tape and listen to word 1; then stop (or pause) the tape and write the word in Burmese script on your paper.
- Do the same for all the words in the Exercise.
- When you get to the end of the Exercise, look at the text again and compare your script with the Key.

KEY TO LESSON 1 DICTATION

Syllables

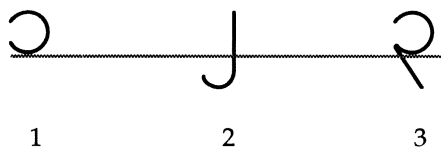
၁ =1	မာ	၅ =5	လာမိ
၂ =2	လာ	၆ =6	လိမိ
၃ =3	လိ	၇ =7	မာမိ
၄ =4	မိ	၈ =8	မိလိ

LESSON 1.1

FIGURES 1, 2, 3

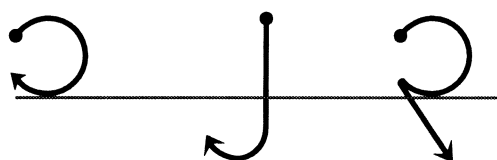
The first three Lessons in *BIS* are each followed by a short additional Lesson which introduces you to the numerals in Burmese script. From Lesson 4 onwards all words in the reading and writing examples are numbered with Burmese figures in order to give you practice in reading them. There is no tape for this Lesson.

New figures



Notice that the Burmese ၁ is like our own 1: ours is straight and the Burmese ၁ is curved, but they're both made with a single stroke. And the ၃ is not so different from our 3 either: in this case the Burmese figure has a straight line in the lower half where ours has a curved one. Given those helpful resemblances, the only figure you've really got to work at here is the ၂.

Forming the characters



Try writing the figures a few times to help memorize their shapes, then tackle the Reading Practice.

Reading practice for Lesson 1.1

Take pen and paper, mask the key below, and convert the Burmese figures to Arabic (Western) figures. Then check your results against the Key.

BURMESE

A. ၁၂

C. ၂၂

E. ၃၁

B. ၂၃

D. ၁၃

F. ၂၁

KEY

A. 12

C. 22

E. 31

B. 23

D. 13

F. 21

Writing practice for Lesson 1.1

Mask the key below and write out the Burmese equivalents of the Arabic figures.

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.




ARABIC




- A. 1
- B. 2
- C. 3




- D. 22
- E. 31
- F. 11

- G. 32
- H. 23
- I. 13

KEY

- A. 
- B. 
- C. 

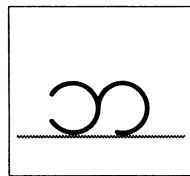
- D. 
- E. 
- F. 

- G. 
- H. 
- I. 

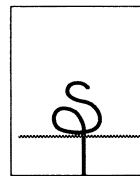
LESSON 2

Look at the new heads and examples below, down to "Reading practice," then listen to the tape for Lesson 2.



New heads



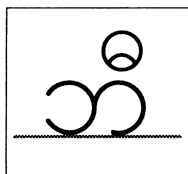
၁ = 1
b-



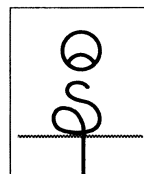
၂ = 2
n-

Shape. Note that  is composed of two broken circles, one with the opening to the east, and the second opening to the south-west. The tail of the  descends below the line.

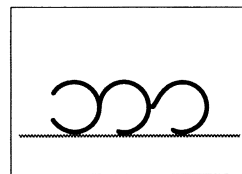
Example syllables



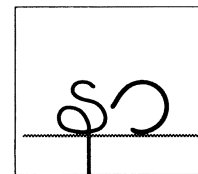
၄ = 4
bi






၅ = 5
ni



၆ = 6
ba



၇ = 7
na

Notice that the  sits centrally over the , but is written over the right-hand half of the , not over the centre. (There is no box 3.)

