

Features of Myanmar Language Document Styles

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1. Introduction

Myanmar language (formerly known as *Burmese*), is a member of Sino-Tibetan language family, according to the international language family tree^a. Besides, Myanmar script is considered a complex script by software developers, as it originated from Indic scripts^b like Thai or Khmar.

Fortunately, our study found out that standardization and latinization of Myanmar document styles would be a lot easier than expected, because Myanmar writing direction, just like Latin-based scripts, goes horizontally from left to right, then top to bottom.

2. Background

If we take a look back into history, we will find Myanmar documents written on many different materials. And their document styles varies according to the material on which it was written.

2.1. Stone Inscriptions: The first Myanmar document, known as Myazedi Stone Inscription, was engraved on stone in 1113 AD, nearly a thousand years ago.

2.2. Palm and Gold Leaves: Later forms of writings were found on palm-leafs by laymen and clergymen. Gold leafs were used by the royal families.

2.3. Paper: As a result of King Mindon's (1853-1878 AD) industrial revolution, the earliest printed paper documents (newspapers) were introduced to Myanmar culture. The first Myanmar typewriter was first built in early 1900s by Remington & Sons. The first computer font for Windows was launched in March 1992.



Fig. 1: writings on palm leaf^c

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Fig.2: the first Myanmar stone inscription



Fig.3: writings on gold leaves

3. Formatting Objects and Properties

3.1. Paper Size

The following paper sizes are common:

- 1) A4 (8.265" x 11.693"): Largest number of official government papers and business papers are printed on this size of paper.
- 2) Legal (8.5" x 14"): Sales agreement of valuable items, bonds, trademark registration, and many other legal documents are printed on this size.
- 3) Magazine (7.25" x 9.5"): Most monthly magazines are published on this size.
- 4) Newspaper (11.5" x 15") All newspaper in the country uses this size.
- 5) Journals (10" x 14.75") Almost all journals are in this size.
- 6) Brochures: Most product brochures and handouts are folded into one-third of A4: 8.265" x 3.9").
- 7) Guidebooks (5" x 10") Many guidebooks and directories comes in this size.
- 8) Calendars: All locally printed wall calendars are printed on either 15"x20" or 20"x30" papers.
- 9) Uncommon sizes: Letter and executive paper sizes are hardly seen or used.



Fig.4: an official document on A4



Fig.5: a certificate on A4



Fig.6: newspaper



Fig.7: magazine

3.2. Paper Placement

Portrait documents are more common than landscape documents in all sizes.

3.3. Unit

All paper units are measured in inches (the British FPS system).

3.4. Basic composition style

Myanmar documents always takes horizontal composition style. They are never written (other than decoration) vertically. Size of text varies just like any other languages. Myanmar documents can not be limited by number of characters on a line, or number of lines per column. Myanmar characters are not monospaced. Restrictions are always set with margins a person use.

3.5. Model of basic composition style

Please see 3.7.

3.6. Position of image area on a paper

The usual margin width used everywhere is between 0.25" to 1". Government official papers are required to have 0.75" as top and bottom margins. Left margin has to be 1" exactly and right margin can be variable between 0.5" to 1". And they are mostly printed on A4 paper.

3.7. Models of basic composition styles

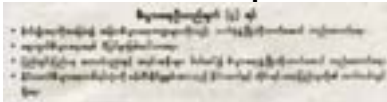


Fig.8: bullet style

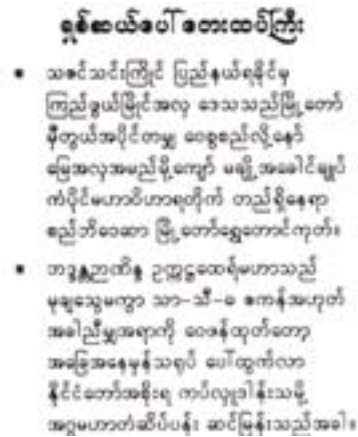


Fig.9: poetry



Fig.10: official application form



Fig.11: table of contents

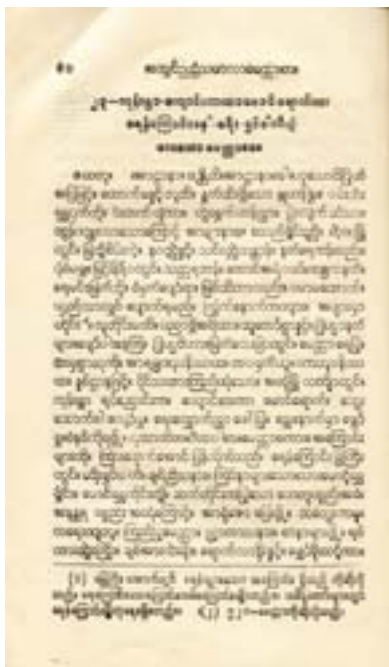


Fig.12. Footnotes



Fig.13: heading

3.8. Font

There is no standard font officially set as national standard. But there is a standard type style thoroughly redesigned by Myanmar Language Commission, Myanmar.

