

The Significance of Sri Lankan Malay and the Importance of Explicit Process Models

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Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) is important to the field of linguistics because it is an outlier with respect to the process of collective second language acquisition and subsequent bilingualism. For theoretical models to be valid, we need to understand outlier processes and states, as much as we need to understand their conventional counterparts.

It is unusual for a radical contact language to develop new phonologically-dependent functional morphology, as has SLM, to mark case contrasts, given the fact that syntactic and other processes can highlight the thematic relationships that could be marked by case morphology, perhaps redundantly. It is also unusual that a radical contact language would develop overt morphology to mark verbs as non-finite, since the functional value of non-finiteness is largely syntactic and typically contributes little to the interpretation of sentences.

The changes that took place in SLM require an explanation, since such changes by no means take place in *all* bilingual speech communities in which the languages spoken are typologically divergent and asymmetrical with respect to the amount of functional morphology they feature. Given this inconsistency across bilingual speech communities, we would expect an external explanation for the changes in SLM. Once there is an external motivation, we would also expect an explicit model of the linguistic processes leading from the earlier form of the contact language to its later form. If the grammatical changes are taken as the product of new communicative needs, we would ultimately want to see what those specific communicative needs are and how the evolving linguistic structure of the contact language accommodates them in a way that was not previously available to its speakers.

Case morphology and other nominal morphology in SLM encode thematic and syntactic relationships between arguments of predicates that are abstractly present in all natural languages, although in other Malay varieties, these relationships are marked differently or not at all. The acquisition of Malay by speakers of Shonam (Muslim Tamil), a language with overt case morphology, provided the conditions for the changes, given the extent of interaction by Malays with its speakers and the prestigious role historically played by Shonam in Malay communities, as the language of religious literature, education, and process.

The sentence in (1) exemplifies functional and morphological change in SLM, since none of the functional affixes and clitics we see in bold have counterparts in vehicular Malay, although they are all derived from free-standing closed class morphology in that language (and in Javanese, in the case of *na*, based on *nang*).

- (1) *Miflal=na tumman=attu=na masigit=ring buku=yang ma-kasi=na si-kəmauan.*
Miflal=**DAT** friend=INDEF=**DAT** mosque=**ABL** book=**ACC INF**-give=**DAT PST**-want
"Miflal wanted to give a friend the book from the mosque."

The term *metatypy* ("change of type") is a label for individual linguistic processes of change, none of which can be identified or explained by simply invoking the term. The concept is nevertheless treated in Ansaldo (2011) as an explanatory model of process that can account for the development of SLM, without elaboration from other cognitive linguistic frameworks. Ansaldo states that this case of ostensible metatypy fulfilled a communicative need, but is silent on what that need consisted of, or why there would even have been one if Malay communities were largely endogamous, as he has claimed repeatedly in his publications. In order for the concept invoked to have explanatory value, specific communicative needs ought to be identified, as well as the way that specific grammatical developments could have accommodated those needs.

With respect to verbal morphology, Slomanson (2011) demonstrated a Sri Lankan discourse culture motivation for the introduction of non-finite status in embedded Malay clauses, whose non-finite status is pragmatically motivated. With respect to SLM case markers, Ansaldo assumes that the morphology encodes contrasts that are not present in vehicular Malay, but the complete absence of case morphology in a range of Malay varieties does not presuppose the absence of thematic contrasts, the absence of abstract case relationships, or any communicative failure within L1 Malay speech communities generally, many of which are as bilingual as the Sri Lankan Malay communities whose bilingualism Ansaldo takes as the factor motivating the process of metatypy. I will review the analysis in Slomanson (2011) and argue for the importance of explicit process models, as opposed to stipulative characterizations that fail to identify specific paths and motivations for grammatical change in L1 and L2 speakers.

Ansaldo, Umberto. 2011. Metatypy in Sri Lanka Malay. In Rajendra Singh & Ghanshyam Sharma (eds.) *Annual Review of South Asian Languages and Linguistics 2011*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. pp. 3-15

Slomanson, Peter. 2011. Dravidian Features in the Sri Lanka Malay verb. In Claire Lefebvre (ed.) *Creoles, their substrates, and language typology*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins. pp. 383-411