

# 14 *The experience of writing the first German–Myanmar Dictionary*<sup>1</sup>

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## *Abbreviations*

DAAD	<i>Deutscher Akademischer Austauschdienst</i> ‘translate’?
EMD	English–Myanmar Dictionary
<i>f</i>	<i>Femininum</i> ‘feminine’
<i>geh</i>	<i>gehoben</i> ‘elevated style’
GMD	German–Myanmar Dictionary
<i>hb</i>	<i>haben</i> ‘have’
<i>I</i>	Italian word
<i>lit</i>	<i>vorwiegend geschrieben</i> ‘written language’
<i>m</i>	<i>Maskulinum</i> ‘masculine’
MED	Myanmar–English Dictionary
<i>od</i>	<i>oder</i> ‘or’
<i>P</i>	Pāli
<i>Pl</i>	Plural
<i>Sg</i>	Singular
<i>sn</i>	<i>sein</i> ‘be’
RHD	Random House College Dictionary
<i>Skr</i>	Sanskrit
<i>umg</i>	<i>umgangssprachlich</i> ‘colloquial’

## 1 Introduction

Writing the first German–Myanmar Dictionary (GMD) has been an arduous enterprise. My thanks still go to the late Professor Schubert of Leipzig, who originally advised me to write a Dictionary in which the target language was my mother tongue. I followed his recommendation, and that Dictionary was published in 1976. Some years later I started with the GMD. The Myanmar language has changed greatly since the beginning of the 20th century, particularly since 1948: over the years, different ideologies come into being. This change in themes has resulted in a change of words: the vocabulary has developed

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<sup>1</sup> In this article, I use the term ‘Myanmar’ for the name of the country, its people and their language.

rapidly and modern Myanmar literature is rather different from older literature. However I decided to limit the Dictionary to only words from modern Myanmar and did not include words that I have collected while translating 19th century literature. Despite this, some words still used in the 20th century have had to be marked as *veraltet* ‘obsolete’ or *veraltend* ‘obsolescent’.

Despite my continuous efforts, to this day I am tormented with one principal question: Is a German–Myanmar Dictionary really necessary, and has it been worth investing so many years’ of time and such an amount of money?

Academic interest in the Myanmar language in Europe is restricted to a few scholars with small groups of students around them, working in universities in Berlin, London, Paris and St. Petersburg. The European economy has a limited interest in Myanmar and the tourism industry is content with practical glossaries or phrase books. At universities in the Union of Myanmar — with the exception of the Myanmar language departments မြန်မာစာဌာနများ: mjàNNmàzàtʰànəmjà themselves — many subjects, if not all, are taught in English. Years ago I was asked by a German speaker whether it would not be better for the Myanmar authorities to introduce English as a second official language for the Union of Myanmar. I offered him two main counter-arguments. Firstly, the introduction of English as an official language would not only separate the people from their literary heritage but also from their cultural heritage as a whole. Secondly, if writers, the intelligentsia, economists, and officials were to converse and correspond in English, the remaining majority of the people would be excluded, simply by virtue of speaking in their mother tongue. It would be a divide and rule policy within their own population. I don’t know whether I was successful in convincing him but I maintain my opinion.

Many sources have acted to spur on my determination, particularly the repeated questions from German students and friends as to whether, after more than fifteen years of work, the Dictionary was finished yet. Thanks are also due to the grants of German organizations like the DAAD (*Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst* — the German Academic Exchange Service) for Myanmar students and lecturers to study or carry out research at a German host university within their program. Finally, I was also persuaded to continue simply by the urge not to give up after so many years of work and the pleasure I had in the work itself: finding lexicographical equivalents and compiling the Dictionary.

## 2 Help from other dictionaries

Where could I turn for help? Good, reliable, German bilingual dictionaries were beyond the scale of the task in hand. Whilst sources like *Duden* — the best monolingual German Dictionary — were important reference books for the GMD, their comprehensiveness gained from long traditions of Dictionary-making meant that there could be no question of the GMD being comparable with them. A Dictionary of that scale would have required extensive linguistic preparatory work. So it was necessary instead to consult reference books which included the Myanmar language in some capacity or other, and to plague Myanmar scholars and friends with endless questions.

