LEXICAL CATEGORIES OF HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN MODERN BURMESE

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"Do not worry," Jain assured me. "They are not gays. They are just looking for gays to make love to." I registered my surprise. "Whatever is easier," he smiled. "They prefer girls. But they like what is easy." — Pico Iyer (1989: 212)

1. INTRODUCTION

Wierzbicka (1989) provided linguistic evidence to show how the semantics of lexical categories distinguished in English and Russian reflect the way in which English speakers and Russian speakers implicitly view the anatomy of the human psyche or consciousness. Conversely, the ethnopsychology of a people speaking a given language is moulded by concepts represented in its lexicon. Ferdinand de Saussure (1987: 40) expressed the same insight when he said,

les mœurs d'une nation ont un contre-coup sur la langue, et, d'autre part, c'est dans une large mesure la langue qui fait la nation ("a nation's mores have their impact on the language, and, conversely, it is to a large extent the language which makes the nation"),

as did Hagège (1987: 80) when he wrote,

la langue est aussi génératrice de culture, tout autant qu’informée par la culture ("language is just as much a generator of culture as it is shaped by the culture").
That this interaction is insidious and pervasive is a point strongly made by Kortlandt (1985).

The way homosexual behaviour is conceptualized in a given culture finds expression in how the lexicon of its language compartmentalizes or parses up the natural spectrum of behaviour. Boswell (1980: 74–79), for example, argues that the lexical distinctions of first-century Latin reflect that, in the urban Roman cultural environment of that period, the sexual role adopted in intercourse was laden with greater social significance than the sexual orientation. The Latin lexicon distinguishes terms denoting various types of male homosexual depending on the rules assumed in anal and oral intercourse. Terms for passive men included *pathicus* 'passive homosexual', *cinaedus* 'wanton or impudent catamite' and *(co)stuprātus* 'violated or debauched man'. Terms for active men include *paedicātor* 'bugger', *paedico* 'bugger' and *draucus* 'sodomite'. Boswell (1980: 79) also lists Latin *gaber* 'young beardless slave' as a term for an active homosexual, although he does not indicate what the basis is for this interpretation. In Latin the same semantic distinction applied when referring to male prostitutes: *exolētus* 'active male whore' (literally 'a full-grown one') vs. *catamītus* 'passive male whore'. This dichotomy in the Latin lexicon is perhaps best understood in the historical context of Graeco-Roman homosexuality, which had its roots in the ritualized pederasty of primitive initiation rites into manhood (Bremmer 1988). For an opposing view, see Hermans (1990).

Categories of male homosexual behaviour distinguished in the Burmese lexicon indicate the outlook on homosexuality of a very different culture. Burmese society has a Buddhist culture with a prominent polytheistic shamanist substrate. A plethora of indigenous Burmese, pre-Buddhist deities known
as နင်း [na?] ‘nat’ have secured a place within the Buddhist pantheon. The modern Burmese lexicon distinguishes three types of male homosexual: လိမ်းရွက် [mēmja] ‘gynaecopath’, နင်းလာ [aθha?] ‘nat possessed one’ and စိတ်ကြိုးကြည် [dzibō] ‘hiding muntjack deer’. The semantics of the lexical distinctions involve the degree of social acceptability or ဟိုခိုး [heiʔkha], degree of effeminacy and social function of the referent. The social acceptability or ဟိုခိုး [heiʔkha] is determined, in part, by religious factors. Overt homosexual behaviour is not limited to individuals denoted by these three terms.

In Rangoon, an urban homosexual is viewed by himself and by others as belonging to one of these three lexical categories. Homosexuals in Rangoon readily place themselves and other homosexuals in one of these three categories. The author did not encounter instances of discrepancy between the category to which a homosexual saw himself as belonging and the category to which he was assigned by other Burmese. These three lexical categories are defined below and illustrated by brief case studies. The lexical material presented here is based on modern colloquial Burmese as spoken in the Burmese capital Rangoon. Data were gathered by the author during two one-week stays in Burma in 1985 and 1986. Most of the author’s data are based on interviews with the six informants described in the case studies at the end of this article. The author also consulted a number of anonymous လိမ်းရွက် [mēmja] and, of course, other Burmese.

