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Frederic Pain. Indexing an "ethnic identification" within an interethnic dynamics framework. An example from the Southern Shan State Burma (Myanmar). 2020. halshs-02956832

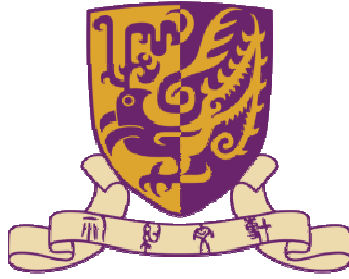
HAL Id: halshs-02956832

<https://shs.hal.science/halshs-02956832v1>

Preprint submitted on 3 Oct 2020

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Indexing an "ethnic identification"
Within an interethnic dynamics framework
An Example from the Southern Shan State
Burma (Myanmar)

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Zoom Meeting: ID 765-199-345
<https://cuhk.zoom.us/j/765199345>

Friday, 20 March 2020

**INDEXING AN ETHNIC IDENTIFICATION
WITHIN AN INTERETHNIC DYNAMICS FRAMEWORK
AN EXAMPLE FROM THE SOUTHERN SHAN STATE,
BURMA (MYANMAR)**

*First draft
for comments and discussion
during the Seminar*

0.- Introduction

The seminar will address the issue of which cultural tools (linguistic and otherwise) are used in order to index particular ethnic identifications within an interethnic environment. It will be analysed how the Inle Lake region (Southern Shan State, Burma [Myanmar]) has undergone a symbolic restructuring of its socio-cultural network since the end of the 1950s, and dramatically after the 1962-Coup. As an introduction, we shall first address the issue of how "ethnicity," "culture," "society," and "language" interact and overlap in many ways. The theoretical backgrounds being cast in relief, we shall gently move to how the interethnic dynamics was renegotiated after the waning of the Shan political sway upon the region and how the Intha emerged as the new dominant ethnic group as well as how they symbolically manipulated a socio-cultural landscape common to all the ethnic communities inhabiting the region; this chapter will set the stage for a better understanding of how a particular ethnic community, the Taung'yo, indexes its position within a newly created dynamics through the technical choice of phonetic markers, an archaising phonetic segment, in a very specific context of interaction in order to align with the position within the interethnic dynamics that the oral traditions (mostly Intha in this case) grant them.

1.- Theoretical Background. Ethnicity, Culture, Society, and Language

1.1. Ethnicity, Culture and Society

"Ethnicity," "ethnic sense of self," "ethnic identification" are a prohibitively complicated issue to address. As Smith (1993:1) pointed out, ethnicity is a concept that *"everybody knows [...] but nobody can define [...]"* though ethnicity marks its ubiquitous presence in many facets of our post-Cold War world. Quite interestingly, as Harrison's historical narrative (1995) pinpoints, anthropologists began to embrace "ethnicity" as a conceptual tool after World War II as an alternative to both the concept of "race" and to argue, as Barth (1969) did, that it was primarily constructed, relational, and historically contingent; Cowlishaw (1999) would even assert, in an Australian context, that the anthropological circles would have replaced the very concept of "race" with the concept of "culture", consequently somewhat conflating "culture" and "ethnicity", finding it more progressive and politically neutral. Edmund Leach is among the first anthropologists to deal with the concept of "ethnicity" in an analytical way that fitted to the standards of an anthropological discipline; for Leach (1954:16), the cultural symbols were mere 'clothes' that could be put on differently according to the historical contingencies; basing himself on the interethnic dynamics in northern Burma and, more specifically, on the Kashin example, he demonstrated that new collective identities could take root anew through an (even partial) acculturation process, political in the particular Kashin case; in a way, Leach proposed a social constructivist approach to "ethnicity" implying the imposition of meaning from above. A decade after, Barth (1969:9-38) adopted an interactionist stance upon ethnicity that claimed

ethnicity and ethnic boundaries to be social constructs¹, rather than cultural ones, which were consequently fluid and contingent; when Barth (1969:15) wrote that it was "*the ethnic boundary that defines the group, not the cultural stuff it encloses*", he underscored the a priori significance of social interactions in creating difference over the semantics of ethnic substance. As Sollors (2001:4816) pointed out, Leach's (among others) constructivist and Barth's (among others) interactionist turns wide-opened a new window into the interrelationships between ethnicity, society and culture, as well as into how ethnicity was constantly recreated, renegotiated or reimagined. Yet, what is "ethnicity"? What kinds of relationship are kept up between "ethnicity," "culture," and "society"? The next paragraphs will address these topics.

As prudently and provisionally hypothesised somewhere else (Pain 2018), the "ethnic sense of self" might possibly be analytically approached in a triadic dimension: cognitive, meta-conceptual and social. The **cognitive** component, which will be called "ethnicity", is an uncontextualised mass of cognitive representations; the **meta-conceptual** process, featured by a particular type of socialisation that will be called "ethnicisation process", is a semiotic process through which some cognitive representations are given credence *through culture by society*; during this dynamic process, signs of one sort (*indices*)—drawn from the uncontextualised mass of cognitive representations typifying "ethnicity"—become signs of another sort (*icons* and/or *symbols*). Finally, the **social** dimension, that will be called "ethnic identification", is the semiotic result of the ethnicisation process surfacing as a project shared by a specific community (see Table 1).²

"**Ethnicity**" is a semiotic system made of cultural (linguistic and non-linguistic) concepts; this system belongs to the semantics, in essence uncontextualised, and consists of an unstructured mass of cognitive representations generated by an indexical referencing of the World based on a collective ego. The arbitrarily selected ethnic semantic representations surface as a set of pertinent signs (linguistic and otherwise) through a particular type of socialisation process that will be called "**ethnicisation**" and which is a pragmatic, hence contextualised, mediating process that links the individuals to each other within a specific community; it bridges the individual egos of a specific group, may it be linguistic, social, or ethnic, into a unique shared, interiorised, communal ego. In other words, through this process, the individuals decidedly dissolve within their own community. Furthermore and quite importantly, during this dynamic process, signs of one sort (*indices*)—drawn from the uncontextualised mass of cognitive representations typifying "ethnicity"—become signs of another sort (*icons* and/or *symbols*). The major problematic of how the individual 'ego' gets interconnected within a specific community has been a long debated issue; it revolves around the old sociological problematical topic of the relationships between *agency* (that is, the ability of an individual—an actor or agent—to act, think and make choices independently) and *structure* (that is, factors related to ethnicity, social class, religion or gender generated by a group that narrow an actor's choice paradigm down according to a particular context).

¹ The influence of Gluckman (1958), for whom it was necessary to take the social boundaries into account in the study of ethnicity, might resonate in Bart's "Introduction".

² This approach is not a novel discovery *per se* as battalions of works have already made similar semiotic arguments in highly sophisticated and theoretically diabolically complex ways in their elaborating semiotic approaches to reconstruct a wide range of theoretical concerns in anthropology (see, in an exemplar way, Kockelman's many works (e.g. 2005) based on a reinterpretation of Piercian semiotics). Furthermore, the approach proposed in this seminar is not so much a "semiotic" analysis of the "ethnic sense of self" as such but rather a montage that would take into account the dynamics of the social interactions, which semiotics considers as non-contrastive and irrelevant. The approach presented here would be more consonant with Chun's (1999; 2009) approach to ethnicity, culture and identity or with Brubaker's (2004; 2015) focus on the practical categories and relational processes behind ethnicity.

For Bourdieu (1972; 2001:24-6), what would link the actors to the structure is quite likely to be the *habitus*³ which is, the way I understand it, a constant back-and-forth flow, a negotiation and renegotiation between existing and new soon-to-emerge or would-be social meanings that are based on improvisation rather than on a paradigm of predetermined rules, contra Saussure ([1916] 1995) for whom there was a selection by the agents from preselected meanings that the structure ("*système*" in Saussure's terminology) made available; in other words, the social meanings are predetermined by, and based on, what happened previously; what an individual agent knows and the ways he thinks is determined by what he has seen and what he has heard. Be that as it may, it will here be simply hypothesised that the strategically selected ethnicised cultural (linguistic and otherwise) features spread, *via* a repetitive exposure, across a community down through the family nucleus and upwards through the media, the education and political organisations imposing these cultural features as natural *facts*, which implies an arbitrary selection of mythical, mythological or historical events rooted in an invented "Tradition" made—and considered—sacred. The ethnic groups created through this "ethnicisation process" will be subject to further boundary renegotiations when the collective objective interests fragment within a specific community.

"Identity" (or, rather, "identification"), "culture" and "society" are fundamentally linked to "ethnicity" and its contextualised, pragmatic, and selective surfacing process or "ethnicisation process." I shall now try to correlate them.

A specific "**ethnic identification**" can be considered as the result of a specific ethnicisation process. Identity is a concept that dates back in Ancient Greek philosophy; it gained its historical salience from the Renaissance onwards, when the primacy of "Individualism" over "Religion" reached its apogee (Ansell 2013:81). Incidentally, within the Western conceptual framework, "identity" has been instrumentalised by society as a tool for Salvation, through religion, and afterwards through progress and justice; the collective identity project *per se* is considered relevant, rather than the specific structure supporting this project (Weber 1927; Parsons 1966; Meyer & Jepperson 2000). An ethnic identification is consequently a project supporting, or legitimising, a specific society or community, rather than a palpable fact. As Chun (2009) pointed out, there have recently been substantial studies questioningly dealing with the notion of "identity" as an analytical tool in social sciences; the criticisms upon this very notion range from too ambiguous a notion to the sacrosanct too much of a Eurocentric conceptual tool (Brubaker 2004; Brubaker & Cooper 2000). However, we should not dispense ourselves to reflect on this notion just because of its European historical semantics (Gleason 1983), according to which it would primarily refer to the notion of "sameness" (from Latin *idem*) transferred into the realm of a specific group. Furthermore, the very notion of "(ethnic) identity" is not necessarily thought of equivalently in the Western languages and, say, in Thai (Keyes 1976). It will be stressed on a 'process' ("identification") rather than on a 'state' ("identity") following Brubaker's (2004:41) claim according to which "*identification –of oneself and of others– is intrinsic to social life; "identity" in the strong sense is not.* Moreover, the ethnic identification is not what it *is* but rather what is *perceived* Connor (1993:377), and it might even be claimed *how* it is perceived. Through which psychological process(es) a strictly egoic identification can be transferred to a group as a whole (and inversely) is a diabolically complex topic that has roared into the debate of the ethnicisation and nationalising processes. It might be reasonably useful to address the topic of "*social intelligence*" (Enfield 2013:14-27) at this point; "social intelligence" might be addressed as a back-and-forth dynamic cognitive process that would bridge the individual agents with the very group they, each one of them, constitute (that is,

³ Bourdieu's concept of *habitus* might somewhat be paralleled with Hannerz's concept of *perspective* (Hannerz 1992:65-8).

their structure); "social intelligence" is predicated upon the individual capacity to navigate the social World thanks to an ability to interpret the others' communicative actions. In a social environment in which Culture (as well as one of its cultural devices: Language) emerges, the most important components of an individual agent's action are basically the other people, or the group itself (Goodwin 2006:97-125). In other words, if a group exerts an influence upon an individual agent, the very same agent equally manages his/her social environment by wielding some controlled signifying behaviours which affect the mental states of his/her social associates, or "group" (Enfield 2009:88-9); it is therefore a dynamic reciprocal process where agents and structure wield an influence upon one another and interferes within the course of action of one another. Be that as it may, the interrelation or interconnection, if not overlapping, of "society" and "culture" with the "ethnic identification" is likely to intervene during this very sociality process called "social intelligence." It will be dealt with this topic throughout the following sections.

Society and culture are two concepts that are closely linked with the ethnicisation process; an ethnicisation is performed *by society through* culture.

As already pointed out, as far back as in Durkheim (1895:97; 107) down to Berger & Luckmann (1966), Hannerz (1992:15) and Kockelman (2013), **Society** is not so much of an organised community based on shared institutionalised (political, cultural, behavioural, etc.) traditions embodied in cultural artifacts, ritualistic or political behaviours, etc. *per se* but rather the product of social interactions that provides a conceptual framework to reference the physical and/or cognitive environment as well as to identify and categorise variances within this interactional environment. In other words, these social interactions provide a conceptual framework for the construction of cultural meanings and discourses and, at least in the case of the "Western" societies, a dichotomy between an 'us' and an 'others'. Moreover, the construction of cultural meanings is legitimised by a dominant authority whose function is to overarch and epitomise those interactions. It is within the scope of society that dominant structures emerge, whose purpose is to mediate a strategically selected group referencing through culture. Be that as it may, the social interactions (that is, "society") engender a common social project encapsulated in a specific ethnic identification; these interactions furthermore constitute the ecological niche and arena *par excellence* in which culture can be enacted and whose purpose would be to provide some socially constructed coherence to the whole. But what is "culture"? And what is it in relation to the ethnic identification? It will be dealt with this issue through the next paragraph.

Though Chun (1996) can somewhat be agreed with when he claims that culture and (ethnic) identity (identification) are concepts belonging to analytically distinct realms that should be treated separately, we should however consider culture as central in the understanding of an ethnic identification genesis. **Culture** is a devilishly complex conceptual tool to define; it has been, and is being, variously addressed according to how its analytical and empirical value is assessed.⁴ In the limited scope of the topic addressed in the seminar, culture will be addressed as collective patterns of thought, as a socially acquired belief in a set of strategically selected features that participate to the edification of a common mental world and a shared knowledge that allow each individual within a specific group to operate in an acceptable (and expected) manner and that provide an individual with detailed expectations about other's behaviours within the group to which he/she belongs; this

⁴ As Sapir (1994:23) pointed out, "culture" is not a "*rigidly defined thing*" as it is consensus and sanction with regard to the meanings of things that define culture (1994:36); there is however a coherence within some analytical terrains or conceptions surrounding the concept of "culture" that can be singled out; see Duranti (1997) and Layton (1997) for an overview.

"hypothesising process" is called *cultural logic* (Enfield 2000). Culture provides the premises used in social argumentations in interaction and this accounts for the reason why some not necessarily conscious logical thinking may be different from a group to another. It will consequently be claimed here that culture provides a group with its own sense of self "ethnicised" (that is, surfacing through an ethnicisation process) according to its own logical thinking rooted in its historical experience and mediated by a repetitive exposure to socialising structures, such language, media, political organisations, oral traditions and, above all, education. Because of the aforementioned repetitive exposure to socialising structures, the cultural representation shared by a specific group or community acts as a somewhat syllogistic reasoning whose premises of any communicational interaction are: *if* I act/believe/interpret a situation, etc. so, *then* I belong to this group/community (Enfield 2000:41). This implies a process of ethnic/communal inclusion or exclusion: *if* I act/believe/interpret a situation, etc. so, *then* I belong to this group/community (inclusion) and *if* one does not act/believe/interpret a situation, etc. so, *then* one does not belong to this group/community (exclusion). It is also worth noting that what matters is not "culture" itself but the specific models of cultural devices shared by a particular community; there are, in other words, discrepancies between what is 'emically' identified as being a representative set of distinctive culture traits and how these cultural characteristics are 'etically' interpreted (Geertz 1974:26-45; Ward 1985:ix-xvi; Evans 1993:20-1).