The modern-day Burmese lexicographer is perfectly aware of the tremendous achievement of Adoniram Judson in producing his Burmese–English Dictionary (Judson 1853), especially given the conditions of his day. However, as all those familiar with it will know, it is now outdated and useful only for special research. *The Student’s English–Burmese Dictionary* by U Tun Nyein (1959), *The University English–Burmese Dictionary* by U Ba Han (1951) and *The Universal English–Burmese Dictionary* by U Tun Aung Lin

(1960) were all compiled with a high degree of expertise and can be regarded as a major advances in Myanmar lexicography. They were, however, mainly written for native speakers of Myanmar language. Moreover, U Ba Han especially, offers long English phrases without translation into Myanmar, thus making the practical use of his dictionary time-consuming and therefore difficult. This criticism can not be made of the *English–Burmese Dictionary* by Saya Tet Toe (1975), who included translated examples and avoided superfluous explanations.

The establishment of the Burmese Language Commission, now the Myanmar Language Commission — hereafter MLC — by the U Ne Win government on 15 September 1971 was an important step forward in lexicography. The MLC's *Myanmar Dictionary* မြန်မာအဘိဓာန် (MLC 1991) and their *Myanmar–English Dictionary* (MLC 1993) — hereafter MED — were the main sources for compiling the GMD, both because they used orthography which could be regarded as standardised, and because both books had been compiled by a group of scholars, rather than individuals with preferences for particular orthographic conventions. The advantages of the MED are several. Firstly, the examples given in Myanmar are short and precise, though not translated, placing foreign users at a disadvantage. Secondly, the pronunciation is given for each entry. Thirdly, space is saved by omitting particles which do not need to be included next to verbs and adjectives in a Dictionary: the MED has headwords consisting of single verbal morphemes like သွား θwá 'go', rather than verb+suffix သွားသည် θwá.θိ 'go.REALIS', or ကောင်း káUN 'good' rather than ကောင်းသော káUN.θဝ် 'good.ATTR'.

The binary nomenclature provided for most of the botanical and zoological names in the MED is to be appreciated, although in practice it sometimes no longer corresponds with current research usage. In any case the information about genus and species is certainly more useful than the explanations found in other dictionaries, where *cocker*, *cocker spaniel* is described as ခွေးတမျိုး [k<sup>h</sup>wé.tə.mjó 'dog.one.kind'] 'a kind of dog' (Tet Toe 1975: 338) and *merle* as ငှက်နက်တမျိုး [ŋɛʔ.nɛʔ.tə.mjó 'bird.black.one.kind'] 'a kind of black bird' (Tet Toe 1975: 1188). One can, of course, argue that an explanation such as that given in the MED for ဝျံ [p<sup>h</sup>jàn] 'kind of edible plant with bulbous root' (MLC 1993:305) is better than nothing, but in my opinion one should clearly distinguish description and circumlocution from lexical equivalents, even though the boundary between the two is not always easy to draw.

Help for the GMD was also available from *The modern simplified English–Myanmar Dictionary for students and schools* by Soe Thwe (1994), the French–Burmese Dictionary written by Denise Bernot (1978–92), the Russian–Burmese Dictionary (Novikov and Kolobkov 1966) and the Burmese–Russian Dictionary (Minina and Kyaw Zaw 1976). As I cannot read Chinese or Japanese I did not consult the dictionaries compiled for those languages. For specialised dictionaries, I had at my disposal the two-volume *English–Myanmar Word Bank* with technical terms organised by subject (Sarpay Beikman 1963) and the eight fascicles of a specialised technical Dictionary *Vocabularies by Subject* (Ministry of Education 1971–1974), organised alphabetically by topic. However, times change quickly. In the thirty-odd years since the latter was published, some terms have fallen out of use, and many new terms have come into use. Therefore these books cannot be relied on without supplementary evidence. More recent publications were a great help, for example *The English–Burmese Dictionary of Western Medicine* by Kaung Nyunt (1992), with its equivalents, explanations, and pictures, and San Lwin's (2003) *Dictionary of Military Terms*, which offers translated examples aimed in particular users writing in

Myanmar language. Further compilation of specialised dictionaries like these is the task of the universities in Myanmar, and this is, to the best of my knowledge, already underway for some subjects.