In this article, the author’s (van Driem 1993) system for the transcription of Burmese is used, with transcriptions given between brackets in the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet listed below. The transcription, although a broad phonetic one, assumes an interpretation of Burmese phonology. Nasalization is analysed as a syllable-final segment. All
syllable-initials indicated have phonemic status except /ð/, which is an allophone of /θ/. The phoneme /w/ is restricted to literary pronunciations. The post-initial glide /j/ occurs only after bilabials and laterals. The vowels [i] and [ʌ] are not phonemes, but allophones of /i/ before final glottal stop and /a/ after initial or post-initial /w/ in closed syllables respectively.

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<th>POST-INITIAL GLIDES</th>
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The vowel [ə] does not occur in closed syllables and lacks distinctive tone. The vowel /a/ has the allophone [ʌ] in closed syllables after initial or post-initial /w/, e.g. oʊd /wa?/ [waʔ] ‘to wear’, oʊd̩ /lwâ/ [l̩aʔ] ‘too, excessively’. Diphthongs do not occur in open syllables, and the diphthongs [ei] and [ou] can be analysed as allophones of /e/ and /o/ in closed syllables, e.g. oʊd̩ /loʔ/ [l̩oʔ] ‘work’, ɔːd /e/ [e] ‘house’. The vowels /a/ and /e/ also occur in closed syllables, e.g. ɔh /wɛ/ ‘enter’, ɔːd /seʔ/ ‘motor’, ɔd /kaʔ/ ‘crisis’, ɔd /læʔ/ ‘road’. The vowels /u/ and /ɔ/ do not occur in closed syllables, and the phoneme /u/ does not occur after initial or post-initial /w/. The vowel /i/ occurs in closed syllables only with final /ʔ/, where it is realized as the allophone [ɪ], e.g. ɔd̩ [ɪʔ] ‘eight’. Nasalization is
indicated only above the second letter of a diphthong digraph, leaving room for a tone mark, if any, above the first letter.

The creaky tone is indicated by *accent grave* except in glottal stop final syllables, where creaky tone is automatic. The breathy tone is indicated by an *accent circonflexe*, and the level tone is left unmarked. A phonetic description of Burmese tones in monosyllabic citation forms is provided by U Thein Tun (1982). The creaky tone is short, pronounced with pharyngealized voice and has a sharply falling contour 5–1. The breathy, heavy is long, pronounced with breathy voice and has the contour 4–5–4. The level tone is long and has the contour 3–1.

2. THE မိမိဗူး ‘GYNAECOPATH’
AND THE မိမိဗူး ‘NAT POSSESSED ONE’

The term မိမိဗူး [mêimafa] ‘gynaecopath’ is a usual dictionary translation for English ‘homosexual’. Learned neologisms such as လိုဟာမိမိဗူး [lêitutchâkamâsei?jîthô] ‘homoeoandrolaikaserotophilia’, လိုဟာမိမိဗူး [lêituctâkamâsei?jîthôthu] ‘homoeoandrolaikaserotophilia’, လိုဟာမိမိဗူး [lêitutchâkamâsei?jîthôjô] ‘homomphilism’, လိုဟာမိမိဗူး [lêitutcâi:jagâsei?] ‘homoeoandrophileroticism’ occur as glosses in bilingual dictionaries but do not form part of the regular lexicon of the spoken language, and of these only the term လိုဟာမိမိဗူး [lêitutcâi:jagâsei?] ‘homomphilism’ would appear to also be applicable to female homosexuality. The term မိမိဗူး [mêimafa] ‘gynaecopath’ is derived from the word မိမိဗူး [mêimà] ‘woman’ through suffixation of the morpheme မိမိဗူး [-fa] which also occurs as a free verb in the meaning ‘emulate, strive’ and as an auxiliary verb to express compassion on the part of the speaker for the subject of the sentence. The morpheme မိမိဗူး [-fa] likewise occurs as the ending in the Burmese word for
The term ဗီဗီယလ္ (mēiməʃa) ‘gynæcopath’ originally denoted palace transvestites who fulfilled a function similar to that of the Indian hijadä at the Moghul courts. In present-day usage, too, the meaning of the term ဗီဗီယလ္ (mēiməʃa) ‘gynæcopath’ hinges upon the idea that a homosexual orientation is associated with effeminate or transexual behaviour. Today the term is used (1) as a generalized, deprecatory term for male homosexuals, and (2) in a strict sense to denote effeminate homosexual men who wear their hair long and exhibit transvestism.