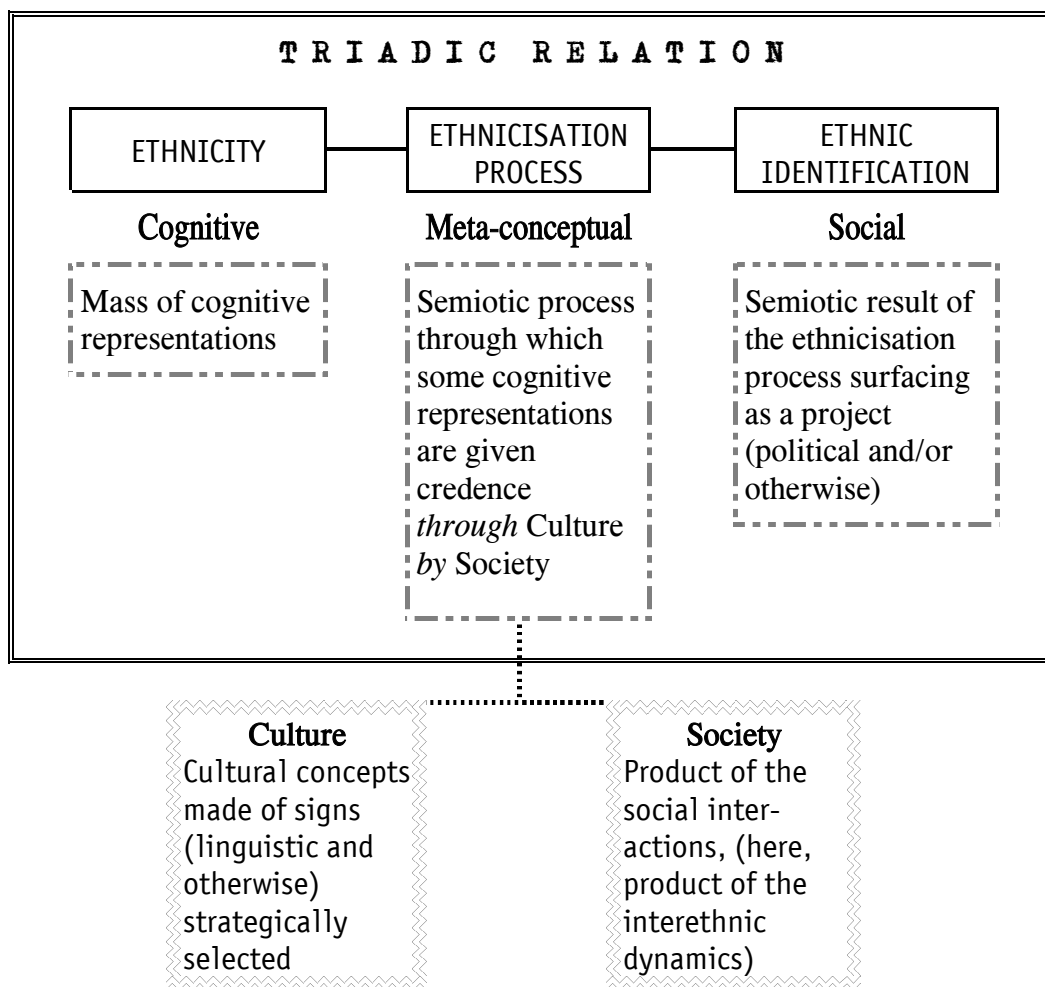


Table 1. 'Ethnic Sense of Self': Triadic Relation

The problematic issue of the culture-language relationship, with which anthropologists and linguists alike have been struggling for quite a while, will now prudently be tackled. Culture (provided that this concept would actually and eventually be a useful one) and language are both semiotic systems used to regulate and interpret social actions (Enfield 2009:83); therefore, the central claim of linguistic anthropology according to which language is one of the cultural devices used by society in order to generate an ethnic identification will be pervasively embraced. This will be the topic dealt with hereunder.

1.2. Language as Culture

"All our considerations have led us to the conclusion that words in their primary and essential sense do, act, produce and achieve. [...] Language is primarily an instrument of action and not a means of telling a tale" (Malinowski 1935:52)

Adopting an anthropological stance upon language has a long history, from Humboldt (1823) and Boas (1911), Sapir (1933), Malinowski (1923; 1935) and Tambiah (1968)⁵, Austin (1962) and Bourdieu (2001) down to the nowadays linguistic anthropologists (Hymes 1974; Duranti 1994, 1997; Kockelman 2010, etc.). Yet, anthropology and linguistics have been considered as academic disciplines throwing all their troops into different frontlines by many anthropologists and linguists alike. Up to a certain point, this is basically true insofar as the contrastive line is drawn between a decontextualising approach prone to a high degree of formalisation focusing on a quest for cognitive universals (linguistics) and a methodology that inclines towards empiricism and focusing on diversity and social construction (anthropology)⁶. However, what singles out an anthropologist from a linguist is how he or she interprets the influence of language and society over each other; an example to buttress this last claim might be useful at this point. Let us consider the "g-dropping" in the gerund-progressive form in British English⁷, so that "*working*" can be pronounced either *working* [wɜ:kɪŋ] or *workin* [wɜ:kɪn]; this phonetic peculiarity can be addressed in line with two different approaches: a linguistic one according to which the speaker is considered as a mere "phoneme-machine," as a patient of a social situation; on the other hand, linguistic anthropology will adopt an anthropological stance upon the very same issue according to which the speaker performs a social act when (s)he chooses to use, and knowingly selects, a particular phonetic segment in a particular interactional context in order to willingly settle his/her position within a particular social interaction. Accordingly, if we address the "g-dropping" from a **linguistic** perspective, a correlation will be done between the higher frequency of the [ɪŋ] variant with male speakers, and [ɪn] with female speakers as well as a higher frequency of the [ɪn] variant with speakers of a working- or lower-class background, while higher frequencies of [ɪŋ] are correlated with middle- and upper-class backgrounds (Labov 1972). On the other hand, **linguistic anthropology** will address the very same issue

⁵ Tambiah (1968) re-analyses the Trobriand ritual addressed in Malinowski (1935); he focuses on how the linguistic devices are synchronised with the non-verbal actions in a structured sequence.

⁶ This frontier-line between anthropology and linguistics has now turned out to be somewhat porous, and be eclipsed by a school of thought in anthropology and linguistics that emerged by the 1960's in response to the inclination towards a universalising theoretical modelling and a de-socialisation, if not de-humanisation, of the social actor at stake in the then dominant Chomskyan transformational-generative grammar (Chomsky 1957) and in the Levi-Straussian structural anthropology (Lévi-Strauss 1949; 1958). This school of thought, whose prominent figures were the philosopher Burke (1966) and the anthropologist Hymes (1962; 1972), advocated that the study of language should be addressed in its relation to the social interactional context and that the role of the interviewer and fieldworker should spread from anthropology into the other social sciences.

⁷ See Foley (1997:3-4) on this topic; Foley also provides other interesting similar examples.

quite differently. While taking note of all these correlations, a linguistic anthropologist addresses the further fundamental question of what we mean when we pose a social act through cultural signs (here, linguistic signs in the shape of a phonetic sequence): in other words, what do speakers socially mean when they use an [ɪn] versus an [ɪŋ] variant? The answer will evidently vary according to variously specific interactional contexts, but one answer could pretty well be that the use of [ɪn], considering its link to the social variables of "*maleness*" and "*working-class-ness*", might possibly be an assertion of a strong masculine self-identification. And in matter of fact, Trudgill (1972) would point out that the male middle-class speakers in Norwich Britain often use these [ɪn] variables to stake exactly this claim, regarding the values perceived to be associated with working-class life, such as "toughness," or "physical labor," as indicative of "enhanced masculinity." Accordingly, using a phonetic sequence instead of another is analysed as a performative **social act** *per se* whose aim is to precisely, knowingly and selectively position oneself within a particular interactional dynamics; in other words, language is a cultural tool that rests upon an underlying ability to attribute action, meaning, and intention in structured sequences of social interaction (Enfield & Levinson 2006:28).

Language as a cultural tool? Language and culture are devices that are used to carry out social relations; they are both likely to belong to an overall system whose purpose is to interpret and regulate social action within a complex interactional group or community. Whether or not "language" belongs to the conceptual realm of "culture" is very much a question of detail and largely depends on the empirical and/or analytical stance upon which the very definition of "culture" is based. Be that as it may, for the least, there are large areas of human sociality where both culture and language overlap and for which analysing both of them apart might be analytically counterproductive, if not futile. First of all, language and culture are both cognitive⁸ (behavioural and perceptual) phenomena that are grounded in a flexibility in problem-solving and that involve mental representations of what the others know, think and want (Enfield 2009:84, Tomasello & Call 1997:8); in other words, on the one hand, culture and language are both flexible phenomena allowing each individual to select one decision among a mental paradigm of others based on how a current situation is assessed in relation to one particular current goal (let us call this first component "**individual cognition**"); and on the other hand, culture and language involve an ability to mentally represent, model and track what others believe, know and want according to a given community (let us call this second component "**social cognition**"); both components are the two sides of the same cognitive coin. Secondly, as Enfield (2009:88; 2013:14-27) brilliantly pointed out, "language" and "culture" are both based on, and predicated upon, *social intelligence* abilities including (1) pro-social and cooperative instincts (that is, an ability to flexible common and joint actions to reach mutual goals), (2) an individual awareness of the perceptual states of other members of a particular interactional community, (3) a sensitivity to social conventions based on a fluid symbolic capacity, (4) a capacity to adhere to, and regulate social norms (hence, socially grounded emotional and moral reflexes and instincts), (5) an ability, if not an inclination towards, "Machiavellian" instincts involving a manipulation of knowledge, a tendency to dominate others through semiotics—as it is the case in ethnic distinctions—etc. Briefly and grossly speaking, the very role of social intelligence in "culture" and "language" is very much the same: to interpret others' communicative actions in an interactional context; in other words, the most prevalent and important components in an individual's interactional environment, in his/her social setting, are the others and what they know, what they want, what they say (through linguistic signs

⁸ It might be interesting at this point to recall that *cognition* is how knowledge (that is, grossly speaking, a mental representation of reality) is processed and distributed whereas a *semiotic* process is how signs of one sort (*indices*) become signs of another sort (icons and/or symbols)

and/or otherwise) and the way the individual reacts towards communicative means according to what this individual knows, wants, says but also according to what he has previously learned, failed to communicate, succeeded in communicating, known, heard, etc. within other various interactional contexts in the (remote or recent) past. Up to a certain point, this might somewhat prudently be paralleled with Bourdieu's *Habitus*, Hannerz's *Perspective* or even Goodenough's *Propriospect*.

Be that as it may, language and culture are both cognitive and semiotic resources that allow an individual to act in an expected manner within an interactional community; those resources allow, and promote, a meaningful action upon and through social interactions. In other words, language and culture are related, which does not mean, or presuppose, that they are separable, but rather that they both just interact: on the one hand, culture can hardly be learned, distributed and enacted outside the realm of language and on the other hand language can hardly be thought of and addressed outside the cultural norms on which it systemically depends, for our linguistic practices largely define our cultural practices and inversely.

The relationships between "language" and "culture" were provisionally and prudently addressed afore, because, as Levinson (2005:637) pointed out, there is a growing interest in establishing connections between language and culture, "*but unequivocally establishing the facts is a difficult and delicate business; it involves establishing the facts and handling the rhetorical delicacies that are essential to establishing a bridgehead for studies of linguistic and cultural diversity among the universalizing sciences.*" This being said, during the seminar, the very act of speaking will be considered as a **social act**, as when the speakers uses language, he/she constitutes the reality that he/she is trying to represent, and the speaker will be considered as a **social actor** belonging to a complex interactional community organised through a network of linguistic and cultural expectations about the response of each one of the other members of this very interactional community.

Now the theoretical backgrounds has just been shortly addressed, we can gently move to the issue of how an ethnic identification is renegotiated anew within a particular interethnic dynamics upon which society round the Inle Lake is predicated. Our major claim throughout the seminar is that the way the Intha managed to talk the neighbouring ethnic communities into aligning their position within the interethnic dynamics with the Intha conceptual universe should be considered as a piece of art of a seamless symbolic sway upon a common socio-cultural universe. We will peer into this issue in the following sections.

2.- Ethnodynamics and Oral Traditions round the Inle Lake

2.1. Ethnographic settings

See map 1 and 2.

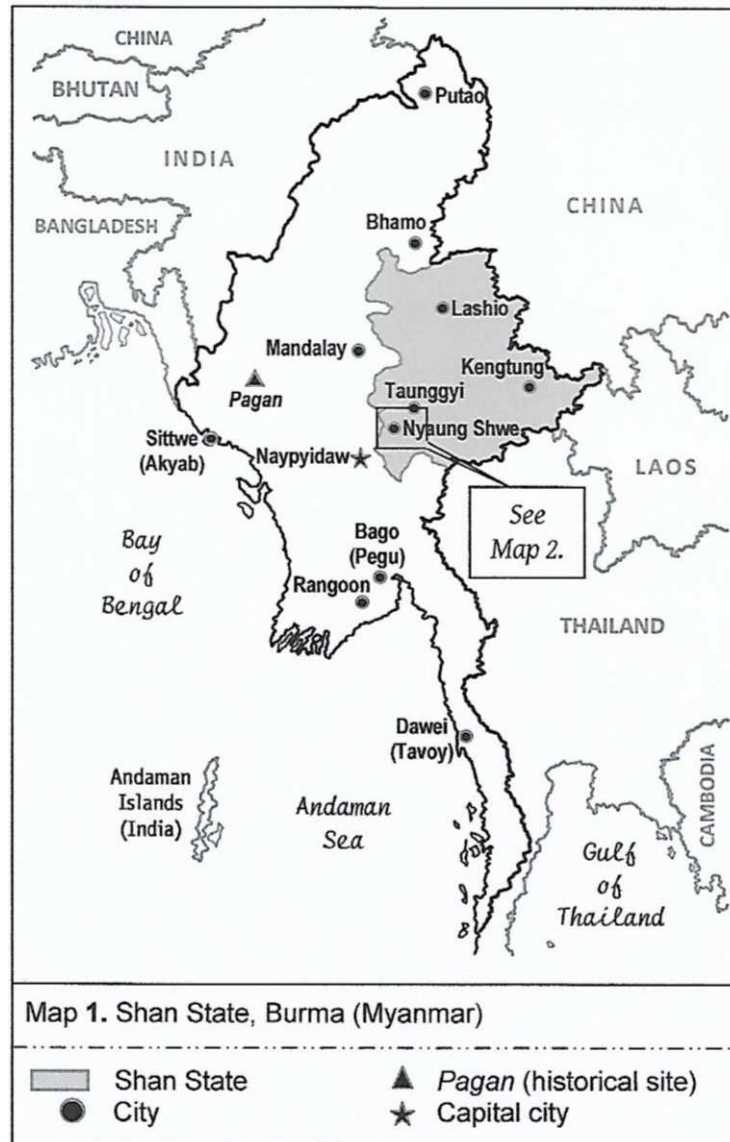
The Inle Lake is located in the south-west of the Shan State (*hram: praññ nay [ḥá pì: nḥ:]*) in Burma, or Myanmar as it was renamed by the military junta. Three fieldworks of two months each were carried out in the region between 2012 and 2014 during a post-doc fellowship at the Academia Sinica 中央研究院, Taipei. More specifically, the fieldworks were carried out in the district of Nyaung Shwe where the Inle Lake, hemmed in by two mountainous areas and flowing southwards, is located. The western hilly areas are dotted with Taung'yo, Pa-O, Danaw and Danu villages whereas the eastern mountains host almost exclusively Pa-O. The lake itself is dominated by the Intha, with some In-Shan enclaves; some mixed area grouping Pa-O, Taung'yo, Intha and Danu hamlets randomly dot the