The most recently published general Dictionary is the *English–Myanmar Dictionary* (EMD) (San Lwin 2001). It offers approximately 22,000 headwords, 1,500 compounds, and 11,000 idioms, on 1,622 pages bound in one unwieldy and heavy volume. This Dictionary also contains many English examples without translation, ostensibly to help users who are learners of English, though obviously this reduces its value for other users. It does offer a number of useful modern words which do not appear in earlier dictionaries, and supports the user with helpful illustrations. Even so, there is a question of whether Myanmar learners of English really need so many untranslated examples. I do not think that this practice has been successful elsewhere. It is worth noting that in the EMD, unlike the MED, unnecessary particles are attached to the Myanmar equivalents of verbs and adjectives.

### 3 Equivalents

Even in bilingual dictionaries of European languages we do not always find true equivalents of source language words in target language translations. In cultures where the environmental fundamentals of plants, animals, climate, etc. are so different from those in Europe, the problem of equivalency is even more complex. In this respect I was confronted with two main problems. The first was the fine gradation from circumlocution to equivalency in the case of unfamiliar Myanmar words; the second was finding equivalents for those foreign words which might refer to concepts unknown to the Dictionary user. As one is able to trace the meaning of nearly every morpheme in Myanmar language, the string of morphemes selected to translate a particular new word, for instance a compound noun, may vary considerably between individual speakers and writers, and the sequence of syllables may vary. Only after a certain time and often through appearance in newspapers, radio, and television may the new word become established as an accepted sequence of morphemes.

I offer here one of many possible examples, the word *Machtpolitik* ‘power politics’. Tet Toe (1975: 1505) whose Dictionary contains a considerable number of political words, provides the periphrastic translation in (1), while the *Universal English–Burmese Dictionary* (Tun Aung Lin 1960:777) gives the translation in (2).

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|-----|-------------------|-------------------------|-----------------|
| (1) | နိုင်ငံချင်းချင်း | အင်အားပြိုင်လျက်        | အရေးဆိုသော      |
|     | nàinṅàɴ.ṅáinṅáin  | ʔinʔá.pjain.ʔəjɛʔ       | ʔəjé.sʰò.θó     |
|     | country.RECIP     | strength.compete.SUBORD | affair.say.ATTR |

နိုင်ငံလုပ်ငန်း  
 nàinṅàɴ.louṅáɴ  
 country.project  
 ? ‘national affairs where nations compete with one another for strength’

- |     |                            |                      |                       |
|-----|----------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| (2) | ကမ္ဘာ့ထိပ်သီးနိုင်ငံများ   | တဦးနှင့်တဦးတို့      | အင်အားပြိုင်သော       |
|     | kəbà.tʰeiʔθí.nàinṅàɴ.mjá   | tə.ʔú.ŋi.tə.ʔú.də    | ʔinʔá.pjain.θó        |
|     | world.top-level.country.PL | one.CLF.with.one.CLF | strength.compete.ATTR |

နိုင်ငံရေး  
nàinṅànjé  
politics

‘the politics where advanced nations compete with one another for power’

Neither Tun Nyein (1959) nor Soe Thwe’s *Modern Simplified English–Myanmar Dictionary* include the phrase ‘power politics’. In the EMD, the editors insert the Myanmar phrase နိုင်ငံရေးအာဏာ nàinṅànjé.ṽàṽà ‘politics.power’ under the headword *power* (San Lwin 2001:1057). We might deduce from this that power in the sense of *Machtpolitik* should not be အင်အား ṽinṽá ‘strength/power’, but အာဏာ ṽàṽà ‘power’ in the English sense of ‘to take, seize, or lose power’ or ‘to come to power’. Similarly the *Myanmar–Russian dictionary* gives for နိုင်ငံရေးအာဏာ the phrase политическая власть ‘political power’ (Minina and Kyaw Zaw 1976: 673). Basing my decision on the above information, I decided that အာဏာနိုင်ငံရေး ṽàṽà.nàinṅànjé ‘politics.power’ was a suitable equivalent for *Machtpolitik* in the GMD.