Names

ဘ in script: ဘကုန်း
 pronunciation: /ဗ,ဂုန်း/ = bá-goùn
 meaning: humpback bá

န in script: နငယ်
 pronunciation: /န,ငယ်/ = ná-ngeh
 meaning: little ná

Now switch on the tape to do —

Reading practice for Lesson 2

Syllables

- ၁ =1 ဘာ
- ၂ =2 ဘီ
- ၃ =3 နီ
- ၄ =4 နာ
- ၅ =5 မာ
- ၆ =6 မိ
- ၇ =7 လီ
- ၈ =8 လာ
- ၉ =9 ဘာလာ
- ၁၀ =10 ဘီမာ
- ၁၁ =11 မိနီ
- ၁၂ =12 လီနာ

Foreign place names

Mask the English equivalents in the right-hand column when you read these words: they give the game away.

- ၁၃ =13 ဘာလီ Bali

- ၁၄ =14 လီမာ Lima

English first names

- ၁၅ =15 လီလီ Lily
- ၁၆ =16 လီနာ Lena
- ၁၇ =17 နီနာ Nina
- ၁၈ =18 လာနာ Lana

Burmese names

- ၁၉ =19 နီနီ Ni Ni
- ၂၀ =20 မာလာ Mala

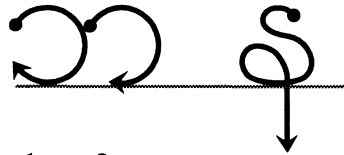
Burmese words

- ၂၁ =21 ဘာ what
- ၂၂ =22 နာ— be sore
- ၂၃ =23 နီ— be red
- ၂၄ =24 နီလာ sapphire
- ၂၅ =25 မာလီ gardener
- ၂၆ =26 လာမာ Lama

Forming the characters

At this point turn off the tape and practise writing the new characters until you are ready to do the dictation exercise below.

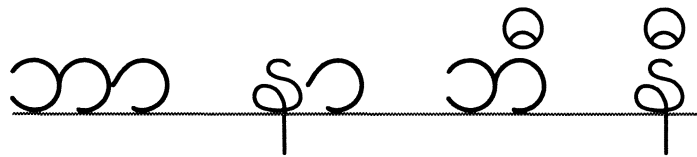
Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
 pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.



Order of strokes: 1 2
 For cursive shortcuts see Appendix 7B.

Writing practice for Lesson 2

Copying. Write out the following, making the strokes in the right order. Make sure that the tail of your န goes below the line.



Dictation. 12 words. Cover up the Key below, and proceed as for Lesson 1.

KEY TO LESSON 2 DICTATION

Syllables

၁ =1	ဘာ	၇ =7	လာနီ
၂ =2	နီ	၈ =8	မာနာ
၃ =3	ဘိ	၉ =9	မီလာ
၄ =4	နာ	၁၀ =10	နီဘိ
၅ =5	မီလီ	၁၁ =11	နာမီ
၆ =6	ဘိဘာ	၁၂ =12	လာဘာ

Having much leisure during this six weeks' voyage I now set myself with great industry to acquire the language. ... I soon mastered the written character. As the language is essentially monosyllabic, there is hardly a combination of two or three letters which has not its appropriate signification, and it was my daily amusement to put together a number of these at a venture, and then ferret out their meaning from my interpreter. Words gained by this process became indelibly fixed on the memory, and it surprised me to see how soon I became possessed of a large stock of them.

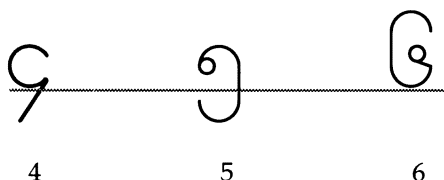
From Henry Gouger: *A Personal Narrative of Two Years Imprisonment in Burmah*. London, 1864, p. 22.

LESSON 2.1

FIGURES 4, 5, 6

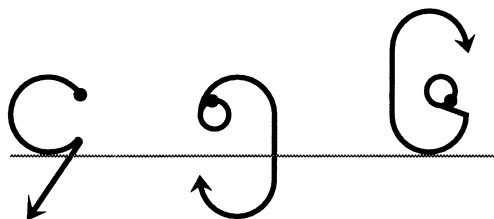
There is no tape for this Lesson.

New figures



Notice that the ၄ is not so different from our 4, and the ၆ is a pretty close match to our 6 too. So the ၅ is the one you need to concentrate on.

Forming the characters



As before, write out the figures a few times to help memorise their shapes, then go on to the Reading practice.