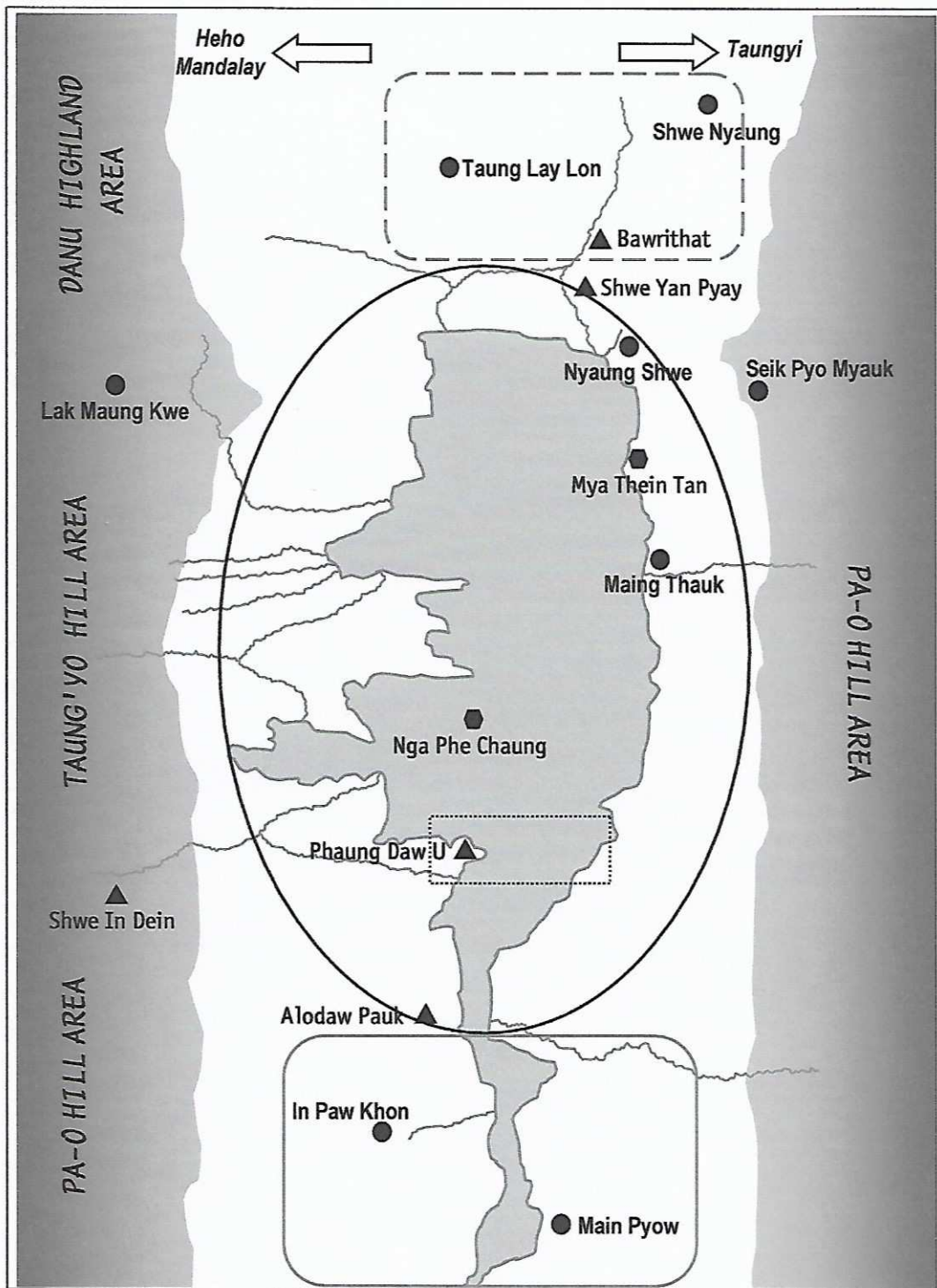
northern and southern edges of the lake. Nyaung Shwe, the district-city, is the convenient venue *par excellence*, where the hill ethnic communities (Pa-O, Taung'yo, Danu and Danaw) can communicate and trade with the Intha. Except during some assemblies grouping all the ethnic communities inhabiting the region round the Lake (which I conveniently call *curum*), the hill ethnic groups do not have much contact with one another, but they each one of them do with the Intha.

The Inle Lake region is a fascinating area insofar as it gathers an amazing linguistic diversity under the same canopy. The first ethnic group that have once held sway upon the region are the SHAN; they belong to the Kradai linguistic group, which the Siamese or Lao also belong to. As we shall see later on, they ruled over the region for some centuries and were in constant conflictual relationships with the Burmese; though they have lost much of their influence over the lake, Nyaung Shwe had been the seat of the Shan Sao-pha ("rulers") until 1962. Nowadays, there remain some so-called In-Shan ('*an*: *hram*: "Shan of the Lake") in some enclaves but they now speak Intha; quite interestingly, before the symbolic of the Phaung Daw U procession was restructured to the advantage of the Intha by the end of the 1950s, the Buddha images were towed on a royal barge from the Phaung Daw U pagoda to the royal palace where they were presented to the Shan Sao-pha. Mon-Khmer is represented by some very few DANAW living with Taung'yo in one village in the central-western mountains; they are the last ethnic group to have migrated into the Inle Lake area by the 19th century; their knowledge of their own language is reasonable and they can be considered as Danaw - Taung'yo bilingual. The PA-O belong to the Karenic ethnolinguistic group; their villages dotted the mountains east of the lake and the south-west hilly regions; their relationships with the Taung'yo are somewhat kindly conflictual: each of both ethnic communities pretending to rule over the mountains. The Danu, the Taung'yo and the Intha all speak a Burmese dialect, though their linguistic ability to understand each other is far from being perfect; the DANU take up a secondary position within the interethnic dynamics; they inhabit the high plateau west of the lake and are the dominant ethnic community in the region of Pindaya; their language in the Lake area is "intha-ised" and pretty different from the Danu spoken in Pindaya; the TAUNG'YO are living in villages uphill in the western mountainous area; according to the post-1962 oral traditions, they are supposed to be the autochthonous ethnic group of the region; we shall extensively address this issue during this seminar. As shall be dealt with quite in depth throughout the seminar, the INTHA are the dominant people in the Inle Lake area; the waning of the Shan political sway upon the region made it possible for the Intha to fill in the vacuum then created through the restructuring of the Lake socio-cultural framework eased by their economic welfare based on their mastering of diversified piscicultural, agricultural and horticultural activities (Bernot 2000; Bruneau & Bernot 1972); like the Danu and the Taung'yo, they speak a Burmese dialect. The lake society (by "society", we understand the very product of the interethnic dynamics in the Inle Lake region) is based upon a horizontal type of ethnic relationships where no ethnic community imposes its sway upon the other by any kind of political force; the Intha prevalence in the symbolic realm on which the social-cultural network is based is predicated upon its economic welfare and, consequently and quite importantly, its conspicuous participation to the Theravadic rituals.

The major point to be preciously kept in mind at this point is the prevailing position over the Inle Lake region taken on by the Intha ethnic community. They dominate the regional trade through the market cycles and play the role of middlemen between the Taung'yo, Danaw or Pa-O and Burmese merchants from Mandalay; they hold sway upon the craft industry, for the hill ethnic groups call upon Intha when qualified forgers, carpenters, etc., are needed to work in their villages uphill; they also play a dominant role in the dissemination of culture through education as Intha are hired as primary school teachers to go

and teach uphill. They finally and most interestingly dominate the symbolic realm which the other ethnic communities incline to align with; the seminar will address this latter issue: how did the Intha reconstruct the symbolic framework of the lake and how the surrounding ethnic communities, in particular the Taung'yo, adapted to this newly constructed symbolic universe?





Map 2. Ethnolinguistic map of the Inle Lake

●	monastery	○	Intha Lake Area
▲	pagoda	⋯	Mixed Area Intha – Taung'yo – Danu – Pa O
●	hamlet	▭	Mixed Area Intha – In-Shan – Pa-O
		⋯	In-Shan Enclave

2.2. Hierarchical power poise: the *Shan* on the vertical axis

In order to set the stage for a clear understanding of how the interethnic dynamics works in the Inle Lake area, the historical contingencies that galvanised the emergence of a specific ethnic group (the Intha) to the detriment of a former one (the Shan) need first to be cast in relief. As a matter of fact, the waning of the Shan authority upon the region generated a power vacuum in which a new ethnic dynamics was to be renegotiated. The current ethnodynamics in the Lake area might be considered as the result of a hybrid "Burmanisation" process: (1) on the one hand, a Burmanisation to the detriment of the Shan and then, as a corollary, (2) a Burmanisation to the benefit of the Intha who established themselves as the prevailing ethnic group in the region. The Shan currently account for a low 2% of the Lake population (Bernot & Bruneau 1972:413) and this ratio must have remained substantially the same until our fieldworks in 2013 and 2014. At the present time, there are still eight Shan hamlets inhabited by the so-called In-Shan populations ('*añ*: *hram*: "Shan of the Lake"), albeit most of them have little more than a fragmentary knowledge of their language and have modeled their social organisation on that of the Intha.

The sway of the Shan ethnic group upon the Inle Lake area was predicated upon its hegemonic position on a vertical power axis dominated, theoretically, at the upper pole by the Burmese (that is, the Myanma ethnic group); I write "*theoretically*", for the Burmese authority consistently deserted peripheral areas such as the Inle region, which smoothly facilitated, if not entailed, a Shan pervasive influence upon the Inle Lake area. The Shan had been in (mostly conflicting) contact with the Burmese as far up as in the 11th century and their relationships were mainly thought and constructed along a vertical, hierarchy-based, axis. In other words, along this specific axis, what did matter was the "power ranking" of the Shan vis-à-vis the Burmese, obtained by force if needed. The Shan controlled the Lake region from the late 13th to the second half of the 16th century (Sai 2009:89-109) and it was not until the late 18th century that the Burmese Kingdom of Ava exercised control over the Shan chiefdoms of the region through a *hmū mat* or '*amat*, an official acting for the king's half-brother (Fistié 1985:62). There tragically remains very little of the ancient Shan prevailing position over the region; just some toponyms, among which (*Möng*) *Yawng Hwe* "(State of the) Golden Banyan", which was first attested in its Burmese form *Nyaung Shwe* during World War II and which eventually replaced its Shan counterpart in a systematic way from the 1960s onwards. Two main overlapping reasons may account for the waning of the Shan sway upon the Inle Lake region.

The first reason is quite likely to be sought in their confrontational relationships with the Burmese that go back centuries. The relations between the Burmese and the Shan date back as far up as from the foundation of the Kingdom of Pagan by the 11th century. The Shan chiefdoms were most likely rather powerful at that time, as forging Shan-Burmese matrimonial ties was considered a political asset to both parties; this political asset might incidentally pretty well be typified by the alliance of the Burmese King Anoratha with the Shan princess Sao Mon Hla (Sai 2009:91) which is echoed back in the Royal Chronicles (Pe Maung Tin & Luce [1923] 2008:84-85). It was only by the 18th century that the Burmese eventually began to impose their sway upon the Inle region. The gradual waning of the Shan chieftains' (the *sao-pha*)⁹ authority would be congruent with the establishment of the *hmū mat* (a senior official acting on behalf of the half-brother of the King of Ava) in the region as well as with numerous rebellions in Upper Burma against the Shan authority considered tyrannical (Milne 1910:186). The colonial administration would also complicitly partake in the waning of the Shan authority over the region insofar as they would largely oversee, and

⁹*Sawbwa* according to their Anglo-Burmese naming.

be gradually more intrusive in, the sao-pha's actions; the Shan chieftains would eventually become sheer puppet rulers divested of any real authority (Sai 2009:162-188). The end of World War II and the independence of Burma in 1948 would be consonant with the last waning phase of the Shan authority which would eventually be completely defused with the 1962 Coup and the actual taking-over of the Nyaung Shwe palace, the symbolic center of the Shan power, by the insurgents. The sao-pha of Nyaung Shwe, Sao Shwe Thaik (*Caw Hrwe Suik*), would die in prison on December 21, 1962, one of his sons would be shot dead by a stray bullet on the very day when the Coup began and the sao-pha's first wife, Sao Hearn Kham, was soon to follow them into the grave. The 1962 Coup sounded the death knell for six centuries of actual or symbolic Shan rule in the region. The aftermath of the Coup, that is, an armed struggle between the 'Shan National Army' (SNA) and the 'Tatmadaw' (the Burmese army) followed by the 1994 peace agreement, would only accelerate the eventual power shift from the Shan to the Intha; during this 'Burmanisation' process, the Burmese central administration adopted a divisive stance towards the ethnic dynamics in the region and favored the Intha in order to defuse any Shan and Pa-o claims prone to repeated violent responses against the Burmese central authority.

The second reason that might possibly account for the Shan authority to be eclipsed is quite likely to be found in the very fact that their political sense of self was rooted in the 'local' rather than in the regional level. Indeed, though the Shan political structures had been hierarchical at a local level, it did not display an homogeneous structure at a higher administrative level, such as at a regional, let alone a national, level; the hallmark of the Shan political framework was its fragmentation which besides characterised the political structures designed by the various Thai peoples in general for much of their history¹⁰. First of all, sporadic alliances sealed between several Shan chiefdoms mostly aimed at routing a common foe chiefdom rather than at allying for the construction of a unified Shan regional polity, upon which a charismatic sao-pha would have ruled supreme and that would have been able to, if not retaliate against Burmese attacks, at least shrewdly hamper them. Secondly, as Leach (1954) or Robinne (2000) aptly pointed out, the Shan political structures were far from being homogeneous from one chiefdom to another: here, the sao-pha was the only holder of the executive power, whereas there he had to share it with high-ranking officials, such as the "myosaji" (*mrui. cā: krī:*) or 'regional prefect'. Finally, the lack of Shan political sense of self had as corollary that the Burmese royal administration had pretty much of a muddled idea of what 'being Shan' basically meant as an ethnic group or political entity; for example, the royal administration under the Kobaung Dynasty counted as many as 30 Shan ethnic groups, of which only three or four were actual ethnic Shan (U Tin 2001:133, 135-6); furthermore, the Shan nobiliary title 'sao-pha' was bestowed on lords who had no Shan descent whatsoever; as a matter of fact, this title was also worn by Wa, Padaung or Kachin chieftains who were identified as ethnic Shan by the Burmese royal authorities and, afterwards, by the colonial administration (Leach 1954:124).¹¹

The political void consecutive to the waning of the Shan authority over the region provided a new fertile ethnic framework in which a new ethnodynamics would be renegotiated; the next section will address this very issue.

¹⁰ See Simms (1999) on the political fragmentation of Laos; Wyatt (2003) addressing the history of the various Thai statelets of ancient Siam and Sai (2009) dealing with the history of the Shan in Burma.

¹¹ During my fieldworks in the Inle Lake area in 2012-4, I could notice that the very term 'sao-pha' was seldom associated with the Shan but was rather connected to the Burmese royal authority or to the colonial administration. Besides, some Taung'yo associate the term *sao-pha* with some specific guardian spirits, the *rwācon. nat*, some of whom are reminiscences of ancient strifes that opposed sao-pha against one another or against Burmese kings.