A number of problems arose from headwords with a narrow, specific meaning. For instance, for the Myanmar equivalent of the German word *Autobahn* I chose not to adopt the UK English term ‘motorway’ or the US English ‘freeway’ — neither of which would be likely to be understood in Germany — opting instead to write the German word *Autobahn* in Myanmar script as in (3), adding the explanation in (4):

- (3) အောက်တိုဘန်းလမ်းမကြီး  
ṽauṽtòbáṽ.lán.má.ṽáí  
‘Autobahn.road.main.big’

adding the explanation

- (4) ဖြတ်လမ်းမဲ့                      မော်တော်ယာဉ်                      အမြန်မောင်းလမ်း  
phjaṽlán.mṽ                      mètòjṽin                      ṽəmjàṽ.n.máun.lán  
crossroad.without                      motor.vehicle                      fast.drive.road  
‘high speed motorway without crossroads’

Rendering *Autobahn* in Myanmar in this way is similar to the inclusion in the monolingual English *Random House College Dictionary* of *coffee klatsch*, *coffee klatch* and *kaffee klatsch*, listed as variants of the German word *Kaffeeklatsch* (Stein 1984:216).

For word specific to particular cultures, anticipating that the Dictionary user who has not spent much time in the culture of the source language may have some difficulty, I provide a transcription of the word in the source language followed by an explanation in brackets in the relevant languages. Thus the Myanmar word ခေါင်းပေါင် ṽáunbàun appears in the GMD under the German headword *Gaungbaung*, followed by the German explanation ‘Kopfbedeckung für Männer der Bamaren und der Mon bei besonderen Gelegenheiten’ [headcovering worn at special occasions by Bamar and Mon men], and the headword *Polka* is rendered in Myanmar as ပေါလကာ pólakà with the addition explanation, this time in Myanmar: တိုဟီးမီးယားနယ်မှ ရိုးရာအကတစ်မျိုး ‘a kind of folk dance from Bohemia.’ Of course, if the reader has never seen people dancing a polka, they cannot understand the concept in depth. For such explanations, sometimes I had to resort to တစ်မျိုး təmjó ‘a kind of ...’.

In some cases I decided only to give a circumlocution in Myanmar, marked out with a star, for instance *Weißnäherin* \* အတွင်းခံအဝတ်ချုပ်လုပ်သူ ‘underwear seamstress’ or *Sektkühler* \* ရှမ်းပိန် ပုလင်းရေခဲစိမ်ရန်ဘူး ‘container for immersing champagne bottles in ice’. Terms for delicacies like *Kaffeefahrt* or *Nugat* were, however, simply dropped. A Dictionary is, after all, neither a specialist lexicon nor a cookery book, and the circumlocution would be too long-winded and still barely comprehensible for the respective users.

Some years ago I was criticised by some German scholars for the insertion of Myanmar words as headwords. I was told that words like *Gaungbaung* [ခေါင်းပေါင် *gáunbàun*], *Khauswe* [ခေါက်ဆွဲ *kʰauʔsʰwé* ‘Shan noodles’], or *Zayat* [ဧရိပ် *zəjaʔ* ‘shelter’] should not be headwords in a German–Myanmar Dictionary. I replied by inquiring why in the *Duden* (*Deutsches Universal Wörterbuch A-Z* ‘A-Z German Universal Dictionary’), which contains, according to the foreword - ‘*den Wortschatz der deutschen Gegenwartssprache*’ (‘vocabulary of the present-day German language’), we can find many non-German head words, for example *Iglu* (Inuit), *Kolchosa* (Russian) or *Haiku* (Japanese).

Cultural differences often prevent bilingual dictionaries for Myanmar and European languages from providing exact lexical equivalents. Should I have translated ခေါင်းပေါင်း *gáunbàun*, the headwear worn by Bamar and Mon men on special occasions, as *turban*? Or should I have left out the word တိုက်ခံအိမ် (*taiʔkʰàn* ‘a *taikkhan* house, with a brickwork or masonry structure downstairs and a wooden structure upstairs)? Architects from three European countries were unable to give accurate equivalents in their own language for a building of this kind. My own experience of Myanmar words combined with data from Myanmar newspapers and periodicals published in the English language enabled me to select a number of headwords to treat in this way.