Private physicians in Rangoon cater to the cosmetic needs of transsexually inclined homosexuals by outfitting them with artificial female breasts through silicon implants. The ဗီဗီယလ္ (mēiməʃa) in Rangoon are well-informed concerning the availability of sex change operations in the West. Some Rangoonese ဗီဗီယလ္ (mēiməʃa) told the author that they would be eager to undergo the surgical treatment transsexuals receive in Europe if it were available in Burma, whereas others considered such surgery undesirable. The term ဗီဗီယလ္ (mēiməʃa) designates the most outspokenly cross-gender of male homosexual behavioural categories differentiated in the Burmese lexicon.

The term ပိုးကြည့် ( çağrı] ‘nat possessed one’ is a deverbalive derived from the verb ကြည့်, also spelt ကြည့်, [ကြည့်] ‘frighten, scare, haunt’ through affixation of the nominalizing prefix ဗီဗီယလ္ - ဗီဗီယလ္. Stewart and Dunn (1950: 55) define the term ပိုးကြည့် (တို့] as ‘terrorization, molestation, visitation by spirits’. The ပိုးကြည့် (တို့] is traditionally a male homosexual who functions as a spiritual medium in the worship of nats. In modern usage, ပိုးကြည့် (တို့] denotes any male
homosexual whose sexual orientation is either intentionally or inadvertently conspicuous or any male homosexual who is generally candid about his sexual orientation. The term ချင်းသား [etshau?] encompasses a broader and more varied range of behaviour than that covered by the term မဏီဦး [meima]. Rangoonese ချင်းသား [etshau?] generally wear their hair short, as ဗိုးဗို [dzibuu] ‘hiding muntjack deer’ do (see below), but some ချင်းသား [etshau?] have long hair like မဏီဦး [meima]. The ချင်းသား [etshau?] category denotes individuals ranging from effeminate long-haired men, provided they are not transvestites, to short-haired homosexual men who exhibit no pronounced cross-gender behaviour. ချင်းသား [etshau?] are not necessarily prostitutes, but any ဖျင်သား [pjedaza] ‘male prostitute’, whether manly or effeminate, is, due to the disrepute of his profession, classified as an ချင်းသား [etshau?], unless he is a transvestite. Transvestite prostitutes are categorized as မဏီဦး [meima].

Both မဏီဦး [meima] and ချင်းသား [etshau?] play a major role in the ဟိတိုး [na?pwé] ‘nat festival’, the most important of which takes place in the fifth month of the Burmese calendar ဝါဗုလှိုင် [wagaú], corresponding to the latter part of August and beginning of September. Nats are indigenous shamanist ancestor deities who have become absorbed into the Burmese Buddhist pantheon. The nats worshipped in modern Burma include the disincarnate spirits of previous monarchs. The nat festivals are characterized by dance, oratory, instrumental and vocal music. Detailed descriptions of nat possession and nat worship are provided by Spiro (1967). The traditional site of a major nat festival in the month of ဝါဗုလှိုင် [wagaú] is at တားဗို [taubjóo], north of Mandalay. It is at the end of this festival that the most nat weddings occur.

