

I'd like to take a few minutes myself and try to explain why using Unicode is a good idea.

The non-Unicode era: every font designer decided which English keyboard key means which Shan character. I.e. one font says a "w" is a "wa" vowel while the other one decided it would be better to make it into a "d" consonant. The underlying character is really English. I.e. if I opened up a Shan document not having the font for it, I will just see the English equivalent of it.

Put it another way, the old non-Unicode fonts are really just another way to represent English characters. I.e. we tricked the computer and say "bob" really should be drawn like the Shan word for, say, eat, " ႁႃႃႃ".

The problem is while the word "bob" in Georgia is still recognizable if it is in Times New Roman, "bob", I would have no idea if your font says "ZHD" means bob while in another font "DIF" means bob in Shan, if I didn't have your font.

So the problems with non-Unicode fonts are:

1. When I type up a document and send it to you, I will have to make you have and know which font I did my document in or it will come out in gibberish English combinations.
2. This also makes sorting impossible because a "abc" word in your font actually might translate to a word all the way in the back of the dictionary but since the underlying character really is English, the computer will sort this word to the front.
3. You potentially have to learn a new keyboard layout for every font you have (or at least per font designer)!!!

The Unicode era:

Unicode came along and aims to assign an **UN**ique **C**ode for every character in the world and rule them all...(Lord of the Rings fans rejoice!), so now a Shan Ka character (ႁ) is an Unicode 1075, it has absolutely 0 chance to be confused with an English "g" character, which has an entirely different code.

As well, keyboards are now separated from the fonts. You can say, when I press the "g" key on an English keyboard, give me a Unicode 1075, which is " ႁ ", but you can just as easily say when I press the "Q" key, give me that 1075 " ႁ ". In fact you have the ability, with some simple tools, to have the keyboard layout of your heart's desire. More on that to come in a future write up. Not only that, your one Unicode Shan keyboard can control ALL Unicode Shan fonts in the exact same way, you can type a "g" in any Unicode Shan font and it will ALWAYS be whatever you said it would be because your keyboard layout says it is a 1075, and the font simply shows its representation of 1075.

So the benefits of Unicode are (countering the cons of non-Unicode fonts above):

1. When people exchange documents, they no longer need to have the exact Unicode font you have. As long as they have ONE Shan Unicode font, the document will display correctly.
2. Sorting is now possible, because a Shan " ႁ " is a Shan " ႁ " and not some random English character. So now something like a concordance is possible.
3. Learn only one layout (even your own layout). One keyboard to rule them all...

Analogy:

If the above did not make sense, here is an traveling analogy. Let's say for some reason each travel website out there gets to decide what code they used for airports, so one website decided "CNX" would be good to represent the airport in Chiang Mai while another decided to make it into "CMA" or something. So not only you might having problem finding the right airport in the first place, you might accidentally end up in New Zealand! Unicode is the governing body that made everybody agree on ONE code per airport so there will be no more confusion. CNX is CNX is CNX.

Keyboard then is like the payment method, each website used to require its own unique payment methods (pay in mangos, bottles of fish sauce, etc.), but now Unicode say, "hey everybody needs to accept Visa", then Unicode works out with each website how they want to get paid and you don't have to worry about sending mangos in the mail, you just need your Visa card.

Summary of analogy:

The old way: you mailed 300 kgs of mangos to travel website A in exchange for a ticket to CNX which is a small airport in New Zealand. I mailed 500 bottles of premium fish sauce to travel website B in exchange for a ticket to CMA which is the airport in Chiang Mai. The only person that is really happy in all this madness is the shipping company, unless your fish sauce didn't quite make it on the way.

The new way You and I both pay 300 USD on our separate Visa cards for a ticket to CNX, which is the airport in Chiang Mai. Done.