2.3. Symbolic appropriation of a sociocultural network: the *Intha* along the horizontal axis

(1) "*Ojā*" rather than "*āṇā*"

The Intha have not predicated their influence over the Inle Lake area upon an exacerbation of ethnocultural differences. They did not impose themselves through a nationalist movement, or agenda, under the purple of a charismatic leader either. In other words, the Intha have not emerged as a prevailing ethnic group by "force" (*āṇā*) or on a political basis. Contrasting to the Shan vertical axis of power poise along which differences were ranked, the Intha sway upon the region would be better addressed and placed on a horizontal axis along which significant similarities are organised, experienced and mediated through relatively stable categorical commonalities shared by all the ethnic negotiators, such as Buddhism, an economic welfare serving the performance of Buddhist rituals and a connection—yet to varying degrees—to the Dynasty of Pagán. The process initiated during the emergence of the Intha leadership over the region is based on a manipulation of mythological symbols borrowed from the Burmese as well as on a conceptual framework rooted in Theravadic Buddhism common to all ethnic groups round the Lake. The Taung'yo (as well as the other ethnic groups around the Lake) repositioned their own ethnic identification within a new ethnic dynamics predicated upon the Intha symbolic reconstruction of the sociological network. Accordingly, it is clearly about the emergence of an ethnic leadership based on a "seamless influence" (*ojā*) symbolically legitimised in an Oral Tradition whose focal point would be a historical connection to the Dynasty of Pagán, with which all the other oral traditions of the Lake would align; from the 1960's onward, all the ethnic group around the Lake have been justifying and legitimising their own position within the interethnic chain according to this newly generated ethnodynamics.

Furthermore, the commercial relationships between the Intha on the one hand and the Hill ethnic groups (Taung'yo, Danu, Pa-O and Danaw) on the other hand display a complex, yet coherent, social network. In point of fact, the Intha economic prosperity based on their horticultural and piscicultural skills (Bernot & Bruneaux 1972; Bernot & Bernot 1972; Bernot 2001) has granted them a dominant economic role in local markets; their economic welfare has allowed them to take an ostentatious share to the performance of local Buddhist rituals that has been eventually conducive to a symbolic restructuring to their advantage of religious rituals, such as during the *Shimbyu* ceremonies (symbolic restructuring at a micro-level) and the *Phaung Daw U Pheya Pwè* procession (symbolic restructuring at a macro-level) (Robinne 2000, Sao Sanda 2008:87-103). In other words, the Intha symbolic legitimacy as a dominant ethnic group has been reinforced by their economic prosperity.

(2) *Intha supremacy as a symbolic construct*

As briefly mentioned afore, the Intha have predicated their socio-economic supremacy upon a symbolic foundation. The interethnic dynamics pretty much breaks loose during the cycles of pagoda festivals and in the markets insofar as the various ethnic groups around the Lake are in close exchange relationships during these very specific occasions. It is indeed during these very events that the Intha symbolically establish their seamless sway upon the local economy and over major Buddhist rituals. In addition, the very fact that a pagoda festival de facto brings a market in its path indicates how intimately the *economic* tissue (as echoed during the exchanges in the markets) and the *symbolic* realm (i.e. the Intha taking-over of the Buddhist rituals during the pagoda festivals, in particular the rites of passage) are both interlinked. On the one hand, the Hill ethnic groups depend on the Intha in their trade exchanges during the market cycles; on the other hand, during the pagoda

festivals, the Intha take over at their own advantage the Buddhist ritual whose watershed appropriation will be congruent with the restructuring of the *Phaung Daw U Pheya Pwè* processional ritual. The Hill ethnic groups are indeed excluded from any officiating function and the Intha control over the Buddhist ritual is legitimated by, or through, a claimed connection to a mission of Burmanisation bestowed on them during the Pagán Dynasty as encapsulated and highlighted in the post-1962-Coup reconstructed oral traditions and which would become an intrinsically significant element in the ethnic dynamics in the Inle region. In other words, the symbolic foundation of the Intha socio-economic hegemony would take its roots in BUDDHISM which is the common conceptual core shared by all the ethnic groups around the Lake as well as in an overlapping symbolic connection to the PAGÁN DYNASTY rooted in the mission once assigned to them by King Alaungsitthu to "burmanise" the Inle Lake area (ie, to develop Buddhism), mission that is besides echoed in the local oral traditions; the Intha has become the prevailing ethnic group upon the region because of this alleged connection to a royal mission bestowed upon them during the Pagán Dynasty. So the oral traditions go.

The conceptual framework according to which the Intha constructed their new ethnic identification in the wake of the waning of the Shan administration is rooted in the notion of *leikpya* (<*lipprā*>), the essence of life (Robinne 2000:156-7). The normative Buddhist ontology considers the existence of an *ātman* ("perduring soul") as an heresy; however, the Burmese animist background associated with Buddhist precepts recognises, if not promotes, the significance of a *leikpya*, also called "Butterfly Spirit" (Spiro 1982:85). As matter of fact, the *leikpya* is pretty much of an "umbilical cord" that would connect one state of life to another (Spiro 1978:69-70) and materialises as a white cotton thread symbolising this shift from one state to another¹²; as such, it naturally became associated with the various rites of passage. Yet, since they were bestowed the mission of spreading Buddhism by King Alaungsitthu, the Intha took on a position of prestige, for they are considered as the guarantors of the permanence of the Buddhist rituals, among which the rituals of passage are the most important (Spiro 1982:232-54). The Intha's taking control over the Buddhist rituals emerges down on a micro-level, that of the individual, in their ostentatious staging of the *shimbyu bwè*, and concludes up on a macro-level, that of the Intha ethnic collectivity, with the restructuring of the circumnavigation during the *Phaung Daw U Pheya Pwè* procession.

Let us first linger over the symbolic **MICRO LEVEL** and the *shimbyu bwè* or "noviciation ceremony." Among the communities for whom the life of the Buddha is considered as a paradigm, one of the most sacred initiatory rituals is the *pabbajja*, a ceremony of passage from the laity to a monastic life, during which the future *samanera* (novice) renounces earthly pleasure in favor of an ascetic life and, for a while, symbolically models its existence upon that of the Buddha. The ritual opens up with the presentation of the young man playing the role of Prince Siddharta Gautama to the lay community and ends up with his taking of the robe and entry into the ascetic life¹³. What matters is not so much the *shimbyu* ritual *per se*, as the *pabbajja* is quite pervasive throughout Theravadic Southeast Asia, but rather its staging through which the Intha exhibit both their ethnic cohesion and economic welfare; indeed, their economic welfare makes it possible for them to dramatise their success to such an extent that it profoundly impacted the sociology of the ethnic network around the Lake. I say *ethnic cohesion*, as it is mainly about a collective ceremony that involves the entire Intha social fabric of the Lake, down from the *rwā* ("village, hamlet")

¹² It should be noted that the cotton thread betrayed a Shan influence, for it is commonly used among the Thai Theravadic ethnic groups, whether they be Lao, Siamese or Shan.

¹³ On the *shimbyu bwè* ceremony and its social significance, Aung Maung Htin (1959:117-8), among many others, should be consulted.

upwards to the *tuik* ("cluster of neighbouring lacustrine villages"), whose chiefs or leaders, *rwācukrī*: and *tuikcukrī*: respectively, take an important share to the ceremony and largely outnumber other local chiefs or leaders, Shan included. I also say *ostentatious*, as the ceremonies, which last several days, are outrageously expensive (millions of Kyats) and such an astronomical expenditure is just a cost the Hill ethnic groups cannot afford; the whole Intha community is consequently wreathed in a twofold prestige both predicated upon a Buddhist symbolism and pervading the ethos of the other ethnic groups of Lake: an economic kind of prestige in respect to all the money huddled and spent for the ceremony as well as a religious one in regard to the merit accumulated for the performance of the Buddhist rites.

The symbolic **MACRO LEVEL** and the *Phaung Daw U* procession should now be conjured up. Every year during the full moon of "*sītañ: kywat*" (October-November), the Intha, Pao, Danu, Danaw, Taung'yo and Shan come from both sides of the lake and the hills to congregate in the Phaung Daw U pagoda, in the center of the lake, and to attend the opening ceremony of the annual circumnavigation, during which four of the five Buddha images hosted in the pagoda are taken aboard a Sacred (Royal) barge. On the first day of the 26-day long ceremony, each family, whichever ethnic group they might belong to, make offerings to the images of the Buddha that will successively be presented in 21 villages all around the lake. It will be posited that the annual circumnavigation during the *Phaung Daw U Pheya Pwe* ("Procession [*bwe*] of the Phaung Daw U pagoda [*pheya*]") involving all the Intha *tuik* ("lacustrine villages") should be addressed as an apotheosis of the dramatisation of the Intha ethnic cohesion and its symbolic seamless sway upon, and appropriation of, the conceptual framework on which the local ethnic dynamics would be based and considered. Since the 1962 Coup, the Intha have indeed appropriated for themselves the Phaung Daw U procession and manipulated its symbolism to their own advantage by aligning it on their own sociological framework and cosmogonic principles underlying the Intha social order.

What is the Intha "*sociological framework*" at issue? To address this topic, it seems reasonably relevant to first zero in on the Intha sociological pervasiveness of the "four-point-around-a-center" and the base-5 counting symbolism. Circumambulating a center is pretty far from being specific to the Phaung Daw U procession, for it also partakes in the symbolism of the *shimpyu* ceremony and its walking around a stupa or of the *Nat* ceremonies (Brac de la Perrière 1992:206); and, if we widen our gaze, the mandala-like political network epitomising the 'Galactic Polity' (Tambiah 1976) eventually predicated upon such a symbolic bedrock. The "four-point-around-a-center" symbolism is not particular to the Intha either. What is noteworthy at this point is that, unlike the other neighbouring Buddhist ethnic groups (Taung'yo, Danu, Shan, Pa-O), this specific symbolism is made a structural artifact of the Intha society as a whole; in other words, the sociological and cosmological patterns do overlap to a tee: the social order (*pañja pwat*) *is* the cosmic order (*pañja tā:*) (Robinne 2000:160). As a matter of fact, the Phaung Daw U procession seems to have first been pretty much of an insignificant pagoda festival organised up in the Western hilly areas now inhabited by the Pa-O. From generations untold down to the 1960s, the procession had unfolded along a linear axis (from the hills down to the Lake, or later from the north of the lake upstream to Phaung Daw U) most probably divested of any symbolic reconstruction of the procession spatial framework. Since 1962 the procession has taken on a new symbolic dimension and its spatial framework was modeled upon the Buddhist cosmological correlation between five particular points, specifically between a center and four points encircling it¹⁴; according to the aforementioned Buddhist framework, the Phaung Daw U

¹⁴ The Chinese also connect the 'Five Basic Elements' (*Wūxíng* 五行) to organise their spatial environment on the symbolic basis of four cardinal points surrounding a center where the opposing forces cancel each other out (Needham & Wang 1956:262-3 ; Topley 2011:365-8).

pagoda (where most of the trustees are Intha) would become the symbolic center (the *maṅṭuiñ*) of an esoteric square surrounded by four Intha villages: Inde in the west, Naung Daw in the east, Nyaung Shwe in the north and Kyain Kham in the south; the procession is therefore a *pradakshina* circumambulation¹⁵ in and around an Intha symbolic realm, in which the other ethnic groups are complicit and consider as a commonality conducive to an interethnic harmony based on Buddhist norms whose moral authority was bestowed on the Intha and legitimated by a royal connection echoed in the Lake oral traditions; in other words, taking part to the circumambulatory procession (whose officiating positions are now exclusively held by Intha) might pretty much be congruent with an interethnic acknowledgement to partake in and of an Intha mandala.

An Intha mandala ? As stated afore, the Phaung Daw U procession might pretty much be equated with a foray into a symbolic reconstruction of the universe as the Intha see it; yet, what singles out the Intha is not so much the use of Buddhist symbols and cosmological norms *per se*, as these norms are shared by the surrounding (Theravadic) ethnic groups, but rather **their** use of these Buddhist norms as encompassing all and any facets of their social life, from the interethnic level (as typified in the Phaung Daw U procession) down to the village or individual (as the symbolism of the Intha tattoos exemplify) echelons: for the Intha, the social order *is* the cosmic order. To substantiate this claim, the symbolic morphology of the Intha vs. Taung'yo or Pa-O pagodas (*bhurā:* or *bhun:krī: kyoñ:*)¹⁶ and pagoda staging halls (*kyoñ: tō*) should be addressed at this point. First of all, the symbolic organisation of the Taung'yo and Pa-O (as well as traditional Intha) staging halls drastically differs from the 'post-1960s' Intha systematic reorganisation of the staging hall inner space, as (long) typified in Phaung Daw U.¹⁷ In the former, a varying number of Buddha images are **linearly** presented on a three-level altar overlooking the entrance stairway. For the latter, a **central and circular quinary-basis** organisation typifies the symbolic reconstruction of the staging hall; the five Buddha images move towards the center of the hall and are presented on an octagonal altar (*pallañ*) where the most sacred image, *Metteya*'s, is surrounded by four other Buddha images: those of the *Kakusandha*, *Koṇāgamana*, *Kassapa* and *Gotama* Buddhas. During the Phaung Daw U procession, *Metteya*'s image remains in the center of the staging hall, whereas the four other images stop off at, and are presented in, the 21 villages around the Lake. Secondly, as far as the location of the pagoda or monastery within the village is concerned, there also is a divergence between Intha and Taung'yo, Danu or Pa-O villages; for the former, the pagoda is granted a symbolic axial position; it becomes the symbolic, if not geographic, center of the village, from which a paradigm of cosmogony-induced favored and taboo locations within the village emerges. For the latter, the monasteries—yet sacred and whether they be in an outlying or in a central (geographic) position within the village—are not awarded such a symbolic axial position. Should we go down to any facet of the Intha social life, from the symbolic spatial organisation of the house down to the esoteric meaning of individual tattoos, the same symbolic framework would come forward¹⁸. Be that as it may, albeit the base-5 counting, the four points around a center and the *pradakshina* circumambulation do partake in the Taung'yo or Pa-O Theravadic conceptual framework, enlarging this framework to all the spheres of their own social life basically clicks empty to them, unlike the Intha.

¹⁵ *Pradakshina* (*pradakṣiṇa*) means a circular movement along the sunpath, from east westwards.

¹⁶ *Bhurā:* is the generic term for 'pagoda' whereas *bhun:krī: kyoñ:* means a 'staging monastery'.

¹⁷ It should be noted that the inclination to move the sacred images of Buddha towards the center was not so uncommon during the Pagan kingdom as soon as up in the twelve century AD (Pichard 2003) ; round the Inle Lake, it remains an intrinsic Intha reorganisation of the symbolic architectural sphere though.

¹⁸ As Robinne (1998 :354-5) pointed out, the markets are also organised according to a quinary basis with the centrality of the cycle in the Intha village of Rwa Ma in the center of the lake.

Furthermore, during the procession, the Intha ethnic bound is materialised by a cotton-made rope (*cañ khya*) symbolising the butterfly spirit or *lipprā*, that binds together each procession barge, whose rowers are Intha. All the procession oozes the Intha ethnic coherence and transports the neighbouring ethnic groups to the Intha symbolic universe, down to the barge layout, as the cotton thread that links each barge together symbolises the bound between the ethnic Intha butterfly spirit—or vital principle—that makes all its coherence and its materialised counterpart¹⁹: the procession. Accordingly, the Phaung Daw U procession might be considered as an interethnic venue whence an iconic representation of the Intha social order is disseminated into the neighbouring ethnic groups ethos; it dramatises, on a macro level, the Intha ethnic sense of self and (obliviously and seamlessly) imposes it as a normative standard to the neighbouring ethnic groups.

Besides, as the oral traditions throughout the region have it, the mission of proselytising Buddhism in the region bestowed on the Intha by Alaungsithu, a king who reigned during the Pagán Dynasty, all the more legitimises their symbolic sway over the area. In matter of fact, using cultural markers to hold an overarching ethnic construct together partakes in quite a prevalent tactical machinery, whether it be in Southeast Asia or in Europe; this issue will be briefly addressed in the following section.