A nat wedding is the union of a female or male medium,
known in Burmese as a နိုင်ငံ (နမ်းကဒါ) 'nat wife', and
the nat by whom he or she becomes possessed. The term
နိုင်ငံ (နမ်းကဒါ) has been translated in the literature both
as 'shaman' and as 'medium'. Spiro (1967: 219) reports that
'in most, but not all, cases, the nat is believed to love the
shaman sexually.' Alternatively, the နိုင်ငံ (နမ်းကဒါ) may
effectively become the nat and, as such, acquire the sexual ori­
entation of the nat. Concerning the male နိုင်ငံ (နမ်းကဒါ),
Spiro (1967: 220) observes: 'With few exceptions male
shamans seem to be homosexual (manifest or latent), trans­
vestite, or effeminate (and sometimes all three). Their nat, of
course, is always female. If the male shaman, either in posses­
sion or in a dream, perceives himself as a female or identifies
with a female nat, his sexual satisfaction acquires explicit ho­
mosexual overtones.'

The bodies of the မွေး (မိမိကုန်) and အနား (အောက်ပါ)
functioning as နိုင်ငံ (နမ်းကဒါ) 'nat wives' are said to be­
come possessed (နိုင်ငံဖူ (နမ်းပျော်)) by a nat. Since it is
held that the nat himself or herself is speaking through the
medium, the possessed မွေး (မိမိကုန်) or အနား (အောက်ပါ)
is in a position to make provocative statements with impunity
and to demand money from those partaking in the ceremony.
A participant addressed by a မွေး (မိမိကုန်) or အနား (အောက်ပါ)
held to be possessed by a nat is obliged to proffer
what the nat requests. Possessed မွေး (မိမိကုန်) and အနား (အောက်ပါ)
are alleged to be clairvoyant, telepathically gifted and
capable of making prophecies. By virtue of their paranormal
powers မွေး (မိမိကုန်) and အနား (အောက်ပါ) play a central
role in Burma's major religious festivals.

Outside of the religious context, the status of မွေး (မိမိကုန်) or အနား (အောက်ပါ) has different social implications.
As Spiro (1967: 225) points out, 'although homosexuality and
transvestism are both found in Burma outside of shamanism, they are viewed, in these contexts, with disdain. Practiced as part of the shamanistic role, however, they are accepted, if not approved. Similarly, although there are no formal sanctions which discriminate against bachelors in Burma, it is taken for granted, and indeed expected, that a ‘normal’ male will marry. Even in the religious context, however, Spiro (1972: 272) stresses that nat possession is considered ‘a major crisis’, to which one responds with a battery of rituals. Far from being respectable, Spiro (1967: 209–218) reports that a large portion of Burmese do not believe in the divine inspiration of ṣaundaw [naʔkəndo] and impugn their integrity. Eli Coleman of the University of Minnesota reports that ‘to have a son become an acault [i.e. ḋaŋągoGo [aʔhau?], GvD] is evidence of having a disreputable life in a parent’s previous incarnation. Therefore, families may be embarrassed by their son, and try to prevent his being invaded by Manguendeun [i.e. ḋaŋągoGo: [màŋwedâũ], GvD]’ (personal communication, 22 January 1988). The deity ḋaŋągoGo: [màŋwedâũ] is a lesser female nat, the wife of ḋaŋągoGoGo [mëtiŋswa], who is one of the ḋaŋGoGoeGoGo [naʔθuŋhēkʰənʔpa] ‘Thirty-Seven Nats’. Spiro (1967: 219–229) reports that parents attempt to prevent their son or daughter from becoming a medium because of the disgrace it brings. The important religious function of ḋaŋGoGoGoGo [mëti₃ma] and ḋaŋągoGoGo [aʔhau?] does not provide them with ʔaʔKha ‘social respectability’.

