

## **Pragmatics of Omission and Inclusion of Personal Pronouns in Utterances in Myanmar**

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### **Abstract**

In any language, personal pronouns are used to refer to the addresser, the addressee and the other(s), and as they are used in different socio-cultural groups, their uses differ from one language to another. Generally, these differences are culturally determined rather than linguistically determined. The Myanmar pronoun system is different from that of English and the omission and inclusion of personal pronouns in the Myanmar language is one of the overriding factors that governs the culture and tradition of Myanmar society. Therefore, this paper attempts to explore whether the omission and inclusion of personal pronouns depends on the relationship between the interlocutors and the meaning of the utterances. The data were collected from the everyday Myanmar conversations and the results show that the deliberate omission and inclusion of personal pronouns has some effects on the relationship between the addresser and the addressee and the meaning of the utterances. Moreover, it also reflects the culture and the society of Myanmar.

Key words: pragmatics, omission, inclusion, interlocutors, deixis, effects

### **Introduction**

In any language, an utterance is meaningful only when it is uttered in a particular context and in any utterance, one usually uses personal pronouns to refer to the addresser, the addressee or the other(s). However, as each language is used in a different socio-cultural group, the use of personal pronouns, which comprises three categories of pronouns: first person, second person and third person, differs from one language to another. In the English language, the same set of personal pronouns are used without taking into consideration the age, rank, status, familiarity, etc. of the addresser, the addressee and the other(s). However, in Myanmar, a wide range of personal pronouns are used depending on the relationship between the two interlocutors and there are more ways to express one's feelings or attitudes towards others or the relationship with others by switching from one form of personal pronoun to another. Moreover, it is seen that Myanmar people sometimes deliberately leave out and sometimes deliberately include the personal pronouns to have some effect on the relationship between interlocutors.

### **Objectives of the Study**

Though studies have been done concerning the person deixis in the field of pragmatics, Levinson (1983) and Yule (1996), dealt with how the choice of one form will reveal something about the speaker's view on his or her relationship with the addressee. Thomas (1995) touched upon the occurrence of ambiguities or problems of reference assignment due to the removal of personal pronouns from the original context of reference, especially the third person deixis as they have an infinite number of possible referents. In the Myanmar language, utterances can be produced with or without using person deixis and they are generally omitted in informal situations. Therefore, it is worth exploring the pragmatics of omission and inclusion of person deixis in utterances in Myanmar.



**English**

After I have my dinner, I brush my teeth.

၎င်း နှစ် မခမာအိအိရ နှစ် နှစ်သိတ် တွေပ . . . ဝ

After he returned from his work, he had his bath and went out to meet his friend at the airport.

ဆလလတူတရူ ဧါ ထာအိအိပ နှစ်သိတ် ( နှစ်သိတ် )  
 ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် . နှစ်သိတ်ထိရ နှစ်သိတ်ပြ . . ဝ

**Myanmar**

၎င်း မခမာအိအိရ နှစ်သိတ် တွေပ . . ဝ

ဆလလတူတရူ ဧါ ထာအိအိပ နှစ်သိတ် ( နှစ်သိတ် )  
 ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် . နှစ်သိတ်ထိရ နှစ်သိတ်ပြ . . ဝ

In Myanmar, once a personal pronoun is mentioned, it is not necessary to repeat it or its other forms e.g. ၎င်း for subjective case and ၎င်းအတွက် for possessive case in the above utterances if it refers to the same person. In typical Myanmar, the same pronoun to refer to the same person is not repeated though it is grammatically correct (Khin Min, 1986).

**Differences between the English and Myanmar Sentence Structures**

In every language, the verb is the nucleus of a sentence and it indicates action or possession or state. Therefore, when a verb is mentioned, a person who does the action is usually mentioned. However, in Myanmar, the doer of the action is often omitted in an utterance and this can be seen in the four basic types of sentences: namely, statement, question, command and exclamation. In English the subject pronouns are rarely omitted except for commands or requests as in the following sentences:

	<b>English</b>	<b>Myanmar</b>
Statement:	I am not feeling well.	ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် မခမာအိအိရ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် အခမာအိအိရ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် နှစ်သိတ်အတွက်
Question:	Have you had your dinner?	ကျွန်ုပ်တို့သည် မခမာအိအိရ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် စ မခမာအိအိရ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက်
Command:	Come here. Finish your tea.	၎င်း တစ်ထပ်သြုပ်တူတူ ( စ . အိအိရ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် )
Exclamation:	How stupid you are!	အခု = ခေ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် ခေ နှစ်သိတ်အတွက် နှစ်သိတ်အတွက်

According to Pe Maung Tin (1956), there are four conditions where subject pronouns can be omitted.