Reading practice for Lesson 2.1

BURMESE

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| A. ၄ | D. ၄၆ | G. ၁၆ | J. ၅၂ |
| B. ၅ | E. ၆၅ | H. ၂၄ | K. ၂၃ |
| C. ၆ | F. ၅၄ | I. ၅၁ | L. ၄၃ |

KEY

- | | | | |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| A. 4 | D. 46 | G. 16 | J. 52 |
| B. 5 | E. 65 | H. 24 | K. 23 |
| C. 6 | F. 54 | I. 51 | L. 43 |

Writing practice for Lesson 2.1

ARABIC

A. 5	D. 45	G. 21	J. 43
B. 4	E. 16	H. 63	K. 35
C. 6	F. 52	I. 34	L. 26

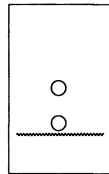
KEY

A. ို	D. ို	G. ို	J. ို
B. ို	E. ို	H. ို	K. ို
C. ို	F. ို	I. ို	L. ို

LESSON 3

Read down to “Reading practice,” then listen to the tape.

Tone mark



၀ = 1

[marks high tone]

In Burmese, if you pronounce a syllable with a high pitch it means one thing, and if you say the same syllable on a low pitch it means another. Examples:

န၀ [low pitch]	na	to hurt
န၀: [high pitch]	nà	to pause
နိ [low pitch]	ni	to be red
နိ: [high pitch]	nì	to be near

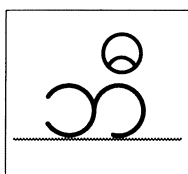
Fortunately for us, Burmese script marks the speech tones clearly (there are some tone languages that don't), and the “two-dot” symbol is one of the ways it does so. In the roman transcription we mark the high pitch with a grave accent ($\grave{\text{}}$); and (as for most vowels in Burmese script) if a syllable doesn't have a tone mark then you know it's a low-pitch syllable.

We speak of “high-pitch syllable” and “low-pitch syllable” for brevity. To be more precise, what matters in Burmese is that a high-pitch syllable should *start* high — which

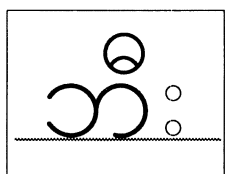
means higher than any neighbouring low-pitch syllables. Similarly, a low-pitch syllable should start lower than any nearby highs. Which way they go after they've started is not critical — as it is in tone languages like Thai and Chinese.

Tones won't be a serious obstacle to learning Burmese — on one condition. The condition is that you must take them seriously, from the beginning: whenever you say a Burmese word you must make sure you're conscious of the pitch, and when you learn a word you must learn its tone as well. That's why tones are brought in so early, here in Lesson 3. Some students are tempted to pay little attention to them at first, thinking they will polish them up some time later. This is a bad mistake. It can't be done. When such students get to the stage of being able to speak quite a lot of Burmese, the bemused Burmans they talk to don't know whether they're talking about resting or hurting, about being red or being near — and the students misinterpret what the Burmese say. This is tragic, because all that confusion and frustration is unnecessary: all you have to do is to take the tone of a word as seriously as you take its consonants and vowels. Tone is just as important in identifying a word as its vowels and consonants are; and in some ways you can argue it's even more important. If you're talking in a noisy room, people can often make out what you're saying because they can hear the ups and downs of your sentence, even though they can't hear the vowels and consonants very clearly.

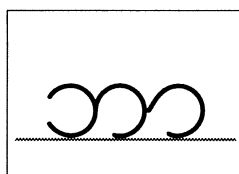
Example syllables



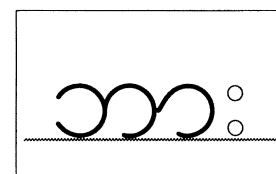
၂ = 2
bi



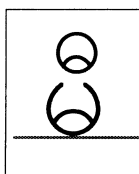
၃ = 3
bì



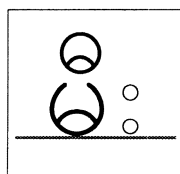
၄ = 4
ba



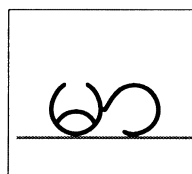
၅ = 5
bà



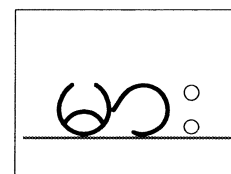
၆ = 6
mi



၇ = 7
mì



၈ = 8
ma



၉ = 9
mà

Name

–: in script: ရှေ့ကပေါက်
pronunciation: /ယှေ့ဂ,ဗောက်/ = shé-gá-bauq
meaning: dots in front

This symbol has several different names, but in *BIS* we shall be using the name given above. You will find some others in Appendix 4 on the names of the letters.