3. THE ḋaŋGoGo: ‘HIDING MUNTJACK DEER’ AND ʔaʔKha ‘SOCIAL RESPECTABILITY’

The term ḋaŋGoGo: [dzibōũ] consists of the morphemes ḋa [dzi], also written ḋa [dzi], ‘muntjack deer’ and the verb QH [pōũ] ‘hide oneself, conceal oneself’. The muntjack or barking deer
is a small species of deer of the subfamily Muntiacinae. The term မိဖွား [dzìbòu] ‘hiding muntjack deer’ is therefore a metaphor for the crypto-homosexual, a phenomenon in Burmese society which bears only superficial similarity to the ‘closeted gay’ of Western society. A မိဖွား [dzìbòu] does not become an အရွေ့ပူ [ahtauí?] simply by ‘coming out of the closet’. The role of the မိဖွား [dzìbòu] in Burmese society is less well defined than that of the မိဖွား [meímà] and အရွေ့ပူ [ahtauí?].

A မိဖွား [dzìbòu] is a male homosexual who does not advertise and in some respects actively conceals his sexual orientation. The behaviour of မိဖွား [dzìbòu] is not considered effeminate by Burmese standards. Some မိဖွား [dzìbòu] are candid about their sexual orientation and appear to be able to discuss their homosexual orientation freely with friends of both sexes. Some မိဖွား [dzìbòu] are bachelors, whereas others are married and have children. Generally, spouses of married မိဖွား [dzìbòu] are aware of the ambivalent sexual orientation of their husbands. However, even the urban မိဖွား [dzìbòu] stolidly maintain the appearance of being heterosexual in public places, including their place of work. Since a မိဖွား [dzìbòu] conceals his homosexuality as a matter of course, the မိဖွား [dzìbòu] by and large conforms to the accepted social patterns of behaviour and freely participates in every domain of community activity, something which the stigmatized မိဖွား [meímà] and အရွေ့ပူ [ahtauí?] are barred from doing.

An important concept in the social awareness of the မိဖွား [dzìbòu] is ဖွားကျော် [hei?kha] ‘social respectability’. မိဖွား [meímà] and အရွေ့ပူ [ahtauí?], although tolerated in urban Rangoon, are unequivocally viewed as lacking ဖွားကျော် [hei?kha]. By contrast, a မိဖွား [dzìbòu] is viewed as respectable, and in order to maintain this respectability a မိဖွား [dzìbòu] will refrain from associating openly or fraternizing with either
Unlike the first-century Latin terms adduced above, the term [dzibōu] gives no indication as to whether the person thus designated assumes either a passive or an active role in sexual intercourse. The criterion of [heiʔkha] 'social respectability' is in part contingent upon not exhibiting conspicuous cross-gender behaviour in public. As stated above, a male prostitute, however manly he may behave, is an [aw-hau?] by default because his profession categorically lacks [heiʔkha].

The spectrum of cross-gender behaviour is to some extent reflected in the use of the native Burmese facial cosmetic [θənəkhâ], a yellowish powder made from the finely pulverized bark of the tree Limonia acidissima, of the Rutaceae family. The powder is mixed with water, applied to the skin and allowed to dry. [mēiməʃa] use [θənəkhâ] powder regularly, and this behaviour is associated with feminity in Burma. Many but not all [aw-hau?] use [θənəkhâ] powder. The use of [θənəkhâ] powder amongst [dzibōu] is no more common that it is amongst heterosexual men, some of whom use the powder in a domestic setting.

Homosexual behaviour in Burma is not limited to individuals included in the three lexical categories under discussion. An individual who engages in homosexual acts is not necessarily viewed as a [dzibōu] 'hiding muntjack deer', [mēiməʃa] 'gynæcopath' or [aw-hau?] 'nat possessed one'. For example, a male who maintains a sexual liaison with a [dzibōu] or is the client of a [pjèdəza] 'male prostitute' may not consider himself, nor be
considered, as belonging to any of these three homosexual categories. His homosexual activity is viewed as a transient diversion or as a more convenient form of sex, allegedly because women are ‘so hard to get’.