- Subjects can be omitted when
- (1) the emphasis is placed on the action, not on the doer of the action.
- (2) the subject is mentioned in the initial sentence.
- (3) the doer of the action can be retrieved from the verb.
- (4) the subject of the second sentence is the object of the first sentence.



ထထထထ      ဝ    တူဂ်အသ်းအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ  
 [Hla Hla      We are going to the market.]

*Dialogue between a grandmother and a grandchild*

ရူအေ              ဣၣ်အိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ  
 [Grandchild    Have you had your meal, Grandma?]

ဣၣ်အေ           မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ (ဝဲအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ)  
 [Grandma      Yes, I have. Have you had your meal, child? (What about you, child?)]

ရူအေ              ခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ (ခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ)  
 [Grandchild    No, I haven't. I'm waiting to have it with mother and the others.]

In addition to kinship terms to refer to oneself, one can address himself or herself, or one can be addressed, using only a part of his or her name. This is one of the reasons for omitting the personal pronouns. In the following utterance, the addresser uses part of her name instead of the first person pronoun တူဂ်အသ်းအိၣ်မၤ.

ခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ (အိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ)  
 [He/ She is very fond of me. He/She and I are from the same town.]

In the following dialogue between husband and wife, the kinship term “ခၢအိၣ်မၤ” is used to refer to the husband and “ချီ” to refer to the wife.

ခၢအိၣ်မၤ      ဝ    ချီ  
 [Husband      Are you going to the clinic? What's wrong with you?]

ချီ              ဝ    ချီ  
 [Wife            There's nothing wrong with me. I'm going to take you for a routine medical check-up.]

ခၢအိၣ်မၤ      ဝ    ) ဝဲ (ဝဲ) ချီ  
 [Husband      In that case, rest assured. Don't worry about me.]

၀၂) ၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) ၀၂) *Aspilets from Faces Magazine. No. 19, Jan, 2003)*

However, personal pronouns are sometimes omitted among interlocutors who are of the same age and among intimates.

Questions	Responses
(X) လိၣ်အိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ	ခၢအိၣ်မၤ (X) အိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ
Have you finished your homework?	Yes, <u>I</u> have.
(X) . . . ချီ ချီ ချီ ချီ ချီ ချီ	(X) လခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ
Where are you going?	<u>We</u> 're going to have some cold drinks.
အိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ (ခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ)	ခၢအိၣ်မၤ (X) ခၢအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤအိၣ်မၤ
How is your Grandma?	Yes, <u>she</u> is fine.

Therefore, there is no doubt that the omission and inclusion of personal pronouns has certain effects on the relationship between the speaker and the hearer: omission to show familiarity and inclusion to pay respect.

Among personal pronouns, first and second person pronouns are most frequently omitted in utterances, especially in adjacency pairs produced in informal situations.

*A dialogue between Mg Mg and his brother*

ဒေသနာ့ ဒေသနာ့ ဝ (x) န် ချီ ခေတဏှာ အဆူဝိ ဣဝါအေ  
 [Mg Mg: Aren't you going to school today?]  
 စံ စံ ဝ ' ျ . ြ . အေ(x) အဆူဝိ ဣခေတဏှာ အ်ပ . ပ . ဝ . ဝ  
 [Brother: No. I'm not. Today is a holiday.]

The above mentioned utterances usually occur in informal situations and they are usually made among those who are of the same age, rank or status or among intimates.

**Omission and Inclusion of Subject Pronouns**

In Myanmar, people usually greet each other saying “(x) ခါ ခေတဏှာ ချီဝါအေ” [How are you?] or “(x) မာအံအံအံအံအံ” [Have you had your meal?] However, when the addressee is someone who is higher in rank or status, it is more polite to use the personal pronouns or honorific terms in utterances as in “ျံ (သေ ခုရ ဧဝီ တူဝေ ဝဲဗွဲဗွဲဝါအေ” [Are you going back, Sayadaw?] or “ျံ (သဘ်တူဂ်အဆ်တုဗွဲဗွဲအေ . ဝေဝါ” [I will see you off, Teacher] or “တူဂ်အဆ်ဒုအဝါ အံ့ဆူဝါအေ” [I've finished my homework.]