Allow me to present an important example illustrating the difficulty of equivalency: ကံကောင်း *kàn.káun* ‘be lucky’ is a common phrase in Myanmar. In the Myanmar–English Dictionary ကံ *kàn* is translated as ‘one’s deed, word or thought which predetermines one’s future’ (MLC 1993:12), but the meaning of ကံ *kàn* in *kàn.káun* ‘be lucky’ is simply ‘luck’ – *Glück* in German. Translating from English, Saya U Tet Toe and Saya U Soe Thwe translate the word ‘fate’ with ကံကြမ္မာ *kàn.Cəmà* (Tet Toe 1975:675; Soe Thwe 1994:455), in keeping with the MLC translation of ကံ *kàn*. However, ကံကြမ္မာ *kàn.Cəmà* is a Pāli–Sanskrit hybrid which can never mean ‘fate’. This word ကံကြမ္မာ *kàn.Cəmà* is dominated by Buddhist philosophy, whereas the term ‘fate’, derived from the Latin word *fatum*, means something that is predetermined and must be accepted. It is not necessary to elaborate here on the difference between fatalism and Buddhism. We find a second sense of ကံ *kàn* defined in the MED (MLC 1993:12) given as ‘luck, fortune, lot’. ‘Luck’ in German is *Glück*, a word which also has two meanings. The first is *Glücksfall* ‘a case of luck’ and secondly is *Glücksgefühl* ‘a feeling of luck’. I translated the first meaning as ကံကောင်းခြင်း *kàn.káun.Dín* ‘luck.good.NOM’ — an instance of good luck — even though this is rarely used in speech, and the second one as ပျော်ရွှင်ရေး *pjəʔwɪn.jé* ‘happy.affair’. I am still unable to offer a better solution but I don’t like to sacrifice the term ကံကြမ္မာ *kàn.Cəmà* to the word ‘fate’ and its misleading implications.

#### 4 Transcription and pronunciation

As in the Burmese–German Dictionary (Esche 1976), I followed the phonemic transcription developed by Eberhardt Richter (as set out in Richter and Than Zaw 1969:11–15). With the help of some speakers from Myanmar and a sonograph, my

colleague Richter transcribed the aspirated sounds *ခ* *ဆ* *ဇ* *ဖ* as *kh sh th ph*, respectively. Zargara (1978) transcribes in the same way, except for *S* which he transcribes as *hs*. In the MED, however, the same consonants are transcribed thus: *K* as *kh* but *S T P* as *hs ht hp*. The motivation for this reversal is easily understood/grasped: since people using a Dictionary like this have at least some knowledge of English, they might pronounce *sh, th* and *ph* as [ʃ θ f], as in the English words ‘she’, ‘thorn’ and ‘phase’. In my opinion, however, such a consideration is unnecessary and such transcription should be avoided. The determining factor should surely be the scholarly analysis, namely that the transcription should follow the actual phonemic or phonetic pronunciation consistently.

In the GMD the vowel of the stressed syllable of the German headwords is underlined (H**e**bel, kl**a**mmern). Only in difficult cases, especially for foreign words used in German, is the pronunciation added, for instance *Lobby* [ˈlɒbi]. In giving Myanmar equivalents, users are alerted to the pronunciation of words only when it is not predictable from the Myanmar spelling, as in *တံခါး*: ‘door’, which is spelt *tànk<sup>h</sup>á* but in fact pronounced *dəgá*, with voicing throughout and the first syllable reduced.

I find it hard to understand two conventions in the transcription system of the MED. Firstly the underlined *a* used to represent the reduced vowel *ə*, known in German as the *Tonschatten* or ‘tone shadow’. The second is the pronunciation of proper names from languages other than English, of which there are a considerable number in Myanmar. The examples in (5) from the MED with their respective transcriptions illustrate my point:

- (5) a. **မနိုင်မကန်** /mānainmākan/ ... for *mənàinmæk<sup>h</sup>àn* ‘abundantly’ (p.332);  
 b. **မသမာ** /māthama/ ... for *məθəmə* ‘evil’ (p.333);  
 c. **အဖွဲ့** /əhpwe./ ... ‘*ʔəp<sup>h</sup>wɛ* ‘organisation’ (p.557).

