**The Perfect Construction and Complexity Drift in Sri Lankan Malay • Peter Slomanson • C.U.N.Y.**

The verb morphosyntax of Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) differs in striking ways from what we find in other Malay varieties. The simple matrix declarative clause in (1) shows us circumfixal temporal marking of the SLM verb.

(1)      *Farida nasi so-makan-abis.*
         Farida rice PAST-eat-ASP
         "Farida has finished eating rice."

Both the presence of tense morphology and the bound status of tense and aspect morphology are attributable to early contact with the Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil vernacular, but contact with Sinhala has played a significant role in recent change. I will discuss a perfect construction (2), which is modeled on a parallel construction in Sinhala. This is being reduced to past tense suffixation (3) as in Tamil rather than Sinhala, not as a function of contact – these younger speakers do not *know* Tamil – but as a result of changes from a cross-linguistically common cycle of morphological change (grammaticalization>affixation>phonological weakening>deletion>grammaticalization).

(2)      *Farida nasi  a(bi)s-makan (tr)-ada.*
         Farida rice ASP-eat      (NEG)-EXIST
         "Farida has eaten rice."

In the SLM construction in (2), the existential verb *ada* is functioning as a semantically vacuous auxiliary. It can be negated, and that negation can interrupt the adjacency of the verb and the auxiliary. Ordinarily we find negation preceding the lexical verb (stem) in complex SLM verbs. The fact that negation precedes the auxiliary in (2) supports a biclausal analysis for this construction. We find similar perfect constructions in both Tamil and Sinhala, however the syntax of the Sinhala construction appears to be closer, based on adjacency facts. The existential "auxiliary" cannot be separated from the verbal complex in Tamil as it can in Sinhala and SLM. Whether this fact is based entirely on syntax or partly on phonology is an open question, but the contrast with SLM is clear.

In contrast with both Sinhala and Tamil, the completive participial morpheme (SLM *a(bi)s*) is obligatorily pre-verbal. This is attributable to the failure of the SLM verb to raise above an aspectual head in non-finite contexts. *A(bi)s* is in complementary distribution with tense, which correlates with finiteness in SLM. The shape of the *tr-* negator also correlates with finiteness. These facts support the view that (*tr*)*ada* is clausal.

Based on recently collected data (2005), fluent young speakers in the highland dialect area are not using past tense prefixation or the participial prefix, and are reinterpreting *ada* (in the reduced form *da*) as a suffix on the main verb, as in (3). Consequently *ada* as -*da*  is the only available past marker for those speakers.

(3)      *Farida nasi makan-da.*
         Farida rice eat-PAST
         "Farida has eaten rice."

The absence of past tense prefixes represents a partial loss of visible complexity, which challenges the view that SLM is necessarily becoming increasingly complex simply because it has acquired tense and case markers. The trajectory of circumfixal temporal affixation (with periphrasis) to less functionally-elaborated affixation demonstrates that morphological simplicity or complexity in contact languages, as in languages generally, will not increase monodirectionally. Instead, the development of a particular contact language may be punctuated by stages which are alternately more and less complex. Complex circumfixal temporal morphology is being simplified by younger speakers as a consequence of rapid speech phenomena such as contraction and the weakening and deletion of atonic monosyllabic prefixes. This may trigger phrase structure changes, bringing the verb syntax closer to that of Tamil, although not as a result of language contact *per se.*