Naturally, when one is addressing his inferior, or someone who is lower in rank or status, younger in age, pronouns are omitted like “[IS] ဧါ ထံတုလဲအေ . ဝါ” [I'm going back.] whereas pronouns are included in utterances when one is addressing his superior as in the following “တူဂ်အေ ခုဝဲဗွဲဗွဲဧါ ထံတုလဲအေအဆ် ဣ” [We wonder if we can go home.] Similarly, the utterance with the pronoun “ခေတဏှာ ဧါ တူဂ်အေ ဝဲဗွဲဗွဲဝါအေ” [Please help me.] sounds more polite than the one without the pronoun. “ခေတဏှာ ဧါ (IIS) တူဂ်အေ” [Please help me.]

It is arguable that some of the utterances are polite because of mitigating devices like “ခေတဏှာ ဧါ ဝေဝါအေအဆ် ဣ”. The power difference between the speaker and the hearer is great and the tone of the speaker is another factor to be taken into consideration. Nevertheless, it cannot be denied that pronouns are used more in a formal context than in an informal context. The more informal language one uses, the more one is likely to omit pronouns in utterances.

**Omission and Inclusion of First Person Subject Pronouns**

As mentioned earlier, first person pronouns are most frequently omitted in Myanmar utterances in informal situations without much effect on the utterance. However, there are occasions when they are used to create certain effects on the meaning of the utterance.

The utterance “တူဂ်အေ ခု-ဧါ ဧေ . ဝါ” [I apologize.] is assumed to be more emphatic than the following utterance “[IS] ခေ ခု-ဧါ ဧေ . ဝါ” [I apologize.] which seems to be spoken flippantly without really feeling sorry for one's misconduct. Similarly, in the following pair of utterances, the first utterance has more bearing on the meaning than the second one.





[IIS] လထူတူ ဧါ ထာံထာံအဲါ instead of အဲါ = နှုတ်လထူတူ ဧါ ထာံထာံအဲါ  
 [Have you returned from work?]

Sometimes, when one wants to make potential accusations less direct or to make a potentially personal issue seem to be an impersonal one, the use of second person pronoun is avoided.

[IIS] မွေ့စ့. ဘိဏ္ဍာ နှဲအဲါ. ပါဧါ. ဖ ဘဲဏ္ဍာခါ သဲါ [(You) return the thing after use.]

[IIS] တံ. ဂြဲအဲါ. (မူ. = ဆူဘဲဏ္ဍာခါ သဲါ [(You) clean up before you leave.]

However, when these utterances are uttered with the inclusion of second person pronouns, they have more bearing on the meaning.

အဲါ. မွေ့စ့စ့. ဘိဏ္ဍာ နှဲအဲါ. ပါဧါ. ဖ ဘဲဏ္ဍာခါ သဲါ [(You) return the thing after use.]

အဲါ. မွေ့စ့စ့. ဂြဲအဲါ. (မူ. = ဆူဘဲဏ္ဍာခါ သဲါ [(You) clean up before you leave.]

On some occasions, one has to address to someone, especially a stranger, without knowing exactly which would be the best term to address that person. In this kind of situation, the choice or use of pronouns depends, to a greater extent, on one's psychological state of mind. If one doesn't want to be friendly or want to be psychologically distant from that person, he will say:

[IIS] ပါ. ဆဲါ. မွေ့စ့စ့. နှဲအဲါ. လူကွဲ သထူလူ ဧါ. အဲါ. မဲညဲါ ဧါ

[Who do you want to see? Wait outside for a moment.]

On the other hand, when one wants to be psychologically close to that person, he might use kinship terms and say like “ပါ<sup>မ</sup> = ထာံ = ပါ. ဆဲါ. မွေ့စ့စ့. နှဲအဲါ. လူကွဲ သထူလူ ဧါ. အဲါ. မဲညဲါ ဧါ” [Who do you want to see, Uncle? Wait outside for a moment.]

**Omission and Inclusion of Third Person Subject Pronouns**

The third person pronoun is used to refer to the person(s) who is (are) not personally involved in the conversation; so it is not normally omitted in utterances unless it has been mentioned in the context once. It is possible that the reference will not be successful and the meaning will be vague unless both the speaker and the listener have the same role in thinking about what is in each other's mind.

In the following utterances, the pronoun omitted in each utterance can be the first or second or third person depending on whom one is addressing in the context. Therefore, third person pronouns are rarely omitted in utterances.

(x) ပါ ဝဲအဲါ ဧါ ထာံထာံအဲါ [Has/ Have (x) got back from pagoda?]

(x) လူ ပါ. ဆူ မွေ့စ့စ့စ့ထာံထာံအဲါ [Is/ Are (x) ready?]

However, sometimes third person pronouns are intentionally left out to create a situation which only the two interlocutors can understand.