Underlining to add emphasis to a particular item in writing is an internationally adopted convention, and in many dictionaries, it is used to indicate which syllable or vowel is to be stressed. However, the MED uses underlining to indicate the unstressed vowel – a convention I find counter-intuitive. In the GMD this problem was settled by using a symbol ‘ə’ for the reduced vowel /ə/ in the transcription, so that the examples in (5) above are transcribed in the GMD as /mənàinmækəŋ/, /məθəmə/, and /əhpweː/. The diacritics ‘ and ` are used for the ‘creaky’ and ‘high’ tones, for instance, as in (6):

- (6) **Zaum** ... ကကြိုးတန်ဆာ /kaːgʏoudəza/ [kɑ̀dʒóðəzà ‘bridle’]

Another issue is the transcription and pronunciation of non-English foreign words, in particular geographical names. It is understandable that foreign geographical names are adapted to the phonology of the speaker’s mother tongue. The English pronounce Berlin /bɜːˈlɪn/ in an English way, just as Germans might say London in a German way /ˈlɔndən/. In Myanmar language Berlin becomes တာလင် *bàlìn* because with a Myanmar accent it is hard to pronounce the German sequence /ber/ or to pronounce a syllable-final /n/.

However, it is incomprehensible to me why English rules of pronunciation are still applied to the *spelling* of geographical and proper names of countries whose national language is not English. Of course, this tendency may be partially explained by the historical influence of English on Myanmar through British colonisation. But this historical experience should become increasingly weaker, a process one can already see. I read for instance that the spelling of the French capital Paris has changed from ပဲရိစ် *péri*? to ပါရီ *pari*. Nonetheless I still baulk when I see Ukraine rendered in Myanmar as the

English-sounding ယူကရိန် *jùkə̀rèin*. I prefer အူကရာယိနာ *ʔùkə̀rə̀jìnà* which more closely reflects the Ukrainian spelling *Україна* /ukra'jina/. In some cases I attempted to promote this change: I have spelt German proper names ending in *...burg* with *...ဘွင်* /buʔ/ (or /bug/) and those ending in *...berg* as *...ဘတ်ဂ်* /baʔ/ (or /bag/). Thus *Brandenburg* becomes *ဘရန်ဒင်းဘွင်* *bə̀rə̀ndinbuʔ* and *Württemberg* *ဝူဒင်ဘတ်ဂ်* *wùdinbaʔ*. In my opinion the rendition of geographical and proper names should be as close as possible to the pronunciation those names have in their original language, as exemplified by the case of Paris. Adaptation to phonological constraints of the language into which the name is being rendered means we have to 'Myanmarise' names if necessary.

## 5 Grammatical information and sense indicators

For an inflected language like German, it is essential to provide grammatical information about nouns and verbs. For nouns I thought the most space-saving way would be to add gender notation following the noun: *m*, *f* and *n* for *masculine*, *feminine* and *neuter*, respectively. Following this is a number which refers to a table where the user can find how to decline this noun, following the patterns described in the dictionaries of *Verlag Enzyklopädie*, Leipzig. Lastly, if the noun is used only in singular (*Sg*) or plural (*Pl*), this is also indicated. The examples for 'sea', 'flour' and 'crow's feet' in (7) illustrate this:

- (7) a. **Meer** *n* 20 *Geogr* ဝင်လယ် (↑ Gelbe ~, ↑ Rote ~, ↑ Schwarze ~, ↑ Tote ~, ↑ Weiße ~)  
 b. **Mehl** *n* 20 *Sg* မှုန် (↑ Erbs~M-, ↑ Reis~M, ↑ Roggen~M, ↑ Weizen~M)  
 c. **Krähenfüße** *Pl* (*umg für* Runzeln in den Augenwinkeln) မျက်ထောင့်တွန်း;  
 (*umg für* schlechte, krakelige Schrift) ကြောင်ခြစ်ရာ

For verbs, it is important to know whether the compound past tense is formed with *haben* 'to have' or *sein* 'to be'. Since all transitive verbs <*vt*>, reflexive verbs and most intransitive verbs <*vi*> take *haben*, I marked with the abbreviation <*sn*> only those intransitive verbs which take *sein*. Some examples illustrate this notation: (8)a and b and (9)a take *haben*; (9)b takes *sein*; (8)c takes either *haben* or *sein*.

