

On Evidence for the Presence of a Tense Feature in Sri Lankan Malay Complementizers

Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) has regrammaticalized a range of what had been free-standing closed class functional elements in the Malay varieties (1) that served as the probable antecedents of the Sri Lankan varieties, to such an extent that the new grammar (2) is no longer associated with the same typological class.

- (1) *Paman Musba coba tulis cerita panjang itu.*
Uncle Musba try write story long that
'Uncle Musba is trying to write that long story.'
- (2) *Musba-maama ittu panjang cerita=yang me-tulis=na a-liyat.*
Musba uncle that long story=ACC INF-write=DAT PRS-try
'Uncle Musba is trying to write that long story.'

Previous research has focused on the fact that tense contrasts are explicitly marked in SLM, as well as the fact that although head-complement orders are obligatorily those of the other Lankan languages (PP, NP), and variably so in the VP, the position of tense and other functional markers remains pre-verbal and is phonologically dependent on the verb. We see these markers as simple tense markers, until there is another functional feature present, and then we see amalgamated forms, such as the implicitly tense-marked negation markers, *thara* and *thuma*. The strongest evidence for the fact that they are tense-marked is the fact that only a completely dissimilar form, *jang*, can be used to negate a verb (3) that would be formally infinitival or participial if it remained unnegated. This tense-dependent finite/non-finite contrast is always overtly marked in SLM.

- (3) *Musba-maama ittu panjang cerita=yang ja(ng)-tulis=na, ruma-ka athi-duuduk.*
Musba uncle that long story=ACC NEG.INF-write=DAT house-in FUT-stay
'Uncle Musba will stay at home to not write (without writing) that long story.'

I will discuss the fact that SLM has evolved as a language in which functional elements other than tense that can in principle (based on language-internal and cross-linguistic evidence) be associated with tense have been, and these are specifically the functional elements that remain pre-verbal, rather than occurring as verbal suffixes or obligatorily associating with free-standing auxiliaries, as their Muslim Tamil counterparts do. The generalization also extends to subordinators, which we would expect to be post-verbal (and clause final), but instead appear as verbal prefixes. These prefixes, like the negation markers, do not co-occur with actual tense markers, but can be analyzed as [+tense]. Genuine wh-elements referring to time ('when...?') are not bound to the left edge of the lexical verb (4), whereas complementizers homophonous with those elements are (5).

- (4) *Musba-maama iskuul attu kappan si-kuttumun?*
Musba uncle school IND when PST-see
'When did Uncle Musba see a school?'
- (5) *Musba-maama iskuul attu kappan-(*si-)kuttumun...*
Musba uncle school IND when-PST-see
'When Uncle Musba saw a school...'