Since male prostitutes lack ဖီးကြော [hei?kha], men making use of their services observe discretion. Such clients generally view themselves as ordinary men and do not classify themselves as ဖီးကြော [dzibôû], nor are they viewed as such by those who do classify themselves as ဖီးကြော [dzibôû]. By contrast, a young unmarried man who maintains a sexual liaison with a ဖီးကြော [dzibôû] is not in peril of losing ဖီးကြော [hei?kha] ‘social respectability’, even when the sexual nature of their relationship is explicit. The involvement of the young bachelor is construed as being a convenient pre-marital outlet for his sexual urges. Such overt affairs are therefore necessarily transient and terminate when the bachelor marries.

The Burmese word လုပ် [lubjo] ‘bachelor’ is pregnant with significance. To draw attention to the fact that an individual is a bachelor in Burmese is a direct allusion to the relative sexual freedom the person is presumed to enjoy. Not surprisingly, the word လုပ် [lubjo] takes on a special significance in the speech of ဖီးကြော [dzibôû], who not uncommonly draw attention to the fact that a young man is a bachelor in the wishful thought that he may be amenable to a liaison. A parallel development may have taken place in English. The collocation ‘gay bachelor’, like လုပ် [lubjo] originally an explicit reference to the sexual freedom of the referent, is, according to one view on the subject, the ultimate source of the modern term ‘gay’, which became widespread in the 1960s in the meaning ‘homosexual’.

4. RANGOON: CASE STUDIES
One of the many places of congregation for the ဖီးကြော [meî-
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Rangoon is the centrally situated Mahabandula Park and the nearby Hsule Pagoda. Here male homosexuals come individually or in groups and meet each other on an informal basis. The homosexuals which congregate here are occasionally subject to harassment by the police. Around the entrance to the park, there are a number of mobile vendors with vending carts full of wares such as cigarettes and small condiments. One of these is a middle-aged woman who warns the and when the police are coming, instructing them in advance to disperse and maintain a low profile.

Many and sleep in temples where they are relatively safe from police harassment, although even there the police have been known to harass, threaten and extort money from them. All the whom the author consulted and who regularly slept in temples had personally experienced police extortion. Although many reports were made of physical abuse by the police, none of the or consulted would himself admit to having been subject to such abuse.

Most Rangoonese reportedly do not frequent Mahabandula Park or other places which would make their sexual orientation conspicuous. The social stigma resting on and constitutes strong social pressure on homosexuals to conform to a lifestyle considered respectable in Burmese society. As elsewhere, stigmatization of a homosexual orientation can lead to problems of self acceptance. A homosexual suicide is mentioned in Case Study 6 below.
The following case studies are brief descriptions of six of the Rangoonese INGTONH [onau?] and [dzibû] whom the author consulted. The names of the consulted informants are withheld to protect their privacy and substituted by the abbreviations M1, M2, M3, etc.

**Case 1**

M1 is a well-built, attractive [dzibû], forty-one years of age but with a far younger appearance. M1 is known for his promiscuity and flirtatious behaviour. He is married to a devoted wife and is the proud father of a young son. M1 is a government employee with a desk job at an office in Rangoon. M1 enjoys a sexual relationship with a young bachelor who works in one of the canteens on the slope of Rangoon’s famous [wedgou pʰejà] ‘Shwedagon Pagoda’. M1’s visits to his lover at the pagoda do not embarrass the lover, because the fact that the lover is not a [dzibû] is well established in the minds of the lover’s many co-workers. In fact, when M1 visits the lover at the pagoda, his lover’s co-workers make jocular and ribald references to the length and thickness of their colleague’s penis, which they say is what lures M1 to the pagoda. M1 made a point of assuring the author of the veracity of the co-workers’ descriptions.