### (8) WEAK VERBS

- a. **schmücken** *vt* မွမ်း (ich habe geschmückt) [m̥ú:n 'decorate']  
 b. **zittern** *vi* တုန် (ich habe gezittert) [tò:un 'tremble, shake']  
 c. **pendeln** *vi* <*hb*, *sn*> (hin- und herschwingen) ယိမ်းခါ (es hat, es ist gependelt) [jéink<sup>hà</sup> 'swing']

### (9) STRONG OR IRREGULAR VERBS

- a. **werben** *vt* <16a> (Mitglieder u. ä.) စည်းရုံး (ich habe geworben) [s̥jò:un 'enlist']  
 b. **laufen** *vi* <9/*sn*> သွား (ich bin gelaufen) [θwá 'go']

To prefixed verbs I added 'a' to verbs in which the prefix may be separated from the stem and 'b' and 'c' when it is not, as in (10):

(10) PREFIXED VERBS

- a. **durchtrennen** vt <a> ခွဲ (ich trenne durch, ich habe durchgetrennt) [k<sup>h</sup>wé ‘split’]
- b. **durchtrennen** vt <c> ခွဲ (ich durchtrenne, ich habe durchtrennt) [k<sup>h</sup>wé ‘split’]
- c. **erhalten** vt <3b> (bewahren) ထိန်းသိမ်း[စောင့်ရှောက်] (ich erhalte, ich habe erhalten) [t<sup>h</sup>éinθéin.səunʃau? ‘conserve’]

A number added in brackets <3/b>, refers again to another table that shows how the verb is conjugated. The user will find under number 3 only *a – ie – a*, enabling them to conjugate the word *erhalten* in the forms: *ich erhalte, ich erhielt, ich habe erhalten*. It is noted that examples like *erhalten* are exceptional in containing the bracketed German translations.

Productive users of the Dictionary are disadvantaged if Dictionary makers fail to provide exact sense indicators and context-sensitive information. There must be some brief information about the semantic field (*Fachgebietsangabe*) to which a word belongs, for instance *Mus* for music, *Geogr* for geography, *Ling* for linguistics and so on. Very often supporting words (*Stützwörter*) were added to show the different meaning of a word, as with the *Krähenfüße* above.

## 6 Orthography

As the Myanmar Language Commission has largely standardised Myanmar orthography, I kept strictly to the orthography given in the MED. So, for instance, I write တစ်မျိုး rather than တမျိုး for *təmjó* ‘one kind’; ဖား rather than ဖါး for *p<sup>h</sup>á* ‘frog’ and ဓာတ် rather than ဓါတ် ဧရ da? ဣလမေနေတ, မိနရောလ. Of course, the non-standard spellings may still be encountered, but the standardised orthography is largely accepted both in the press and in other publications.

However, the writing of Myanmar geographical names in Roman letters remains problematic. Geographical names were not included in the MED, and so had to be collected from other sources. Given the lack of official romanised forms, it is unsurprising that one can find various spellings in publications. For example, ဧရာဝတီ appears as *Ayeyarwady* or *Ayeyawady*; အင်းလေး as *Innlay, Inlay* or *Inle*; ပြည် as *Pyay* or *Pyi*. I included a number of such names in the Dictionary, but sometimes doubted which spelling I should follow.

## 7 Stylistic Register

Generally dictionaries translating between European languages and Myanmar provide little information relating to stylistic register. In my first dictionary I provided only limited information: *lit* for written style, *umg* for colloquial style, and *vulg* for vulgar words. In the GMD I have again included some indication of register, though rather reluctantly. After all some Myanmar authors, especially in Upper Myanmar, write their stories in colloquial style; newspapers and journals sometimes contain a mixture of styles; and spoken language may contain phrases normally found only in written language. One might doubt whether it is possible to give useful information regarding style.

In spite of these misgivings I did include information indicating register, based on my experience, though not without initially qualifying this in the Explanatory Notes as being no more than suggestions. In most cases I added the same indications of written style (*lit*),

colloquial style (*umg*) and vulgarity (*vulg*). Within lexical entries, I placed words used in both speaking and writing first, followed by colloquial words and then written/literary words at the end of the group, as in (11):

- (11) a. **Ausflüchte gebrauchen** ကေတိကာတိလုပ် *umg* [kèti:kàti.lou? ‘quibble’]
- b. **fragen** *vt* မေး၊မေးမြန်း *geh* [mé,memjÁN ‘ask’]
- c. **lachen** *vi* ရယ်၊ရယ်မော *lit* [jì,jimó ‘laugh’]
- d. **studienhalber** *Adv* လေ့လာဖို့အတွက် *umg*, လေ့လာရန်အတွက် *lit*,