(3) *The Pagán Dynasty as a focal ethno-historical legitimation*

As stated afore, predicating a ‘national’ or ‘ethnic’ legitimation upon a reconstructed past saturated with mythologised iconic deeds and institutions is not uncommon; through a complex semiotic process, this imagined past is made a psychological experience located in the affect, in the ‘subjectivity’, and is routinely mediated by an overarching ‘authority’ whose purpose is to impose a common ethnic or national sense of self as well as, as it is the case around the Inle Lake, a common acceptance of a particular interethnic structural networking. If the various nationalising processes in modern Europe predicated the legitimation of their newly-constructed national institutions upon the tradition of Roman Law and upon iconic Medieval myths (Geary 2003), the concept of a Burmese ‘nation’ would be rooted in and legitimated by two overlapping and interconnected focal markers: the Pagán Dynasty and Buddhism (Taylor 1987:150). Buddhism is central to the Burmese nationalism and, seconding Charney (2009), might even have shaped it since the Konbaung dynasty (1752-1885) onwards when religious symbols and motifs turned to “*basic cultural and ideological building blocks for nationalists*” (Smith 2003:254-5). The Pagán dynasty seems to have become an iconic referent to political unity from the very end of the 16th century onwards (Lieberman 1984:23-4); moreover, this Dynasty seems to have been associated right from the start to the expansion of Buddhism and to Buddhism being the very legitimation of any royal authority insofar as it would operate within a strictly Theravadic mindset²⁰. In other words, during the ethnicisation and nationalising processes constructed and mediated from the Konbaung dynasty onwards, Buddhism would become the cornerstone of a newly-implemented Burmese nationalism and the Pagán dynasty was made its symbolic referential mediator.

¹⁹ The *lipprā* (the ‘butterfly spirit’ or ‘vital principle’) is thought to bind both facets of all organisms together: the *rūpa* ‘bodily dimension’ to the *nāma* ‘spiritual or psychological dimension’ (Spiro 1982:86 ; Spiro 1978:69-70 ; Shway Yoe [1882] 1963:390-5). According to this Buddhist stance on Human duality, the procession would be the material, bodily, counterpart (*rūpa*) of the psychological Intha ‘ethnic sense of self’ (*nāma*).

²⁰ Even today, the shifting away from Rangoon and northwards to Central Burma of the capital-city *Naypyidaw* might pretty much be considered, on the one hand, as an attempt to obfuscate, if not obliterate, a colonial past typified by Rangoon, and, on the other hand, as a political symbolic strategy consisting in going back to the historical area whence the Burmese glorious past irradiated.

It is pretty much of a risky, yet not so futile, endeavor to date a particular regional oral tradition. Oral Tradition eventually addresses the "*fields of force*" or the "*chains of causation and consequence*" (Wolf 1982:18, 385) that affect a particular society; accordingly, identifying the critical tipping point where a society veered off course might give us pretty much of a temporal hint for the construction of a particular oral tradition. Though there are several kinds of oral traditions (Harkin 2010; Krech 1991), the main purpose of an oral tradition is intrinsically to mediate a particular semiotic construction—that is, a symbolic system—of a society as constructed and disseminated by an overarching socio-political authority through a textualisation of selected socio-historical and cultural iconic markers.

According to the various oral traditions that I recorded in Lak Maung Kwè (a Taung'yo village), Nyaung Shwe (among the Intha) and in Saik Pyo Myauk (a Pa-O village) in 2013 and 2014, as well as according to written essays on the history of the region (Taw bi Ta 1986 ; Trustees n.d.), the birth of Civilisation round the Lake is always connected to the arrival of King Alaungsithu in the region in the twelve century AD; he would have brought several Buddha images²¹ with him during his voyage downstream to "burmanise" the area. So the core frame of the local oral traditions goes and there are some toponymic and symbolic echoes of this royal landing in the area, including the *Karawik*-shaped²² prow of the main barge carrying the four Buddhas during the Phaung Daw U procession. This core frame seems to be the substrate of the common narrative, probably the oldest layer. It is not so unreasonable a claim, though uneasy to substantiate, to date back this substratic layer to the attempts of the Konbaung Dynasty (1752-1885), or of its literati, to implement a Burmese "proto"-nationalism ("Burmese-ness") and to burmanise its peripheral areas; the "*Glass Palace Chronicle*", compiled at the behest of King Bagyidaw as of 1829, would besides epitomise the historiographical stance to adopt and would somewhat help mediate a common ethnic sense of self, or a particular ethnic dynamics, that still resonates in the oral traditions round the Inle Lake. And indeed, the older layer of the oral traditions in Inle intersects with what is claimed in the *Chronicle*, particularly when both narrate that:

In a former life [...] king Alaungsithu was son of the Pateikkara king [...]. Accompanied by his fourfold army he [Alaungsithu] took the bones [of Pateikkara king] which Shin Araham had gathered, and [...] treasured them in Shwegu pagoda in the land of conquest. Then he [Alaungsithu] thought: 'It were better [...] to set the images of the Lord, Shinbyu and Shinhla, where the Lord is fain to dwell than to keep them in the palace and worship them'. So he set the two images of the Lord upon a raft and went upcountry attended by a host of fighting men [...]. (Pe Maung Tin & Luce [1923] 2008:120)

In other words, this very section of the *Chronicle* is mirrored in all the local oral traditions and would insert the Inle region in a common Burmese historiographical, politico-cultural (Buddhist) and ethnic framework. All the ethnic groups (except the Taung'yo) followed Alaungsithu to the Inle Lake and brought with them a glorious cultural past as typified by a Pagán dynasty connection and a Theravadic tradition.

²¹ According to the Phaung Daw U chronicles (Trustees n.d. ; Robinne 2009:173), Alaungsithu would have brought eight Buddha images with him, among which the five images hosted in Phaung Daw U.

²² The *karawik*-shape of the *phong* ("barge") prow is typical to the ancient royal barges (*karawikphong*); it echoes the royal origin of the procession, though it is hardly ever acknowledged as such among the protagonists. The *Karawik* is the Burmese version of Vishnu's mount, that is, the Solar Bird with a human body and the beak of an eagle, the sworn foe of the *Nagas* who rule over aquatic environments (Myanmar Language Commission 1978:5).

If this core frame is predicated upon a general frame of burmanisation of the region, the actual interethnic dynamics of today is intrinsic to the Inle Lake area. If all the oral traditions agree with the core narrative frame, they all equally agree with two important claims: (1) first of all, the Intha set sail to the Inle region in Alaungsithu's barge and were largely complicit in proselytising the region with their king; Alaungsithu's prestige as a Buddhist proselytiser being transferred to the Intha is the local twist to an old *topos* and is most likely congruent with the Shan being eclipsed by the Intha as the prevailing ethnic group at the threshold of the 1970's. (2) The second claim is that the Taung'yo had been living uphill long before the arrival of the other ethnic groups; therefore, according to all and any local oral traditions, they are considered as the rustic, primitive, autochthonous inhabitants of the region speaking a "heavy" language: being the primitive autochthonous ethnic group in the region is their structural position in the inter-ethnic dynamics that all the local oral traditions grant them.

3.- Taung'yo archaisms as an ethnodynamic patterning A linguistic anthropological approach

The interethnic dynamics in which the Intha conceptual universe dominates as a focal point being cast in relief, we can now gently move to how a particular ethnic community, the Taung'yo, indexes its position within this dynamics through the technical choice of phonetic markers, an archaising phonetic segment, in a specific interactional context. In this chapter, language will be considered as a cultural tool, insofar as the linguistic reference is a social act *per se* whose eventual purpose, if not *raison d'être*, is to get the various actors within a specific interactional environment to focus their attention on a strategically selected cognitive item drawn from a common social universe.

In other words, we shall now address the issue of how the position of the Taung'yo within the interethnic dynamics was textualised through an oral tradition aligning with the Intha pseudo-historical grand narrative and how this very position was indexed through the strategic choice of a phonetic segment in a particular context of interaction.

3.1. Local Oral Traditions and Interethnic Dynamics

The local oral traditions from today and the Shan Chronicles of Nyaung Shwe diverge as to when, how and why the Intha arrived in the Inle Lake area; according to the Shan chronicular sources compiled in 1926, the Intha would have reportedly departed from Tavoy, a city-port in the Mergui archipelago, to flee the wars against the Siamese that were raging during the 14th century (Harvey [1925] 2000:111-2) and would have sought refuge up in the north in the Lake area. It would only have been at the behest of Sao Hseng Hpa, founder of Nyaung Shwe in 1359, that they would have settled in the village of Nam Sè as servants of the Shan King; Sao Hseng Hpa would also have allowed two Intha (Nga Naung and Nga Thaung) to go back down to Tavoy in order to beckon 36 Intha families up into Nyaung Shwe and consequently foster, if not shore it up, the first Intha settlement in the region (Myin Maung 1984:33); according to another version (Enriquez 1933:16), the Intha would have been displaced from Tavoy and relocated in "four villages on the lake" (*'an: le: rwā*). On the other hand, the **INTHA** oral tradition, whose genesis seems to be more recent and on which the other oral traditions of the Lake line up, gives credit to the version according to which King Alaungsithu, returning from an expedition in Tavoy, would have marched northwards into the Shan State of *Kosāmbī* (Pain 2008:648), uphill from Nyaung Shwe; with deported populations in his wake, he allegedly ordered two Intha brothers from Tavoy (the aforementioned Nga Naung and Nga Thaung) to settle on the lake in order to spread the

Buddhist faith in the northern fringe of his kingdom. In a way or another, each ethnic community in the Lake region aligns its oral tradition with the Intha grand narrative.

The relationships between the Pa-O, Taung'yo, Danaw and, to some extent, the Danu, are typically occasional, and mainly operate during the pagoda festivals that punctuate the ritual life around the Lake. Conversely, the relationships between these hill ethnic communities and the Intha are tangibly more regular and complex and climax during (1) the pagoda festivals, (2) the buffalo transhumance (Robinne 1998) and (3) the market cycles (San San Myin 1998), all of these three activities being symbolically and economically dominated by the Intha. These (symbolic and economic) dependence relationships are mirrored in the alignment of their oral traditions with those of the Intha, if not the predication upon them. Accordingly, as the **PA-O** oral tradition has it, this ethnic group allegedly accompanied Alaungsitthu, in the barge of the Mon king Manoha²³, perchance to depart from the ethnic Myanma and, most probably, from the SLORC; historically, the Pa-O might be the first to have migrated northwards into the Inle region from the Gulf of Martaban in Lower Burma, most probably by the 10th century (Scott & Hardiman 1900:555). According to their oral tradition recorded in Nyaung Shwe, the **DANU**, who take up pretty much of a secondary position in the economic network centered around the Lake²⁴, would have been Alaungsitthu's elite soldiers, *kywan tō*, whom they purportedly escort up into the Inle Lake area²⁵. The **DANAW** would be the last to have migrated into the region (by the end of the 19th century); they only make up three households in the village of Nyaung Kun where they are largely outnumbered by Taung'yo and Pa-O. Furthermore, they dramatically lack a contrastive ethnic identification, which dooms them to quite an awkward position within the interethnic dynamics; their uneasiness to galvanise and mediate ethnic commonalities that would form the mainstay of their ethnic identification, and to therefore allow them to position themselves unambiguously in the interethnic network, is mirrored in their quite muddled oral traditions, inasmuch as Gotama Buddha would allegedly have demanded that their ritual speech be a Creole jumbling up Intha, Taung'yo, Shan and Pa-O²⁶; so their oral tradition goes. Yet, some Danaw informants working in the lowlands claim that their ancestors would have served Alaungsitthu as *kywan-tō*, that is, commoners attached to the Crown, along with the Intha, Danu, and Pa-O; they are therefore ultimately integrated into a common oral-tradition framework and consequently gently embrace the Intha grand narrative.

Two ethnic groups stand out though: the Shans and Taung'yo. The **SHAN** take up a very marginal place; they form an outnumbered ethnic minority in Nyaung Shwe and the last hamlets they still dwell in are all located in the In-Shan ("Shan of the Lake") enclave while their linguistic skills in their own language hardly edge the basics; they have always experienced fitful relationships with the ethnic Myanma and their oral traditions clearly echo this almost millennial and reciprocal mistrust. To top it off, their oral traditions are knowingly not intended to position them within the interethnic dynamics according to an arrival in the region of Inle along with Alaungsitthu, which demonstrates an obvious divisive position within the interethnic network. The position of the **TAUNG'YO** within the interethnic

²³ According to a version of this oral tradition that we recorded in the Pa-O village of Seik Pyo Myaut. Historically, the Pa-O would originate from the Gulf of Martaban in Lower Burma; their language is related to the Northern Karenic branch of Tibeto-Burman.

²⁴ They take up a prevailing position in the interethnic dynamics in the region of Pindaya, quite similar to the Intha position around the Inle Lake.

²⁵ Their skills as archers would possibly account for their autonym *Danu* meaning "bow" in Pāli (Myin Maung 1986:37-8).

²⁶ Danaw is a Palaungic language from the Mon-Khmer branch of Austroasiatic. In the Inle Lake region, even if their language is still vivid, they incline to speak Taung'yo in an interethnic context of communication.

dynamics is quite noteworthy. Historically, according to the pre-1962 traditions, the Taung'yo would have arrived in the region with the other Burmese ethnic groups and settled there before themselves, the Danu, and the Intha had embraced Theravada Buddhism (Lowis 1991:30). Conversely, according to the current Taung'yo oral tradition, their structural position in the interethnic dynamics is, on the one hand, to depart from the 'other' Burmese (Intha, Danu) and Pa-O newcomers, for the Taung'yo are said to be the autochthonous (Burmese) people inhabiting the region and, on the other hand, to accent their inclusion into the burmanisation process through their connection with the Pagán dynasty sealed in a royal marriage of a Taung'yo princess named *Veluvati*, the "Bamboo Princess", with King Anōratha and who is mentioned in the *Glass Palace Chronicle* (Pe Maung Tin & Luce [1923] 2008:18-9) as his sixth and last wife.

3.2. Autochthonous murmurs from the mountains: The Taung'yo

According to the Taung'yo oral tradition recorded in the hamlet of Lak Mong Kwé, the Taung'yo presence in the hills west of the Lake would date back to the Buddha's times, long before the first Burmese kingdom of Pagán was founded; as their tradition has it, the Taung'yo would have received the Buddha as a guest when He came to meditate up in the hills. Touched by the rusticity, courage and devotion of this hill people who watched over him, the Buddha would have named them "Rustic, courageous and honest (*rui:*) people [living in the] mountains (*toiñ*)," hence their ethnonym Taung'yo (*toiñrui*: [ṭ̃ar̃ɔ́:])²⁷. The position of the Taung'yo in the interethnic dynamics is therefore to be the indigenous rustic people inhabiting the region and so are they unanimously singled out and identified by themselves and the neighbouring ethnic communities. Furthermore, all the ethnic groups of the Lake equally agree to consider their language as strange-sounding ("*they speak heavy*"), linguistic apartness that seems to be quite an ancient stance as the Taung'yo were already mentioned in the epigraphy of Pagán as "foreigners," that is, those who speak a strange language (Myin Maung 1986:37-8).