In the following dialogue, if the utterance is said in full, i.e. without omitting any pronoun, her mother might get a hint or inkling, and might ask who ဆဲး. It is natural that if one uses vague terms ဆဲး in front of people, they would be more interested in and more curious about it.

*Kyaw Kyaw asked his friend, Nwe Nwe to tell his girlfriend, Wai Wai to wait for him at the usual place that evening. So Nwe Nwe came to see Wai Wai but as her mother was around, she just said the following:*

Nwe: [IHS] အဲ တ့တဝ[IO] ငွှ်း နှဲ တ့ပ . . ခ[He phoned me this morning.]

ဝ ဝ ခါ ဝ[HO] နယ့်ကွဲ-ခါ ( သဘူရဲ `အ . ထွှ်း[HS] ခူ ဝေဝ . . သေ

ဝ [He said he would meet you at the same place this evening.]

**Omission and Inclusion of Object Pronouns**

Omission of object pronouns is not found as often as that of subject pronouns and if they are omitted, the referent can become vague and the utterance will be senseless. Therefore, object pronouns are rarely omitted in utterances. However, there are some cases where object pronouns are left out and have certain effect on utterances. In the following utterances, the primary effect is vagueness.

(x) ) ချိုထသေ . ထွှ်းရူ ဝေဝူသေ . . သ

[He/ She/ I/ You said he/ she/ I/ you would come today.]

(x) ) . . အဲရဲသဲအဲ အဲ အဲ

[I don't know where I can look for him/ her/ you.]

**Omission and Inclusion of First Person Object Pronouns**

First person object pronouns are dropped when one intentionally makes the meaning of the utterance to be vague and this can be seen in the following utterances.

*Mu Mu and her sisters went to their cousin's birthday party. The mother asked Mu Mu to come back early and let her sisters stay behind if they wish. About one hour after they arrived, the party became so crowded and she did not want her sisters to stay behind. So she said:*

လအောဝ[IO] ခမဝရူခါ ထသထွှ်းအဝဲတ့ပ . . ဝ

[Mother asked me/ us to come back home early.]

Though it is the addresser alone whom her mother wants to come back home earlier, the addresser can make all go back home by exploiting the vagueness of meaning due to the omission of the first person object pronoun.

If the utterance is like လအောဝ ထွှ်းခမဝရူခါ ထသထွှ်းအဝဲတ့ပ . . ခ[Mother asked me to come back early.], the meaning is quite clear and it is not possible for her to take her sisters back together with her.



As Myanmar maintains an extended family system, the spirit of the team or group work and close social ties are reflected in the use of pronoun system. Therefore, it can be firmly stated that the omission and inclusion of personal pronouns is one of the overriding factors that governs the culture and tradition of the Myanmar society. This cross-cultural pragmatic study of the two languages, English and Myanmar, indicates that Myanmar has the high-contact culture characterized by a high degree of spatial and psychological closeness of the society.

As personal pronouns are omitted in Myanmar, some Myanmar EFL learners are sometimes confused about the use of personal pronouns and some tend to omit them when they use them in the English language. Since this study also reveals the differences between the uses of personal pronouns in the English language and the Myanmar language, it will contribute to English language teaching and learning in Myanmar. It is hoped that this preliminary study on the omission and inclusion of personal pronouns in Myanmar would be an inspiration for those who are interested in the uses of personal pronouns in Myanmar to research deeper into this particular area of both English and Myanmar grammar to gain more insight into it.

It is the belief of the researcher that as English language teachers, they must be fully aware of the mother-tongue influence and interference in the use of English. Thus, teachers of English would also need to master both languages and be fully aware of the differences in the two language systems. This will enable them to discover why their students make the kind of errors they should not make. As a result, they will be able to teach their students not only very efficiently but also most effectively.

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န . နှစ် အချက်အလက်များ ဝေးဝေးထဲသို့ ပို့ဆောင်ပေးခြင်း ( အချက်အလက်များ ပေးဆောင်ပေးခြင်း ) ဖြစ်ပေါ်စေခြင်း ဖြစ်သည်။

န . နှစ် အချက်အလက်များ ပြန်လည်ရရှိခြင်း အချက်အလက်များ ပေးဆောင်ပေးခြင်း မှတ်တမ်းတင်ခြင်း ဖြစ်သည်။

ခဏအချက်အလက်များ ပေးဆောင်ခြင်း ဖြစ်ပြီး ၎င်းတို့သည် အချက်အလက်များ ပေးဆောင်ပေးခြင်း ဖြစ်သည်။