3.9. Unit of character size

Character size is usually measured in "points". Myanmar ascenders height and descenders depth are taller than English. Therefore, English characters has to be 4 or 5 points smaller than Myanmar text, to align same size with Myanmar characters. When typed together, the "x-height" of both Myanmar and English characters has to be equal.

3.10. Headline

There is no set standards about headlines.

3.11. Number of headlines

No particular standards regarding headlines.

3.12. Position of headline

Myanmar headlines are always at either in the center or on the left. Never at the right.

3.13. Contents of headline

Ordering numbers are sometimes included in the headlines. But they mostly don't.

3.14. Page Number

According to government guidelines for official documents, "page numbers" have to be displayed on top of the page at the center in "Myanmar numerals" between 2 hyphens. However private publishers position page numbers anywhere they like.

3.15. Note

Myanmar people do not have a tradition of using Interlinenotes, except in musical notes.

3.16. Type of note

Sidenotes, headnotes, footnotes, and endnotes are used in the same way as English documents.

3.17. Reference Mark

Myanmar people use asterisks (*) as a reference marks. Sometimes they are numbered or symbolized with Greek signs.

3.18. Character and Style

Like footnotes, reference mark legends are smaller than usual body text.

3.19. Emphasizing mark

Emphasizing marks are often used by underlining and highlighting.

3.20. Superscript / Subscript (Superior / Inferior)

There is no use of subscript in Myanmar language. The use of superscript is also very little. Only endnote and footnote numbers are printed in superscript. Of course, superscript text size is smaller than that of the body text.

3.21. Word-length adjustment

"Word-length adjustment" can be used for Myanmar documents very well. Similar to Thai, Myanmar language does not use *space* as a word-breaker. Space is used as a phrase-breaker, rather than a word-breaker.

3.22. Character space adjustment

"Character space adjustment" can not be allowed for Myanmar documents, because many Myanmar glyphs have zero text spacing, and every few of them forms up a syllable. If character space adjustment are used, Myanmar words get distorted.

3.23. Clause

n.a.

3.24. Ordered clause

Myanmars use pre-marking method. Please see *ordered list*.

3.25. Unordered clause

All 3 types (no marking, unordered character, and graphics marking) are used, depending on the layout designers.

3.26. Indentation of clause

Private publications use numerous indentation styles. Please see details and illustration at 3.28.

3.27. List

Both ordered lists and unordered lists are used in Myanmar language.

3.28. Ordered list

Myanmar ordered lists are often numbered with Myanmar numerals. Government official guidelines instructs that the first indentation should be 1-inch away from the text boundary (which is 2 inches away from the left edge). If there's second level of indentation, it is indented only .05". The second step of indent is 1.5-inch away from the text boundary (which is only 2.5" away from the edge). They are numbered in brackets with Myanmar alphabets such as (a), (b), (c) for the first level, and the second indented level will be numbered (aa), (bb), (cc), and so on. See below:



Fig.14: ordered list

3.29. Unordered list

Use of unordered list is common, but almost always, a hyphen ("-") is used instead of a bullet.

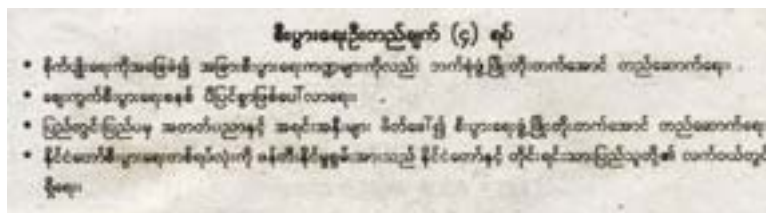


Fig.15: unordered list

3.30. Indentation of list

Note that the first indentation space is wider than any other indentation lists. First level of indent is 1" far from the text boundary.

3.31. Table

Tables are also used in Myanmar documents whenever necessary.

3.32. Character size

Regular newspaper uses 10 point. Official government departments uses 16 point within most official papers.

3.33. Position

Certain setting of space between table and image area are not found.

3.34. Heading

Large headings usually are between 24 and 36 points.

Medium headings are usually between 14 and 24 points.

Small headings are usually between 8 and 14 points.

Headings may be either in center or on the left, but never on the right side. Only dates are written on the right end.



Fig.16.: heading with chapter number

3.35. Paragraph indentation

Same as English.

3.36. Score

Underscore lines are used to make some group of words stand out. Overline, leftline, rightlines, strikethrough can not be seen at research time.

3.37. Rule

Solid rule, dotted rule, and double-rule are used as supported by common software like Adobe PageMaker. No language specific ruler lines are used.

4. Conclusion

Since Myanmar writing direction and text-flow direction are same as English, Myanmar document styles are not much disturbed in interchanging process like Japanese and Chinese. Thus we consider that standardization of Myanmar document styles will not cause too many difficulties.

^a Please see international language family tree: http://www.ethnologue.com/show_family.asp?subid=872

^b See Unicode Consortium, <http://www.unicode.org>

^c Rendered images are extracted from newspapers, books, and current magazines, by local typography expert.