This Taung'yo regional autochthony (and its semantically attendant rusticity, if not primitiveness) encoded in the Taung'yo oral tradition, and echoed in the oral traditions of the neighbouring ethnic communities, is indexed in a linguistic archaism that is only used in the specific interethnic communication context of a preparation of various religious and ritual activities as well as of a negotiation of the specific roles played by, and the detailed contributions bestowed on, the participants to these ritual activities. In a context of trade negotiations in the everyday life interaction, a specific position within an interethnic dynamics is not linguistically encoded. How the Taung'yo draw upon an "*ethnodiachrony*" (that is, a conscious semiotically-used linguistic change, or a linguistic sign dedicated to the expression of an ethnic deixis)²⁸ to legitimise their position within the interethnic dynamics is the issue that will be peered out into in the next section.

3.3. Indexing a community's position within an interethnic dynamics

The following section will address the issue of how the Taung'yo make use of a specific linguistic archaism in a particular communicative environment to align with their position in the local interethnic dynamics that the oral traditions grant them (that is, they are

²⁷ Robinne (2000b:67-8) mentions a slightly different version of this myth, but whose overall framework of the Taung'yo being autochthonous remains untouched though; his informant was an educated monk, a *phounji*, who was quite privy to the oral traditions of his own ethnic group. On the other hand, my informants all belonged to the *vulgus pecus* who, somehow and sometimes, had a vent over their 'ethnic imagination'.

²⁸ See Pain (2019a) on this issue.

the *primitive autochthonous* ethnic group living uphill). In other words, it will be shown what survives of an old linguistic code and be explored how and under what anthropological contingencies it reappears in a particular spoken discourse. To be more accurate, it will be shown which **social act** is at hand while using a particular paradigm of cultural signs (here a linguistic icon) selectively used, if not staged, in a particular context of social interactions.

Taung'yo [ṭʰər̥ɔː] belongs to the Southern Burmish group of the Lolo-Burmese branch of Tibeto-Burman, to which Central Burmese (or Standard Burmese) also belongs (Yabu 1981). Moreover, according to Bernot & Bruneau (1972:415), Taung'yo should be classified among the "Old Burmese type of dialects," in the sense that they would have maintained some archaic features. The other "Old Burmese type of dialects" are Arakanese [ṭʰə kʰaɪn] spoken in Arakan, Marma [məɾəmàː] spoken in the Chittagong Hill Tracts (Bangladesh); Intha [ʔʒɪ θáː] spoken in the Inle Lake area; Dawe [dəwɛː] in the region of Taninthayin in Southwestern Burma; Yaw [jɔː] spoken in the East of the Arakan Mountains on the plain extending between Saw and Seikpyu, as well as Danu [tʰəny] in the region of Pindaya are basically dialects close to Central Burmese as far as the un-palatalisation of the alveolar trill is concerned. What makes Taung'yo basically sounds "*archaic*" or "*heavy-sounding*" to their audience are (1) a specific **hypercorrective** pronunciation of the alveolar trill [-r-] as an initial of a word and in a medial position of a consonant cluster, and (2) the **erratic** use of the close-mid back vowel [ɔ] where it diachronically turns out to be basically irrelevant and unjustified. Incidentally, my Intha and Danu informants used to emulate the Taung'yo pronunciation with such phonetic sequences [ʔʒʔ rɔʔ pʰrɔʔ ʔʒʔ krɔʔ] when they wanted to joke and mock the Taung'yo; this might seem trivial, but it clearly shows how the Taung'yo are linguistically perceived: as a people speaking a strange archaic Burmese language.

A short sketch of the diachronic history of the Old Burmese trill [r] in an initial and medial position of a word might pretty much be useful at this point²⁹. As a general rule, the alveolar trill [r] palatalised in the huge majority of the Burmese dialects, [r] > [j], whether it be in an initial or medial position of a word; a noteworthy further evolution is to be found in the association of the velar plosives³⁰ with the palatal approximant [j], or *yod*; the telescoping of the palatal with the velars [k(ʰ) g(ʰ)] yielded a palatalisation of the velar plosives: [k(ʰ)-] + [j] > [ç(ʰ)-] and [g(ʰ)-] + [j] > [ʒ(ʰ)-]. The only Burmese dialects that underwent only a partial palatalisation process are Arakanese and Marma, an Arakanese dialect spoken in Bangladesh in the Chittagong Hill Tracts, along the border with Arakan in the westernmost rim of Burma.

²⁹ The linguistic development will not be addressed in depth here as it will most likely seem, if not be, irrelevant to a socio-cultural anthropologist. For an introduction to Burmese diachronic phonology, see Pain (2017) and Bradley (2002) among many others. It is worth mentioning that the palatalisation of the trill in consonant clusters (at least in the case of consonant clusters whose onset is a velar) seems to have taken place quite early; as a matter of fact, standard Old Burmese epigraphy attests some phonetic inconsistencies pointing to an early palatalisation as in standard Old Burmese (12th. century) *khynwe* "sweat" (Modern *khywe*: [çʰuɛː]) or *khlyiy* "dung" (Modern *khye*: [çʰiː]) where both the trill -r- and the palatal -y- are noted.

³⁰ As Nishi (1999:75) pointed out, the voiced plosives [g-gʰ ʒ-ʒʰ d-dʰ b-bʰ] (written *g-gh*, *j-jh*, *d-dh* and *b-bh* respectively) in Old Burmese are almost exclusively attested in loans; furthermore, there is no phonemic contrast between voiced and voiceless plosives in Old Burmese. Pain (2019b:127-31) might be consulted on the voiced vs. voiceless plosives issue typified in the problematic of the borrowing of the Old Burmese *phura*, etc. from Old Thai *brah*.

Old Burmese	Central Burmese	Marma ³¹	Intha	Taung'yo	Gloss
<i>khrok</i>	<i>khrok</i> [c ^h ɑʔ]	[k ^h ɾɔʔ]	[^h jɔʔ]	[c ^h ɣʔ]	"six"
<i>khri</i>	<i>khre</i> [c ^h i:/c ^h è:]	[k ^h ri:]	[k ^h è:]	[k ^h è:]	"foot"
<i>krok</i>	<i>krok</i> [cɑʔ]	[krɔʔ]	[cɔʔ]	[cɣʔ]	"afraid"
<i>krā</i>	<i>krā</i> [cà:]	[krà:]	[cà:]	[cɔ̀:]	"to inform"
(<i>ʔa</i>) <i>prat</i>	<i>phrat</i> [p ^h jaʔ]	[p ^h rasʔ]	[p ^h laʔ]	[ʔəʃrɔʔ]	"to cut off"
<i>hrai</i>	<i>ʔahrai</i> [ʔəʃin]	[ʔə ^h ɾàɔn]	[ʃèn]	[ʃɔ̀n]	"alive"
<i>hrui</i>	<i>hrwe</i> [ɕyè:]	[^h rwì:]	[ʃwè:]	[ɕwè:]	"gold"
<i>mrui</i>	<i>mrwe</i> [mjyè:]	[mrìn]	[mwè:]	[mwì:]	"snake"
<i>rwā</i>	<i>rwā</i> [jyà:]	[rwà:]	[rwà:]	[βà:]	"village"
<i>praññ</i>	<i>praññ</i> [pjì:]	[prɔ̀n]	[pjì:]	[ʃrè:]	"city"
<i>mrai</i>	<i>mrai</i> [mjìn]	[mrɔ̀n]	[mjèn]	[mrɔ̀n]	"to see"
	<i>palatalised</i> [r]>[j]	<i>rhotic</i> [r]>[r]	<i>palatalised</i> [r]>[j]	<i>palatalised</i> [r]>[j]	

Table 2. Rhotic vs. palatalised Burmese dialects

Taung'yo largely belongs to the "palatalised" Burmese dialects, even if there remain some scarce and sporadic instances of words where the trill, in onset [r-] or in consonant clusters [C·r-], have come down to us. Though scarce, those archaic-sounding [r]-words outnumber, by and large, the rare instances of Danu and Intha words attesting an alveolar flap [r] or lateral approximant [l] in initial consonant clusters, both being highly softened phonetic avatars of the trill; this pretty likely accounts for the ethno-iconic value conferred on the Taung'yo [r]-words, as well as the surfeit of hypercorrective attestations of these words in a *curum* context of interaction.

The list below gives some rhotic words, that is, words that are always pronounced with the trill, whether it be in everyday-life interactions or in a *curum* context of interaction; the list of rhotic words presented below is basically it. Incidentally, the ratio *rhotic* vs. *palatalised* [r]-words from my field wordlist grossly corresponds to the ratio attested in Scott & Hardiman's (1900:646-59) and Yabu's (1981:161-81) wordlists. To this list, their autonym *toñrui*: "Taung'yo" should be added; quite interestingly, it is pronounced [ʃarɣ:] or [ʃrɣ:] in an everyday-life interactional context, whereas it is emphatically pronounced with the "heavy-sounding" back vowel [ɣ] in the *curum* interactional context: [ʃrɣɣ:].

³¹ The Marma data were collected in Bandarban, Chittagong Hill Tracts, during two fieldworks with Dr. Sikder Murshed (University of Dhaka) in Bangladesh in 2013 and 2014.

Transliterated	Phonemised	Gloss
'arui:	[ʔarɯ:]	"bone"
tarā	[tʰarà:]	"100"
'are	[ʔarè:]	"skin"
kre	[kʰrè:]	"deer"
mre ("earth")	[mrè:]	"valley"
khyam:	[krón]	"cold"
kra	[krɔ]	"to drop, to fall"
khyui	[kʰrɯ:]	"sweet (taste)"
praññ	[pʰrè:]	"city (=Nyaung Shwe)"
mrañ	[mròn]	"to see"
'aprat	[ʔəpʰrɔʔ]	"to cut off"
pre:	[pʰrè:]	"to run"
mran	[mròn]	"quick"
phraññ:	[pʰrɯ:]	"slow"
pre:	[pʰrè:]	"to divide"
khraññ	[kʰrè:]	"to tie"
phre	[pʰrè:]	"to untie"
mlac ("lake")	[mrɔʔ]	"Inle Lake"
'apra	[ʔəpʰrɔ:]	"blue"
'aprañ	[ʔəpʰrɔn]	"outside"
praññ.	[pʰrɯ]	"full"
mrok	[mrɔʔ]	"north"
'amrè	[ʔəmrè:]	"always"
kyon:	[ʔəkrɯ:]	"monastery"

Table 3. Some Taung'yo rhotic words

The issues that will now be addressed is through and by which process the selection of a particular phonetic sequence in a particular context of interaction helps establish an existential relation with a given social referent (here, a position within the interethnic dynamics that has largely been dealt with afore) and becomes performative as well as what kind of agency is at work in establishing a link between each individual agent and the shared social structure during a specific kind of social interaction. In other words, we will deal with an indexical approach to culture and the conversational element of social agency.

First of all, two contexts of social interactions are to be singled out. The first context is the everyday life interactional context; this context is characterised by a linguistically "normal" (according to the diachronic rules) use of language in social interactions; in this interactional context, the Taung'yo speak their language in a normal way, without the erratic "heavy-sounding use of the back close-mid vowel [ɤ] and the hypercorrective archaising pronunciation of the alveolar trill [r]. The second context of interaction is the one generated during the *curum* ([sù:joùn] in Intha) "assembly," where about all the ethnic groups round the lake attend the meeting in order to speak about the preparation of *Shimbyu*'s, pagoda celebrations, organisation of market cycles, or the organisation of the Phaung Daw U procession, etc.; in this interactional context, all the ethnic groups speak their own language (except the Danaw who speak Taung'yo and the In-Shan communicating in Intha) and the Taung'yo indexed their position within the interethnic dynamics by using the archaising use of the alveolar trill [r] and heavy-sounding vowel [ɤ]. There is absolutely nothing ritualistic or ritualised during these meetings, except that they all speak their own language.

Furthermore, and quite notably, it is pretty much about a conspicuous **inclination** to use an archaic phonetic sequence in order to index an ethnic position within a *curum* interactional environment than a general rule *per se*; in matter of fact there are instances where a phonetic sequence of a word is archaised in a sentence, whereas the same word is pronounced as in an everyday-life interaction in another sentence, whether it be pronounced during the interaction by the same or a different Taung'yo speaker; for example, let us consider the two corpus fragments below³²:

- | | | | | | |
|-----|---|---|--|--|---|
| (1) | ရွာစုကြီး-အထက်-မာ
<i>rwācukrī:-'athak-mā</i>
He.[Chief of village]-above-at
[<i>rwà:sakrí:-ʔatʰɔʔ-mà:</i>
"He has four older brothers" | အယ်-လေး-ဆ
<i>'ay-le:-khā</i>
elder.brother-four-CLF
<i>ʔè:-lɛ́:-kʰà:</i> | ရှိ
<i>hri</i>
exist
<i>ʰrì</i> | | |
| (2) | စုရုံ-မာ
<i>curum-mā</i>
meeting-at
[<i>sərũm-mà:</i>
"How many people are there at the assembly?" | တကိုလောင်း
<i>takuilon:</i>
body
<i>ʔəkʰlɛ́m</i> | တာမာ-ဆ
<i>tāmā-khā</i>
how.many-CLF
<i>ʔəmà:-kʰà:</i> | ရှိ
<i>hri</i>
exist
<i>ɕì:</i> | လော
<i>lo</i>
QUEST
<i>lè:</i> |

if we compare (1) and (2); we will notice that, in (1), the [r] of *hri* "exist" is emphatically pronounced [*ʰr-*], whereas in (2) the very same *hri* "exist" is pronounced [*ɕì:*] as in a "normal" everyday-life interactional context, yet being used during the *curum*; just the *-r-* in *curum* is emphatically pronounced [r]. The major point being that, when possible in a sentence, one archaising phonetic sequence should be pronounced during a *curum* for an ethnic indexicalisation purpose.

Some more conversational fragments drawn from (1) everyday-life interactions and (2) from *curum*-interactions might be useful at this point to substantiate and typify the indexicalisation of the Taung'yo ethnic position within the interethnic dynamics during these assemblies (*curum*) where the various ethnic communities living around the Lake (Intha, Taung'yo, In-Shan, Pa-O and some very rare Danu and Danaw) congregate. The conversational topics during these assemblies range from discussing about pagoda fairs or even *shimbyu*'s to economic arguments about the market cycles, and the "staging" of the Phaung-daw U Pheya Pwè, etc. It should also be added that the meeting is devoid of any ritualised or ritualistic component, except that each community communicate in its own language (the In-Shan are Intha native speakers and the Danaw most often speak Taung'yo). Actually and eventually, these meetings or inter-ethnic assemblies just seamlessly delineate

³² The Taung'yo data were collected in Nyaung Shwe for the *curum* corpus and, for the 'everyday-life' Taung'yo data, in Lak Maung Kwe (*lak moñ kwe:*) in the mountains west of the lake, some 3 hours away on foot from Nyaung Shwe. Selected parts of the corpus were transliterated into Burmese writing with the help of Mr. Ko Aung (from the Taung'yo ethnic community) and Mr. Min Min (from the Intha ethnic community). Their profound knowledge of their language alone makes this work possible. Okell (1969) was used for the morpho-syntactic chunking and analysis of the corpus. *Abbreviations*: 1.SG = "personal pronoun, 1. pers. singular"; CLF = "classifier"; CTR = "affix marking a contrast"; FP.app = "final particle used to seek approval"; FP.emph = "final particle used for emphasis"; FP.proh = "final particle used to mark prohibition"; FUT = "verb affix marking a future tense"; NEG = "negation verb affix"; NFUT = "non-future verb affix"; PLUR = "plural affix"; POS = "noun affix marking a genitive construction"; QUEST = "question—polar or open— marker"; SM.fif = "subordinate marker used to indicate that the action is now fulfilled"; SM.if = "subordinate marker used to introduce an if-clause"; SM.rel = "subordinate marker used for relative clause construction"; SM.sim = "verb subordinate marker for simultaneous actions"; SUBJ = "marks the subject of a transitive or intransitive verb".

the ethnic position of each community in pretty much of a pleasant "chatting-and-drinking" *Stimmung* where any community is aware, and proud, of the ethnic position bestowed upon each one of them.