However, if the canteen worker were to visit M1 at the latter’s place of employment, this would constitute a grave indiscretion, as it would expose M1’s status as a [dzibû]. Even though some of M1’s friends at work are both aware of and indifferent toward his orientation, it would betray a lack of [heinkha] to be visited by one’s homosexual liaison at work.

**Case 2**

M2 is a friendly but not handsome [dzibû]. He is forty years of age and is a bachelor. He sells imported Indonesian
batiks and kains in one of the large covered markets in Rangoon where he has a permanent stall. **M2** is theatrical in the company of intimate friends, but he is sobriety itself when he is engaged in commercial activities with his clientele in the marketplace. **M2** is a successful merchant and makes small donations to needy ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] on a regular basis. His generosity is tempered by envy, however: he is seldom the object of anyone's sincere sexual attentions and refuses handouts to attractive ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?].

**M2** was greatly embarrassed by an ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] who approached him in the marketplace during business hours with a request for financial assistance. The ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] had hoped that **M2** would give him the money quickly in order to rid himself of the embarrassment of being visited by an ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] at his place of work. It was the deliberate intention of the ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] in question to embarrass **M2** because **M2** selectively begrudges him, although he is particularly needy, and suggests that sexual favours be rendered in return for any money. The ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?] in question is physically repulsed by **M2** and feels ill-treated because **M2** shells out handouts to others who are not the made subject of his advances. Moreover, **M2** is as blunt about the ဗော်ဖော် [aθbau?]’s lack of စိုက် [hei?kha] as he is relentless in expressing his sexual attraction toward him.

For fear of stigmatization, **M2**, like most Rangoonese စိုက် [dzibɔû], does not frequent Mahabandula Park or other places where homosexuals are known to congregate.

**Case 3**

**M3** is a စိုက် [dzibɔû] of partial Chinese extraction and in his mid-twenties. **M3** is a taxi driver by profession. He is 180 cm in height, which is rather tall by Burmese standards. **M3** is very concerned about his စိုက် [hei?kha]. He consorts with
in the evenings, especially in the neighbourhood of Hsule Pagoda. He is always said to be on the look-out when he is in Mahabandula Park, for fear of being spotted. His parents are unaware that their son is a dzibói, and M3 has no intention of informing them because he anticipates that the idea would not be well received.

**Case 4**

M4 is a friendly, effeminate ṣeṣaļau in his early twenties. He wears his hair long and uses ṣeṇaṅkha powder and eye liner. M4 generally sleeps in pagodas or out on the streets. He is not accepted by his family, not because he is an ṣeṣaļau but because he is a whore. Only his sister, who lives on the outskirts of Rangoon, will have anything to do with him. One of the places he earns his living is at a men’s toilet situated underground. He also finds clientele at a transport depot for long-distance lorry drivers. M4 has often been a victim of police extortion.

**Case 5**

M5 is twenty-seven years old and is a manly ṣeṣaļau who wears his hair short and shuns feminine attributes. M5 is of low-caste Nepalese extraction. His father came to Burma as a Gorkha soldier during the Second World War. His mother, also Nepalese, died when he was a child. M5 was born and raised in Rangoon, and, although he understands some Nepalese, he has virtually no active command of the language. M5 speaks Burmese and goes by his Burmese name. His Nepalese name is known only to his father and the author. M5 is an attractive and successful whore. His success as a prostitute is only paralleled by his misfortune in contracting venereal diseases from his clientele. He carries a personal registration card from a private venereal disease clinic where he regularly undergoes treatment.
M5 has been married twice. His first wife died shortly after their marriage. He re-married, fathered a daughter and then became a whore. He has been evicted from his house by his second wife who refuses to live with a male whore. M5 has been disowned by his father who works for the Burmese government as a lorry driver. For his father, who is Nepalese, the fact that M5 is an ᵹevento [ȯthauʔ], let alone a whore, constitutes sufficient ground for disowning his son. M5 has occasionally attempted to regain his father’s acceptance, but whenever he visited his father in the lorry drivers’ canteen, he was totally ignored, and whenever he returned to his parental home in an attempt to reconcile with his father, he ended up being severely beaten.

