

Abstract of paper to be presented at the 18th SEALS conference, May 2008.

Title of paper: Deixis and information structure in Mon
Subfield: Semantics/pragmatics and syntax
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Deixis and information structure in Mon

Superficially Mon has a three-way deictic system with postnominal particles indicating PROXIMAL (nəʔ), MEDIAL (kəh) and DISTAL (təʔ) deixis, not unlike Thai but markedly different from Burmese which makes only a two-way distinction. The picture in Mon is complicated by two factors: 1. There are competing forms for the proximal deictic, especially in the literary language, going back to two historically unrelated lexemes. 2. What appears to be a medial deictic particle in fact has other functions as well and often combines with the proximal and distal deictic particles.

In this study I will focus on the syntactic and discourse functions of the ‘medial’ marker *kəh*, tracing its history from Old and Middle Mon to the modern vernacular. I will argue that the functional load of *kəh* is information structure rather than deixis. It will be seen that the marker *kəh* is in fact used to mark known or IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION (cf. Lambrecht 1994:109), or to reactivate distant TOPICS, i. e. *kəh* has anaphoric rather than deictic function. It can be extended to deictic contexts, where it is used as medial marker. The fact that the notion of IDENTIFIABLE INFORMATION is very close to that of TOPIC has led some authors to describe *kəh* as a topic marker *per se* (e.g. Jenny 2005). This view has to be reassessed, though, as *kəh* marked phrases can co-occur with the focus marker *raʔ* (but see Dik 1989:266).

kəh looks like the equivalent of a definite marker in many constructions, but it differs from such in that it does not involve inclusiveness (or completeness) of the referent and that it marks not only NPs, but also other pieces of information (cf. Lyons 1999:280). One important function *kəh* has acquired, though, is to mark the end of an NP.¹ This function is especially prominent in complex NPs including a relative clause, which is not otherwise marked as such in Mon. As the content of the relative clause is presupposed and therefore necessarily known/identifiable in the context, it can receive the marker *kəh*, the scope of which is extended from the relative expression to the head noun, i.e. it is the head noun that is seen as identifiable. This extension is illustrated in (1):

- (1) mənìh [ràn lə̀ lə̀c mùə]IDF kəh
man buy KEEP text one IDF
- [mənìh ràn lə̀ lə̀c mùə]IDF kəh ‘the man who bought a book’
man buy KEEP text one IDF

The analysis to be presented in this study is based on data from a wide range of texts, including Old and Middle Mon inscriptions, literary Modern Mon and data of modern spoken Mon gathered by the author during many years of fieldwork in Thailand and Burma.

¹ This does not mean that *kəh* is a nominalising device for verbs or verbal phrases, as claimed by Bauer (1982:331).

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