Everyday-life interactional context

- (3) တောင်ရိုး-စကား ပြော-နိုင်-လော
toñrui:-cakā prō-nuiñ-lo
 [၎်စာ်း-ဆေကံး ဟဲး-ဂဲး-လဲး]
 Taungyo-language speak-capable-QUEST
 "Can you speak Taung'yo?"
- (4) ငါ ရှမ်း-စကား ပြော-တတ်-ဘူး
nā hram:-cakā prō-tat-bhū:
 1.SG Shan-language speak-able-NEG
 [ဂဲး နမ်း-ဆေကံး ဟဲး-၎်စာ်း-ပဲး]
 "I don't speak Shan"
- (5) ဘုရားတက်-ပြီး ဆု-တောင်း-ကြ-ရ-မယ်
bhurā: tak-prī: chu-toñ:-kra-ra-may
 holy-go up-SM.sim reward-ask.for-PLUR-must-FUT
 [ပဲးဂဲး ဝဲး-၎်စာ်း နဲး-ဂဲး-ဂဲး-မဲး]
 "We have to go to the pagoda"
- (6) ဟာ တောင်ရိုး-ကြီး ဝတ္တရား ဤ
hā toñrui:-krī: wattarā: 'i:
 that Taungyo-great duty FP.emph
 [ဟဲး ဝဲး-ကံး-ကံး ဝဲး-၎်စာ်း-ပဲး ဝဲး]
 "That is the duty of the Taung'yo people"

We could easily increase the everyday-life conversational fragments corpus tenfold here, but this would most probably just lead to a reader-fatigue and, anyway, confirm that Taung'yo remains largely palatalised, except for the list of the rhotic words mentioned afore. The situation is quite shifting in the case of a *curum* context of interaction though, as the examples below will incline to testify.

Curum interactional context

- (7) ဘုန်းကြီး ဓနု-စကား ပြော-တတ်-ဘူး
bhun:krī: dhanu.-cakā prō-tat-wū:
 I-Senior Monk Danu-language speak-able-NEG
 [ပဲးဂဲး ဝဲး-ဆေကံး ဝဲး-၎်စာ်း-ပဲး]
 "I can't speak Danu"
- (8) မ-နားလည်-တဲ အကြောင်း-တွေ မ-ပြော-နဲ့
ma-nā:-laññ-tè. ʔakroñ:-twe ma-prō-nè.
 NEG-understand-NFUT-SM.rel matter-PLUR NEG-speak-FP.proh
 [မဲး-ဂဲး ဝဲး-၎်စာ်း-ပဲး မဲး-ဝဲး-၎်စာ်း-ဂဲး]
 "Don't speak about what you don't understand"

- (9) စုရုံ-ဆီ-မာ အဓိက ဇာ ဆွေးနွေး-ကြ-မ-အား
curum-chī-mā *ʔadhika* *jā* *chwe:nwe:-kra-ma-'ā:*
 assembly-LOC-at principal what discuss-PLUR-FUT-QUEST
 [sə̀rúː-sʰ-màː] ʔətɪkɔ̃ zàː sʰwéːnwéː-krɔ̃-mə-ʔáː
- တိုက်-စုကြီး-က ဆွေးနွေး-ချင်-မယ်-လဲ
tuik-cukriː-ka *chwe:nwe:-khyān-may-lè*
 Chief-SUBJ discuss-want-FUT-QUEST
 ၎်ဒ်sə̀kríː-kɔ̃ sʰwéːnwéː-krúːm-mèː-léː]
 "What will be the main point of discussion at this assembly; what do you want to discuss?"
- (10) ဘုန်းကြီး-သုံး-ပါး တောင်ကြီး-ခ စုရုံ-မာ ကြ-ကြ-မယ်
bhun:kriː-sumː-pā: *tonkriː-kha* *curum-mā* *krwa-kra-may*
 monk-three-CLF Taunggyi-from assembly-at come.[monk]-PLUR-FUT
 [pə̀ŋkriː-θáː-θ̃rúː] ၎်ဒ်ə̀ŋkriː-kʰɔ̃ sə̀jɪm-màː krɔ̃-krɔ̃-mə̃]
 "Three monks have to come to the assembly from Taunggyi"
- (11) ဘုရား-ပွဲ-မာ မောင်မောင်-ရဲ ခြင်းကြား ရောင်း-သေးရင်
bhurā:-pwè-mā *moñmoñ-rè.* *khraṅkrā* *ronː-sō:rañ*
 pagoda-event-at Maung Maung-POS vannery sell-SM.if
 [pʰrúː-θ̃wéː-màː] mʰmmʰ-rɕ cʰŋkɪkráː rʰː-θáːrʰː
- ကောင်း-မ-လာ သိ-ဘူး နော်
koñː-ma-lā *si-bhū:* *no*
 good-FUT-QUEST know-NEG FP.app
 kʰm-mə-làː θ̃ː-βúː nʰːː]
 "It would be nice if we sell MM's vannery at the pagoda fair, wouldn't it"
- (12) ဟာ-စုရုံ-ခ စ-ပြီး အရပ်-အား-တော့-ဘူး-ဤ
hā-curum-kha *ca-priː* *'arup-'ā:-tō.-bhūː-'i:*
 this-curum-from begin-SM.flf business-come-CTR-NEG-FP.emph
 [hàː-sùːrúː-kʰɔ̃] sɔ̃-θ̃rúː ʔə̀rə̀ʔ-ʔáː-θ̃ŋ-βúː-ʔéː]
 "It's really the last time I try to do business with this assembly"

It is quite clear from the corpus presented afore that the *curum* context of interaction is characterised by the use of hypercorrective rhotic forms felt as iconically archaising by the neighbouring ethnic communities and used by the Taung'yo, I hypothesised, to index their position as the autochthonous people in the Inle Lake region within the interethnic dynamics symbolically and economically dominated by the Intha. Accordingly, this hypercorrective archaising rhotic phonetic sequence is used as an ethno-indexical marker.

	Everyday-life	Curum	Gloss
<i>prō</i>	[hò:]	[ḡrò:]	"to speak"
<i>bhurā:</i>	[pʰjá:]	[pʰrú:]	"pagoda, holy, HON"
<i>pri:</i>	[ḡwí:]	[ḡrí:]	"SM.sim"
<i>kra</i>	[cɸ]	[krɸ]	"PLUR"
<i>ra</i>	[jɸ]	[rɸ]	"AFF.must"
<i>wattarā:</i>	[ʔḡḡəjá:]	[ʔḡḡərú:]	"duty"
<i>bhun:kri:</i>	[pʰḡḡkí:]	[pʰəḡkrí:]	"monk"
<i>'akron:</i>	[ʔəcʰ:]	[ʔakrɛ:]	"matter"
<i>curum</i>	[səjḡ:]	[sù:rḡ:]	"meeting, assembly"
<i>tuikcukri:</i>	[ḡʰʔsəkwí:]	[ḡʰʔsəkrí:]	"chief of a group of villages"
<i>khrañ</i>	[cʰḡ]	[kʰrḡ]	"AFF.want"
<i>tonkri:</i>	[ḡḡncí:]	[ḡəḡkrí:]	"Taunggyi" (name of city)
<i>krwa</i>	[kwɸ]	[krɸ]	"to come" (speak of monk)
<i>rè.</i>	[jɸ]	[rɸ]	"POSS"
<i>khrañkra</i>	[cʰḡcà:]	[cʰḡḡkrá:]	"kind of vannery"
<i>ron:</i>	[jḡ:]	[rɛ:]	"to sell"
<i>sō:rañ</i>	[θó:jḡ:]	[θó:rḡ:]	"SM.if"
<i>capri:</i>	[sɸ-ḡwí:]	[sɸ-ḡrí:]	"begin-SM.flf"
<i>hri</i>	[cì:]	[ʰrì:]	"to exist"
<i>rwācukri:</i>	[βà:səkwí:]	[rwà:səkrí:]	"chief of village"
<i>pā:</i>	[ḡá:]	[ḡrú:]	"CLF.monk"

Table 4. Summarising table

Some grammatical notes. Taung'yo remains a dramatically under-documented language³³; it seems therefore reasonably relevant, or interesting anyway, to somewhat address some of its morphosyntactic oddities at this point. In corpus fragment (1), *'athak* [ʔətʰɔʔ] "above" in Taung'yo (whence TG) corresponds to standard Central Burmese (whence SCB) *'apo* [ʔəpò:]. TG *mā* [mà:] "at" corresponds SCB to *hmā* [ʰmà:]. TG *'ay* [ʔè:] "elder brother" corresponds to SCB *'akui* [ʔəkò:]; incidentally, TG *'ay* [ʔè:] might be a borrowing from Intha [ʔè:] "(girl's) younger brother" which in turn is quite likely a loan from Shan [ʔɛ:55] "appellation given to females"; the semantic shift from one kin branch to another remains disturbing though. TG *khā* [kʰà:] "CLF.human beings" corresponds to SCB *yok* [jəwʔ]. The SCB verb affix for a non-future tense *-tay* [-dè:] can be omitted in Taung'yo, as in *hri* "it exists," used as an alternative form to *hri-tay* [ʰrì:/cì:-ḡè:]; this might possibly be due to an Intha interference. In corpus fragment (2), TG *takuilon:* *tāmā-khā* [ḡəkòlɛm ḡəmà:-kʰà:] "body-how.many-CLF.human" (= "how many people?") corresponds to SCB *lū bhayhna-yok* [lù: pè: ʰnà: jəwʔ] "person-how.many-CLF.human". TG *lo* [lè:] "QUEST" corresponds to SCB *lè* [lè:]; the dialectal or diachronic origin of TG *lo* is not clear to me. In corpus fragment (3), TG *prō* "speak" is strangely pronounced [hò:] in everyday-life interaction instead of [ḡjò:]. In corpus fragment (4), TG *nā* [ḡà:] "I" is the only 1. pers. pronoun to be used where SCB would use a large range of pronouns such as *kywanto* [cəñò:] for a male speaking with someone of his age (or older), its feminine semantic counterpart *kywanma* [cəmà:] or *kyup* [cɸwʔ] "I" used by the older people in the countryside; in SCB, *nā* [ḡà:] is considered as rude. TG *prō-tat-bhū:* [hò:-ḡɔʔ-βú:] "speak-able-NEG" ("I can't speak") corresponds to SCB *ma-prō-tat-bhū:* [mə-pjò:-dəʔ-βú:] "NEG-speak-able-NEG"; the first verb negation affix (*ma-*) is often dropped in TG; the second verb negation affix *bhū:* [βú:] (SCB [bú:]) might be an Intha

³³ The only short linguistic sketch that we have is to be found in Japanese (Yabu 1981).

interference where the same verbal negation pattern is used as in: Intha *swā:-bhū:* [s^hwá:-ʔú:] "GO-NEG" (TG *swā:-bhū:* [θwá:-βú:] but SCB *ma-swā:-bhū:* [mə-θwá:-bú:]). In corpus segment (6), TG *hā* [hà:] "that" corresponds to SCB *'edā* [ʔədà:]; TG affix marking "emphasis" at the end of the sentence *'i:* [ʔí:] is a borrowing from Intha and corresponds to SCB *pè* [bè:]; *toñrui:-krī:* [ʔərɔ́:-kí:] "the Great Taung'yo" is an alternative autonym to *toñrui:-lūmyui:* [ʔərɔ́:-lù:mjɔ́:] "Taung'yo people". In corpus fragment (9), TG *'ā:* [ʔá:] "AFF.content-question" corresponds to SCB *lè* [lé:]; it is a borrowing from Intha; TG *jā* [zà:] "what" corresponds to SCB *bhā* [pà:]; moreover, it should be pointed out that the title *tuikcukrī:* "chief of a group of lacustrine villages" is almost exclusively used in spoken discourse; in the administrative documents this title has been replaced by Pāli *'ukketa* since the 1962-Coup; *tuik* "a group of lacustrine villages" has also been replaced by *'up cu* in the administrative documents. In fragment (11), TG *-sō:rañ* [-θó:rɔ́:] "SM.if" corresponds to SCB *-rañ* [-jɔ́n]. Finally, in sentence (12), TG *'arup* [ʔərɔ́ʔ] "trade; work" is a hypercorrective form of Intha *'alup* [ʔəjɔ́ʔ] "work"; TG *kha* [k^hɰ] "AFF.from" corresponds to SCB *ka* [kə].

Making use of phonological diachronies, an archaising phonetic sequence to be more specific, in order to index an ethnic identification calls for some further comments. Even if speakers generally have little or no consciousness of the history of their own language, I would claim that they entertain a socially accepted linguistic objectiveness according to which "this or that" sounds older, sounds prestigious or, anyway, somewhat different than a standard would eventually impose; it doesn't involve a profound diachronic reasoning or analysis of their own language but rather, since speakers are in constant contact with the way the older generations speak, or with different dialects or sociolects of their own language, they do actually know what are archaic, prestigious, etc. linguistic features and they do know, or are socially taught of, what to do with those linguistic features and for what purpose; in this sense, some linguistic changes may be used as an ethno-indexical marker, i.e. to mark out an ethnic sense of self of a group in opposition to another speaking a close dialect.

The use made by the Taung'yo of an archaising phonetic sequence to index their position within the interethnic dynamics is predicated upon quite an unstable system prone to **hypercorrection** and largely based on **literacy**, on the prevalence of the written form of language in Burmese culture and history; some examples to substantiate this claim might be useful at this point. First of all, there are a handful of words where the phonetic insertion of the trill as an outset of a consonant cluster is in no way diachronically relevant (that is justified in its written form), as the classifier used to number the monks *pā:* read [p̣rà:] (see sentence 7 from our corpus) where the trill is emerging from basically nowhere and which might be a hypercorrective form originating from its association with *bhurā:* [p̣^hrà:] used as an honorific; another example is to be found in fragment 9 of the corpus where [kṛəm] "AFF.want" is a hypocorrective pronunciation of *khyañ* and in fragment 12 where *'arup* [ʔərɔ́ʔ] "work" is a hypercorrective form of Intha *'alup* [ʔəjɔ́ʔ]. Secondly, the prevalence of hypercorrective written forms might be typified, I would suggest, in Taung'yo loans from neighbouring languages; *prwan* [p̣rɔ́n] "bamboo pipe" is quite likely a borrowing from Intha *prwan* [p̣jɔ́n] "pipe", as the pronunciation of rhyme *pr-wan* [-ɔ́n] instead of the regular Taung'yo pronunciation [-ɔ́n] would suggest; a hypercorrective trill [ṛ] was reintroduced in Taung'yo on the basis of the Intha written form; [p̣rú:] "kind of rake made of bamboo" might also be a borrowing from Intha *phyū:* [p̣^hjú:] "comb" in which an obscure hypercorrective trill [ṛ] was reintroduced, I very tentatively hypothesise, from its written form in standard Central Burmese *phrī:* [bí:] "comb". Some Pa-O consonant clusters such as

[C·z], written *C.l-*, yield a hypercorrective borrowed written form *C.r-* in Taung'yo and are read [C·r] in the *curum* context of interaction, as in:³⁴

PA-O		TAUNG'YO		Glose
Written	Phonemised	Written	Phonemised	
<i>khli</i>	[k ^h ʒi: ⁴⁴]	<i>khri:</i>	[k ^h rɪ: ⁴⁴]	"bow"
<i>phle</i>	[p ^h ʒe: ²²]	<i>phre</i>	[p ^h rɛ: ²²]	"to buy"
'āplo' 'skin'	[ʔa ³³ p ^h ʒoʔ ³⁴]	<i>prok</i>	[p ^h rɔʔ]	"fur"
<i>ta phlū</i> 'road'	[tə ³³ p ^h ʒu: ³⁴]	'aphrū:	[ʔəp ^h rú: ³⁴]	"path in the mountain"

Table 5. Hypercorrective Taung'yo loans from Pa-O
(*Curum* context of interaction)

As aforementioned, the prevalence of the written form in Taung'yo spoken discourse in an assembly interactional context takes its root, I would suggest, in the highly valued share **literacy** takes in Burmese culture. As a matter of fact, as Spiro (1982:307, n.2) noticed, the literacy rate in pre-modern Burma was most probably the highest in Asia³⁵ and one of the highest in the world; this high literacy rate might be consonant with the role of the Buddhist monk as a school teacher in pre-modern Burma³⁶, as Burmese male children spent quite a stretch of a time to study at the feet of Buddhist monks in their villages (Shway Yoe [1882] 1963:35)³⁷. The growing prevalence of literacy in Burma is quite likely to date back from the 18th century, probably as an aftermath of "localisation" processes according to which various Theravadic written texts, meditation and astrological manuals, medical treatises, law codes, etc., initially written in Pāli were "vernacularised", that is, translated into Burmese³⁸ in order to be spread among the lay population (Lieberman 2003:197-8), which eventually inflated the literacy rate in Burma. Furthermore, what might have played an equally

³⁴ The Pa-O data were collected in 2014 in the Pa-O village of Seik Pyo Myauk (*cuik pyui: mrok*), in the hills east of the Lake, some 20 minutes away on foot from Nyaung Shwe.