M5 is a close friend of M4 and, like him, earns his living at a men’s toilet situated underground and at a transport depot for long-distance lorry drivers. He sleeps on the streets and, if possible, in pagodas.

Case 6

M6 is a middle-aged, unmarried ᵹibô [džibôu] who used to be a biology professor at a university in Burma until he was pressured into giving up his job for political reasons. His family were affluent jewelers before independence. During the years at the university, M6 was popular with the students, and some of his former students are now his personal friends. Unlike any of the individuals of the other case studies, M6 also speaks languages other than Burmese, viz. English and French. He has a large circle of ᵹibô [džibôu] friends, and each year he and his friends go on holiday at the famous Burmese beach resort of ᵹapali on the Bay of Bengal.

M6 lives in a large family home in the suburbs of New Rangoon, which he shares with father, mother, brothers and sisters and their spouses and offspring, in the traditional Bur-
mese fashion. All his relatives are aware of his and his friends' sexual orientation. M6's friends are received with generous hospitality whenever they visit the family home, and they have all been introduced to the family. His young to middle-aged မိမိ[dzibòu] friends likewise live with their respective families, are accepted by their families as မိမိ[dzibòu] and are at liberty to take their friends home with them. None of the individuals mentioned in the other case studies know M6 or belong to his circle of friends.

One of M6's friends, a colleague at the university, committed suicide, according to M6, because of problems of self-acceptance in connexion with his homosexual identity. M6 claims to be indifferent to others' attitudes towards his sexual orientation. Although his self-acceptance is undoubtedly a factor contributing to his overall well-being, he believes that his nonchalance in this regard may have been a factor in bringing about his expulsion from the university where he worked.

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS

The semantics and usage of the lexical categories မိမိ[mêimèafa] 'gynaecopath', သိရိယား [therhu?] 'nat possessed one' and မိမိ: 'hiding muntjack deer' are indicative of the way 'homosexuality' is conceptualized by speakers of Burmese. There is no lexical category in spoken Burmese which is semantically equivalent to English 'homosexual'. Linguistic evidence supports the view that sexuality is perceived differently in different cultures. An understanding of the semantics of lexically differentiated concepts in a given language can be profitably studied in this regard.

NOTES

1. I thank David Bradley of La Trobe University in Bundoora,
Australia, for his helpful comments on Burmese phonology, although my phonological analysis differs from Bradley's.

2. The Burmese word for 'penis' is ကလေး [li]. Terms denoting homosexual acts include ကမျိုး [lou] 'fellatio', formed with the verb ကြြေး [lou] 'suck', and ကမ်း [lo], the vulgar Burmese verb 'fuck' which denotes both vaginal and anal intercourse. The verb ကလေး [kə], 'be erect' collocates with ကလေး [li] 'penis', e.g. ကမျိုးကလေးကလေး [likei?de] 'have an erection'. In poetic diction, the expression ကမျိုးကလေး: [pá-thàū] 'passion flower' denotes a male erection. The qualifier ကမျိုး: [thàū] literally means 'pulverized, fine as powder' but also occurs in expression in which it denotes strong passion. The genitalia of a boy are referred to poetically as ကမျိုး: [swepa] 'golden flower'. The flower image in connexion with male genitalia seems not uncommon in Tibeto-Burman languages. In David Bradley's experience, in fact, in Burmese "some people associate ကမ်း [pá] alone with penis and avoid the word in the meaning 'flower' and in compounds" (letter of 27 April 1992). The verb ကလေး [lə] 'to be beautiful' can be used with respect to a male referent, although this is unusual even in the speech of homosexuals; the more usual verb is ကမ်း: [tʰs] 'handsome.'

REFERENCES