

Finiteness and Pseudo-Affixation in Sri Lankan Malay ☀ Peter Slomanson, C.U.N.Y.

Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) is a radical contact language that has by all accounts undergone extensive typological change, however this is distributed unevenly across the grammar. Its major lexical categories appear to manifest an increase in morphological complexity, when compared with what we find in other Malay contact varieties, such as Ambonese Malay. This can be attributed to a certain degree of restructuring, due in part to the collective trilingualism of SLM speakers in Tamil (though diminishingly), Sinhala, and SLM itself. Under a syntactic account of morphological structure, however, the ostensible morphological complexification of SLM nouns and verbs remains rather limited. I will discuss the relatively conservative SLM verb and will show that the extent of new functional affixation is minimal, although string adjacency and PF processes create an impression of morphological complexity. The verb is subject to raising which is not driven by attraction by tense, aspect, modality, and negation, as in Tamil, but simply by a finiteness feature. The finiteness contrast is arguably the most radical morphosyntactic accretion to have developed in Malay in Sri Lanka.

In the matrix clause in (1) – curly braces demarcate the apparent complex verb – tense (past in this example) precedes the lexical verb, to which it is obligatorily adjacent, and aspect (completive in this example) *follows* the lexical verb, to which it is also obligatorily adjacent. (This adjacency itself, which is the basis for the apparent complex verb, is itself a contact linguistic innovation.)

- (1) Farida sɛ pɛ buk { so tulis abis }.
Farida 3S POSS book TNS write ASP
“Farida finished writing her book.”

If we assume the affixation of x-zero elements to follow from their cyclical left-adjunction to successive c-commanding heads, then the verb in (1), having raised to the left of aspect and apparently no further, has not been prefixed to the higher functional head hosting tense features, but is merely adjacent to it. Likewise in the tense-marked and nominalized embedded clause in (2), tense also immediately precedes the lexical verb.

- (2) [Farida sɛ pɛ buk { so (*abis) tulis nya }] Karima { so suka }.
Farida 3S POSS book TNS ASP write ACC Karima TNS like
“Karima liked Farida writing her book (in the past).”

We might assume that the verb is left-adjoined to an aspectual head between the base position of the verb and the functional head hosting tense. We might assume then that aspect attracts the verb. However in the first clause in (3), which is a participial adjunct clause (not tense-marked and therefore not finite), the completive aspect marker *abis* (< *habis*) *precedes* the verb *pi*.

- (3) məsigit naŋ { abis pi }, Farida [sɛ pɛ buk { mə tulis naŋ }] { so mulai }.
mosque to ASP go Farida 3S POSS book NONFIN write P TNS begin
“Having gone to the mosque, Farida (subsequently) began to write her book.”

The example in (3) shows us that the verb does not in fact raise *for* aspect, to which it initially adjoins, just as it does not raise for tense, to which it *never* adjoins. Since the verb *does raise* in finite contexts and not at all in non-finite contexts, I propose that verb movement within the inflectional domain is triggered by finiteness only. The finite verb adjoins to an intermediate FinP projection below tense. Modality and finite negation, which raise to check tense independent of the verb, are generated above FinP. They compete for adjunction to the single functional head hosting tense features. The fact that the SLM verb raises for finiteness does yield affixation to aspect, as a result of successive cyclic head movement. Functional material generated to the left of the verb, however, consisting of tense – but also either negation or modality, but not both at once – remains syntactically unassociated with the verb.