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.

Now listen to the tape.

Reading practice for Lesson 3

Syllables

၁ =1	မားမာ	၈ =8	နီးလာ
၂ =2	မာမာ	၉ =9	နားလာ
၃ =3	မာမား	၁၀ =10	နာလာ
၄ =4	မားမား		
၅ =5	ဘီးနီ	၁၁ =11	ဘီးနီ red comb
၆ =6	မီးနီ	၁၂ =12	မီးနီ red light
၇ =7	နီလာ		

Phrases

The suffix -နား, attached to the end of a word for a place or person, means “near [place/person].” For example လီမာနား means “near Lima.” Here are some more phrases with -နား -

၁၃ =13	လီမာနား	near Lima
၁၄ =14	ဘာလီနား	near Bali
၁၅ =15	လီလီနား	near Lily
၁၆ =16	မာလာနား	near Mala

The suffix -လာ, attached to the end of a word, is like a question mark. If you say နီနီလာ it means “Ni Ni?” As in English, people use questions like this to mean “Is that Ni Ni?” or “Do you mean Ni Ni?” or “Did you say Ni Ni?” Here are some phrases with -လာ -

၁၇ =17	နီနီလာ	Ni Ni?
၁၈ =18	မာလီလာ	the gardener?
၁၉ =19	မီးနီလာ	a red light?
၂၀ =20	မာလာလာ	Mala?
၂၁ =21	ဘာလီနားလာ	near Bali?
၂၂ =22	နီလာနားလာ	near the sapphire?

Meanings of some single syllables written with the new characters			
<i>For reference only: not practised on the tape</i>			
လာ:	question suffix, mule	ဘိ:	comb
လိ:	penis (vulgar)	နာ-	pause, rest
မိ:	fire, light	နာ:	ear
ဘာ:	bar	နိ-	be near

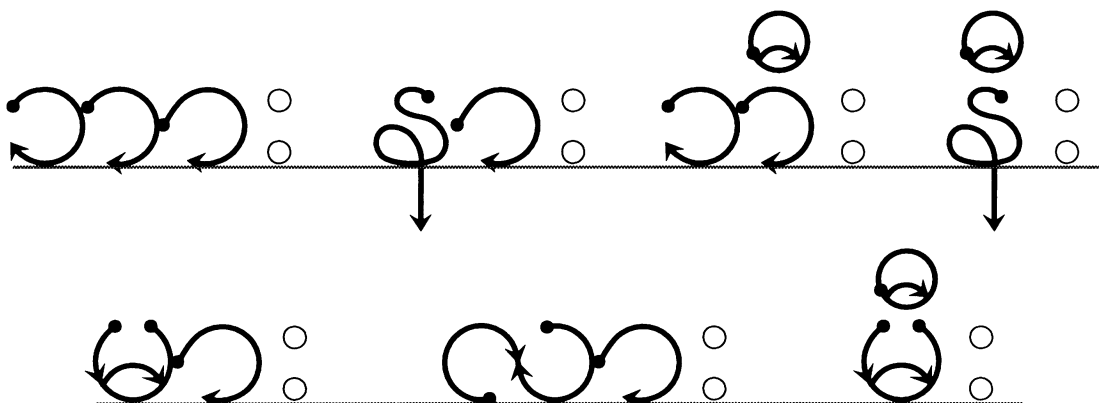
Forming the characters

At this point turn off the tape, and practise a few syllables with the tone mark until you are ready to do the dictation exercise below. Write the tone mark after you have written the consonant and vowel; like this: ဘ-ဘိ-ဘိ:

Before paper was used widely for writing in Burma, people wrote on lengths of palm leaf, treated by soaking and smoking to make them flexible and long lasting. They etched the shapes of the letters on them with a metal point, and then rubbed black colouring into the lines to make the letters show. One of the weaknesses of palm leaf as a writing material is that it is liable to split. Clearly, to mark a dot by jabbing the leaf with a metal stylus would be unwise; so scribes drew a dot by making a very small circle. This convention is still observed in printing, but in handwriting most people just write dots.