### 8 Etymology

Before the Myanmar language was established in written form, the Mon language was widely used in Bagan, and the Indo-European languages Sanskrit and Pāli also enjoyed high esteem. Monk-scholars and members of the high society at court acquired Sanskrit and Pāli along with Buddhist teaching and used these languages as a model for own work by connecting Pāli and Sanskrit terms with words in their mother tongue. As a predominantly Buddhist country, Pāli words are often found in Myanmar today, not only in Buddhist contexts like စေတနာ <P: cetanā> [sèdənà ‘goodwill’] but also in every-day usage like ဓါတ်ဆီ <P: dhātu> [daʔ.shì ‘petrol’]. As German users may not be familiar with Pāli and Sanskrit, particular attention was paid to the decoding of Pāli and Sanskrit words.

In Myanmar texts these items can often stand alone, written in their original form only with Myanmar letters, for example ကရုဏာ <P: karuṇā >. However there have also been changes, sometimes following established rules, or sometimes not. Very often, words have changed not only in form but in meaning, are may be difficult to recognise. The word အာလူး ʔālú now means ‘potato’. This word has its roots in Pāli and Sanskrit as ālū, where it does not mean ‘potato’ but rather *Amorphophallus paeoniifolius*, a tuber. These Pāli or Sanskrit words are sometimes combined with Myanmar words, or with other Pāli and Sanskrit words, or with English words or terms coming from Hindi, Mon and other languages. The problem for my Dictionary was considering how to provide proper etymological information without being excessive, a challenge evident in the compounds in (12):

(12)		
source lang.	ပုံစံ နေတရယ	pron. and gloss
Pāli	ပုဂ္ဂလိကပစ္စည်း <P: puggalika + paccaya>	pouʔgəli:kə.pjiʔsí ‘private property’
Sanskrit + Pāli	မိနိရသံ <Skr: mīna + P: rāsi>	mèin.jàðì ‘Pisces’
Pāli + Sanskrit	ဂုဏ်သဓရ <P: guṇa + Skr: śrī>	gòun.θəjè ‘characteristics’

Where English words were recognisable from their rendition in Myanmar, I omitted the English words, so the entry for ဘော့ပင် bópìn ‘ball(point) pen’ is simply **Kugelschreiber** m 4 ဘော့ပင် <E>.

These hybrids are the product of centuries of use by Myanmar scholars. The problem was not so much a lack of etymological research but rather the amount of space that would be occupied if all relevant etymological information were to be included. Therefore, I decided to transcribe words derived from Pāli, Sanskrit, Mon and Chinese, but to include only abbreviated source information for words from other languages such as Hindi, Malay

and Thai. Myanmar words behind or before a Pāli, Sanskrit, Mon or Chinese word are not marked, as in (13).

(13)

**Kabeljau** *m* ၁၀၆ *Ichth ကော့ဒ်ငါး*: <E→ (*Gadus morrhua*) [kə.၇ာ် ‘cod.fish’]

**Laterit** *m* <\_[e]s, \_e> *Geol ဂဝံမြေ* <Mon: ကတမ်> [gəwùn.mjè ‘laterite’, lit: ‘cod.earth’]

**Kali** *Eig Hind ကာလီ* <Skr: kālī>, ကာလီနတ်သမီး: [kàlì.naʔ.θəmí ‘Kali.spirit.daughter’ *Kali*]

## 9 Final remarks

There are, of course, many problems involved in Dictionary compilation, and many things to consider in order to benefit the students learning these languages. In this paper only some of these issues have been discussed. Although the GMD contains more than 60,000 headwords, approximately 2,000 collocations and some whole sentences where necessary, it is still possible to find new words and word-combinations every day in newspapers and books. Myanmar is a language with a long, interesting history and a rich literature. Moreover, like many languages in the world, Myanmar has changed rapidly in recent decades and continues to change apace. There will surely be gaps in the coverage of the GMD and perhaps some users will not find the word or phrase they are looking for. Allow me to quote a word of consolation from the great poet Johann Wolfgang von Goethe who made the following confession:

‘Such a work ... is really never finished.  
We have to accept it as such,  
when we have done our best to it,  
as far as time and circumstances would allow us.’

(Klatt et al. 1910:vii)