³⁵ It should be noted that even in traditional China, the literacy rate was not as high as in Burma. Incidentally, the role of the Buddhist monk as a teacher for the laity is a peculiarity of the Theravadic tradition in Burma; many Chinese Buddhist monks or Taoist priests did not play any role in the secular process and many of them were illiterate; literacy was a Confucian elitist monopoly (Yang 1963:337-8, quoted in Spiro 1982:307, n.2).

³⁶ Particularly dating back from the later part of the 18th century when monks began to be seen as masters of texts *per se* (Charney 2006:50).

³⁷ As far as modern Burma is concerned, more specifically the education of the Taung'yo children in 2013-14, young children are taught in their hamlet in class given by Intha primary school teachers coming up to the Taung'yo hilly regions. Incidentally, it should be pointed out that the social morphology of the Burmese monasteries is twofold; on the one hand, the monks are involved in the Great-Tradition component of Buddhism (the *vinaya* 'discipline') and on the other hand, they are involved in the *dassana* 'lay religion'; in the latter component, the monks are involved, among others, in the preparation of horoscopes for lay families, they provide for popular astrological cults, and teach to the laity. The very dual conception of religion as the Burmese understand it where *vinaya* and *dassana* overlap is therefore mirrored in the very social morphology of the Burmese monastery; this implies, towards the absolute, that even teaching to lay children is a religious act *per se* that eventually partakes in the Burmese ethnicisation process. It should nonetheless be mentioned at this point that since the end of the 1980s, the junta (now the federal government) has implemented a "Burmanisation" plan; one of its pillars, whose purpose was supposed to speed up the Burmanisation process, was the erection of state-run schools in the most remote areas of the country to be superposed on the traditional teaching offered in the Buddhist monastery schools (*bhun:krī: kyōñ*).

³⁸ Not to mention the *Nissaya Burmese*, which is a Burmese that mirrors Pāli morphosyntactic patterns and that is used in translations of some Pāli texts (Okell 1967:96).

important role in spreading literacy among the Burmese population was the vernacularisation of Sanskrit epics such as the *Rāmāyaṇa* which in turn provided important source material for public performances during fairs (*pwè*) sponsored by local officials such as *Myosugyi (mruik. cukrī:)* or township headmen (Charney 2006:56). Be that as it may, literacy is deeply anchored in the Burmese *ethos* and even an uninformed tourist could not but be impressed by the large number of bookshops found even in small rural hamlets; the keenness to have books for a Burmese and the greatest reverence they pay to their books might be a consequence of this solidly rooted importance of literacy; it was already noticed by Yule (1858:182) when he reported that *"to sit on a box of books they would consider absolute profanation."* Accordingly, from a Burmese perspective, phonemising a written form in a hypercorrect way to index an ethnic identification makes sense somehow.

Taung'yo is not unique in making use of a phonetic segment to index a social meaning, an ethnic identification to be more accurate. As matter of fact, utilising a phonetic segment to index an ethnic or a social identification as well as a psychological state is pretty much of a common phenomenon across languages. As a rule, two phonetic segments are used contrastively to encode a particular social meaning (in contrast to another) in a very specific context of interaction. Some examples might be useful at this point. In Australian English (Wierzbicka 1986), the use of the anti-diminutive form (that is, monosyllabisation + [z]) of the first-name as a term of address (as in *Caz* [kʰæz] for Caroline, *Gaz* [gæz] for Gavin or *Julz* [dʒulz] for Julie) indexes "anti-elitism and solidarity," cherished and important, if not iconic, markers in the Australian ethnic identification. Contrastively, the abbreviated form of the first name (as in *Bobby* for Robert or *Freddie* for Frederic), which is pretty common in the English-speaking community as a whole, indexes, and inclines to conjure up, pretty much a "patronising", if not condescending, relationship to the addressee, at least in an Australian cultural context. Another example: in French a heavy irritation might be indexed through the use of a palatalisation [k-]>[kʲ-], as in *"tu m'casses les couilles"* [ty mkas lɛ kuj] ("You're a pain in my ass") vs. *"tu me 'kʲasses les 'kʲouilles"* [ty mə 'kʲas lɛ 'kʲuj] ("You REALLY are a pain in my ass"). The same phenomenon is at work in Taung'yo: the use of a phonetic segment C+[r], in contrast to another (C+[palatalisation]), in a particular context of interaction (everyday life vs. assembly context of interaction) indexes an ethnic identification within an interethnic dynamics framework.

	Context 1	Context 2	Indexed social meaning
<i>Australian</i>	polysyllabic + <i>-ie/-y</i>	monosyllabic + [-z]	"anti-elitism"
<i>French</i>	velar [k]	palatalisation: [kʲ-]	"heavy irritation"
<i>Taung'yo</i>	C + <i>palatalisation</i>	trilled consonant clusters	"autochthonous-ness"

Indexical markers

Table 6. Contrastive phonetic segments as indexical markers

It seems now reasonably relevant to somewhat address the issue of what a *"context"* basically is. Bronislaw Malinowski was the first fieldwork anthropologist to promote a study of language spoken by the people under his ethnographic scrutiny and the context in which some words acquired a particular value according to a particular context and to open a more intimate window into the way the "natives" viewed their world; he wanted to *"grasp the native's point of view, his relations to life, to realize his vision of his world"* (Malinowski [1922] 1964:25). Linguistic anthropologists owe Malinowski's ethnographic theory of

language (Malinowski 1923) two major key concepts: the concept of **context of situation**³⁹ and the idea of language as a **mode of action**. With the 1960's and the ethnographic approach of language as well as the adoption of an anthropological stance upon language emerging, the "context" became a key issue in linguistic anthropology and analytical tools and units of analysis to define the context of speech needed to be identified and gave rise to the 'SPEAKING-Model' (the acronymic 'SPEAKING' standing for **S**ituation, **P**articipants, **E**nds, **A**ct **S**equences, **K**ey, **I**nstrumentalities, **N**orms, and **G**enre (Hymes 1974); in other words, the study of "context" de-encapsulated language from the formal system that isolated it from society and culture and allowed to focus the linguistic anthropologists' attention upon the institutions that coordinate the behavior of members of a particular society (Goodwin & Duranti 1992:1); moreover, language was identified as the "*primordial locus for sociality*" (Schegloff 1987:208). In other words, one of the key issues in linguistic anthropology is not so much how context is used to interpret and elucidate the communicational meanings during social interactions but rather what is "context" *per se*. Under the impulse of linguistic anthropology, the very concept of "context" was also revisited by a number of socio-cultural anthropologists, revisions typified in the collective work *The Problem of Context* edited by Dilley (1999). Be that as it may, the Taung'yo data presented afore would tend to indicate and point to the dynamics of context; the Taung'yo use of linguistic archaisms in order to legitimise their position within the interethnic dynamics is not so much adapting to the interactional context but is rather activating a new context through language, through the selective choice of some linguistic signs that are integrated into a larger field of human sociality called "social agency" through an indexicalisation—by a phonetic sequence—of a social referent (here, a position within an interethnic dynamics); this indexical approach to language-culture and the specific social agency at work in the Inle Lake interethnic dynamics will be dealt with in the following paragraphs.

"Indexicality" is an important concept and pretty much of a pressing issue in linguistic anthropology as it highlights how language and social relations intersect. It pinpoints the property of linguistic expressions (whether they be words, phonetic segments, or even a language *per se* in its iconic dimension) to help establish a mental connection between a linguistic segment and its spatial, temporal or even social referent. Following Silverstein (1976), two different kinds of indices (that is, linguistic signs that will stand for other signs through an indexicalisation process) are to be singled out. Those that are context-dependent, as the deictic terms *there, now, then, over here*, and those that are context-creating; the Taung'yo data point to the latter kind of indexicalisation: the use of the archaising and heavy-sounding phonetic segments is generating a particular context of social interactions where, for any reason, there is a need to index an ethnic position legitimised in a textualised mediating structure (the post-1962 Coup newly generated and textualised oral traditions) based on a common socio-cultural framework, and acknowledged as such by the other participants to this very particular kind of social interaction. In other words, the meaning-making during the *curum* involves a **sign** ("archaising" and "heavy-sounding" phonetic segments) that mentally represents the position of the Taung'yo within the interethnic dynamics granted by, and textualised within, the oral traditions, and linked to its **object** according to a correspondence between the actual position of the Taung'yo as the autochthonous primitive ethnic group inhabiting the region and the archaising hypercorrective phonetic segment (that is, "autochthonous-ness" as the object). The semiotic relationship and association between the *sign* and the *object* mentioned afore will in turn

³⁹ His "*context of situation*" involves either the situation of enunciation based on one individual linguistic experience, or the socio-cultural context of interaction, or even both. There is pretty much of a theoretical overlapping, if not incoherence, in Malinowski's writings on this very topic. We can address this very topic after the *exposé* during the question-answer part of the seminar.

activate an **interpretant**, which is the actual recognised position of the Taung'yo within the interethnic dynamics surfacing as the very feeling of belonging or not-belonging to the Taung'yo community.

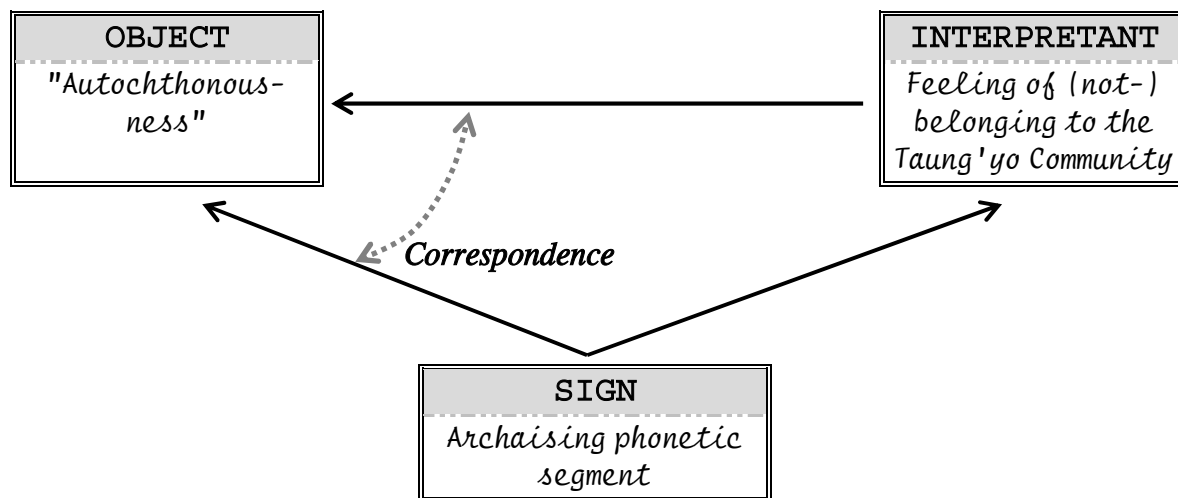


Table 7. Indexicalisation process in the Inle Lake region

Moreover, the interpretant, the feeling of belonging to the Taung'yo community because of an "autochthonous-ness", is activated by a particular kind of social agency that might somewhat be provisionally paralleled with the **iterational element of conversational agency** (Bayer & Mische 1998). In matter of fact, what is reactivated through this particular type of agency is the mental representation of any feeling associated with the very idea of being archaic, of belonging to the past. When the Taung'yo index their "autochthonous-ness" to make legitimate their position within the interethnic dynamics through archaising phonetic sequences, it somewhat refers to the selective reactivation of past patterns of thoughts and actions that allow the individual agents to activate routine actions and thoughts in response to a particular context of interaction that help them highlight and sustain their own ethnic or social identifications.

Conclusion

The interethnic dynamics and the way a particular ethnic identification emerges from it can be addressed in many ways. In this seminar, a twofold stance was adopted upon this very issue. First of all, we have analysed the ethnic relationships along an egalitarian horizontal axis, where no ethnic community imposes its political sway upon the others, rather than along a vertical axis where the ethnic relationships would have been addressed in relation to their complicated relations with an overarching Burmese central authority⁴⁰. It has been shown that the Lake society of today emerged out of a dynamics predicated upon a seamless symbolic manipulation and appropriation of a common socio-cultural framework by a newly dominant ethnic community: the Intha. The second stance taken upon the Lake ethnic identifications was a close-up to one particular ethnicisation process: we have shown that the Taung'yo incline to index their position within the interethnic dynamics through the

⁴⁰ There is little doubt, if any, that the Burmese central authorities have not hampered the emergence of a new dominant ethnic group in the region, as the Intha prevailing position within the interethnic dynamics seamlessly defused any Shan and Pa-O divisive endeavours prone to violent armed outbursts. Furthermore, incorporating a King of the Pagán Dynasty and endowing him with a focal role in the local oral traditions hook the regional grand narrative upon which a good share of the local ethnicisation processes are predicated to a broader nationalist agenda.

technical choice of phonetic markers, an archaising phonetic segment, in the specific interactional context of the "assembly," *Curuñ*, gathering all the ethnic groups inhabiting the Lake region in order to discuss economic and ritual activities as well as other "common" topics. To be more precise, we have shown that the "autochthonous-ness" that the oral traditions grant them was indexed through an archaising phonetic segment; the use of the archaising and heavy-sounding phonetic segments generates a particular context of social interactions where there is a need to index an ethnic position legitimised in a textualised mediating structure (the post-1962 Coup newly generated and textualised oral traditions) based on a common socio-cultural framework, and acknowledged as such by the other participants to this very particular kind of social interaction; we have also provisionally hypothesised that this indexicalisation was part of a particular element of social agency, the iterational element of conversational agency, whose purpose is to reactivate the mental capture of any feelings associated with the very idea of being archaic, of belonging to the past.

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