Writing practice for Lesson 3

Copying. Write out the following, making the strokes in the right order.



Dictation. Cover up the Key, and proceed as for Lesson 1.

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.

KEY TO LESSON 3 DICTATION

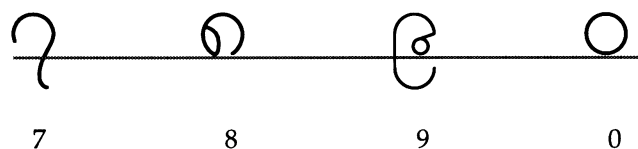
၁ =1	လားလာ	၆ =6	နာနား
၂ =2	မားမာ	၇ =7	ဘာနီ
၃ =3	မီးမိ	၈ =8	ဘီလီ
၄ =4	ဘားဘာ	၉ =9	မာလီနား
၅ =5	နာနီး	၁၀ =10	ဘာလီနား

LESSON 3.1

FIGURES 7, 8, 9, 0

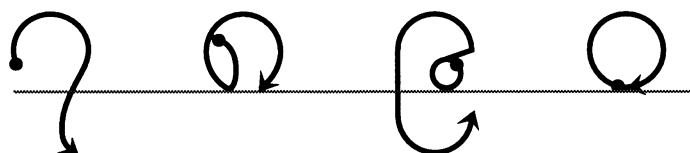
There is no tape for this Lesson.

New figures



Memorizing the ၇ and the ၀ won't give much trouble; but the ၈ and the ၉ will need some practice. Notice that the ၇ and the ၉ extend below the line. For cursive shortcuts see Appendix 7B.

Forming the characters



As before, practise writing the new figures, then move on to the Reading practice.

Reading practice for Lesson 3.1

BURMESE

A. ၉	E. ၈၉	I. ၂၆	M. ၇၀၃
B. ၈	F. ၃၀	J. ၇၄	N. ၁၅၉
C. ၇	G. ၉၈	K. ၈၁	O. ၆၂၀
D. ၀	H. ၇၀	L. ၃၅	P. ၄၀၈

KEY

A. 9	E. 89	I. 26	M. 703
B. 8	F. 30	J. 74	N. 159
C. 7	G. 98	K. 81	O. 620
D. 0	H. 70	L. 35	P. 408

Writing practice for Lesson 3.1

ARABIC

A. 7	E. 80	I. 57	M. 308
B. 5	F. 97	J. 81	N. 694
C. 9	G. 90	K. 30	O. 915
D. 0	H. 78	L. 26	P. 472

BURMESE

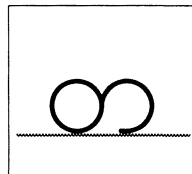
A. ၇	E. ၈၀	I. ၅၇	M. ၃၀၈
B. ၅	F. ၉၇	J. ၈၁	N. ၆၉၄
C. ၉	G. ၉၀	K. ၃၀	O. ၉၁၅
D. ၀	H. ၇၈	L. ၂၆	P. ၄၇၂

That brings you to the end of your coverage of the Burmese figures. In the next Lesson, and all the subsequent lessons, we'll be using Burmese figures on the page to identify the examples. That's to let you have plenty of practice in reading Burmese figures. And when you're doing dictation, I strongly advise you to use Burmese figures for the numbers of the words, so that you get some practice in writing the figures as well as reading them.

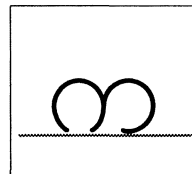
LESSON 4

Read down to the Practice section, then listen to the tape.

New heads



တ
t-

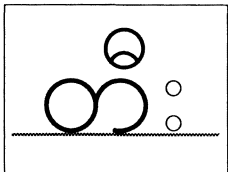


က
k-

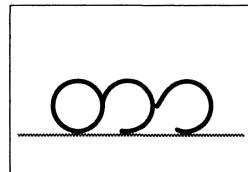
Shape. These two consonants have almost the same shape, but the တ has a full circle for its first half, while the က has only a horseshoe. In both letters the second circle is open to the southwest, like the second half of တ .

Pronunciation. တ and က represent “voiceless unaspirated plosives,” or “foreign T and K”: more on the tape.

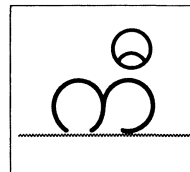
Example syllables



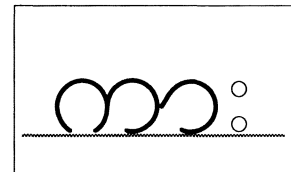
တိ
ti



တ
ta



ကိ
ki



က
ka

(There is no box 3.)

Forming the characters



Order of strokes:

1 2

1 2

For syllables to copy, use the “Example syllables” above.

For cursive shortcuts see Appendix 7B.

Names

၀ in script: တ၀မံးပူ pronunciation: /တ,ဝနံးပူ/ = tá-wùn-bu meaning: pot-bellied tá	က in script: ကကြီး pronunciation: /က,ဂျီး/ = ká-ji meaning: big ká
--	--

Change of Lesson format.

Now that you have worked through three Lessons and have got the measure of the task before you, we're going to change the format of the Lessons to something that gives you more flexibility in the way you do your practice.

Up to this point you have had separate sets of words for reading practice and writing practice. In fact, a single set of words can be used for both purposes, so from here on you will find only one (longish) set of words for practice. You can use the whole set for reading, and then go through it again to practise writing from dictation; or you can use the first half for reading and the remainder for dictation; or do dictation first and reading second. Assess your strengths and weaknesses and go for what you need most.

You will probably find it more rewarding to treat the loanwords and foreign names as reading practice, rather than dictation, at least for the first time through. There is some satisfaction to be gained from recognizing familiar words in the unfamiliar script.

When you are writing down words from the tape, write the number of each word in Burmese numerals. This will give you practice in writing them. From this point on the numbers are shown in their Burmese form only. Each number is followed by the symbol || This is a mark of punctuation that is used to mark the end of a sentence, and to mark numbers in numbered lists, like the full stop in English. It is known by two names:

in script: ပုဒ်မ or ပုဒ်ကြီး pronunciation: /ပုတ်မ/ or /ပုတ်ကြီး/ = pouq-má or pouq-ci meaning: main section or big section
--

Now listen to the tape.

Practice for Lesson 4

The following words are read aloud on the tape.

Syllables ၁ တီ ၂ တာ ၃ ကာ	၄ ကိ ၅ ကိးနာ ၆ နိကား ၇ တားမိ
---	---

Diphthongs in the roman transcription:
pronounce ei as in *vein*, ai as in *Thailand*, ou as in *though*, au as in *Sauerkraut*.

၈။	လာတီး	၂။	လီတာ	litre
၉။	နီးလီ	၃။	ကာလာ	colour
၁၀။	နားဘာ	၄။	ကီလီ	Keighley
၁၁။	ဘီးကာ			[Rangoon road name]
၁၂။	ဘားမာ	၅။	မီတာ	metre, meter
၁၃။	မီးကာ	၆။	ကာကီ	khaki
၁၄။	ဘီမား	၇။	မာတီနီ	Martini
၁၅။	လားတီ	၈။	မီလီလီတာ	millilitre
Loanwords from English		၉။	မီလီမီတာ	millimetre
၁။	တီဘီ			TB

Burmese words and phrases

၁။	ကားနီ	red car
၂။	တီနီ	red worm
၃။	တီဘီလား	TB?
၄။	ကာလာလား	colour?
၅။	ကာကီလား	khaki?
၆။	ကားနီလား	a red car?
၇။	တီနားလား	near the worm?
၈။	ကားနီနားလား	near the red car?

For reference: meanings of some single syllables written with the new characters

တီ	earthworm	ကာ-	ward off
တီး-	beat, strike	ကား-	spread out
တာ	[measure of length]	ကား	car
တား-	block the way		