Topics in Sinhala Syntax

Deepthi Kumara Henadeerage

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

of

The Australian National University
May 2002
Except where otherwise acknowledged in the text, this thesis represents the original research of the author.

Deepthi K Henadeerage
This thesis is dedicated to my father
Henadeerage Wilfred Henry Perera in loving memory,
and
to Venerable Kannantudawe Gunalankara Thero
who has been instrumental in fostering my interest in my language.
I would like to express my appreciation and gratitude to Avery Andrews, Chair of my Committee, for his patience, constructive feedback and insightful advice. Over the years, I have benefited from his stimulating ideas and suggestions. I would also like to thank Cynthia Allen, my adviser, whose advice, support and comments have been invaluable, I have learnt a great deal from her. Thanks are also due to Sasha Aikhenvald, who was on my Committee for the first two years, and Nicholas Himmelmann and Anna Wierzbicka for providing comments on the early drafts of some chapters. In addition I appreciate the support and advice of Harold Koch, the Graduate Convenor in 2001-2002.

I am especially grateful to Jane Simpson, who has always inspired and encouraged me since I attended her syntax classes as an undergraduate student at the Department of Linguistics, University of Sydney. She has helped me in many ways and has given helpful comments on a number of chapters in this thesis.

I also appreciate and offer my sincere thanks to my informants, the Sinhala speakers, who later became my good friends, for their valuable time and comments: Thushara Abhayapala, R. Balakrishnan, Neelakshi Chandrasena, Lalith Daluwatta, Rohan Edirisooriya & family, Anupama S. Hewa, Uditha Karunarathne, Sevini Kirinde, Giri Munasinghe, Chandrani Munasinghe, Prasanna Nanayakkara, Savithri Nanayakkara, Dhammika Perera, Kalyani Perera, D. A. J. Ranwala, Rukshika Perera and Ignatius Willathgamuwa.

I want to thank Pascale Jacq for going through all the chapters and proof-reading them carefully, and also Marie Fellbaum and Carol Priestley for proof-reading and various comments.

A number of people assisted me by providing papers or through discussions: Wayan Arka, James Gair, Paul Hagstrom, Tracy Holloway King, Hideki Kishimoto, Masako Ohara, Victoria Rosén, Masayoshi Shibatani and Ven. T. Sutadhara.
At the School of Language Studies, my colleagues, past and present, have been of great support over the years: Safnil Arsyad, Felicita Carr, Azumu Evershed, Junko Inoue, Shunichi Ishihara, Misako Ishii, Marie Fellbaum, Pascale Jacq, Yuko Kinoshita, Wayan Pastika, Carol Priestley, Stuart Robinson, Tatsuya Yanagida, Hyung Soon Yim and Kyung-Joo Yoon.

I am deeply indebted to my family and friends, in particular to my wife Jeeva, for their constant love and support.

This study would not have been possible without the award of an International Postgraduate Research Scholarship (IPRS) from the Commonwealth Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DETYA), Australia and an ANU PhD Scholarship from the Australian National University.
Abstract

This study is a detailed investigation of a number of issues in colloquial Sinhala morphosyntax. These issues primarily concern grammatical relations, argument structure, phrase structure and focus constructions. The theoretical framework of this study is Lexical Functional Grammar.

Chapter 1 introduces the issues to be discussed, followed by a brief introduction of some essential aspects of colloquial Sinhala as background for the discussion in the following chapters. In Chapter 2 we present basic concepts of the theoretical framework of Lexical Functional Grammar.

The next three chapters mainly concern grammatical relations, argument structure and clause structure in colloquial Sinhala. Chapter 3 examines grammatical relations. The main focus lies in establishing the subject grammatical relation in terms of various subjecthood diagnostics. We show that only a very small number of diagnostics are reliable, and that the evidence for subject is weaker than assumed previously. All the subjecthood diagnostics that were examined select the most prominent argument in the argument structure as the subject, i.e. ‘logical subject’. However, there appear to be no processes in the language that are sensitive to the subject in the grammatical relations structure, i.e. ‘gr-subject’. Further, there is no evidence for other grammatical relations like objects. In Chapter 4 we discuss the agentless construction and related valency alternation phenomena. It was previously assumed that the agentless construction, valency alternation phenomena and the involitive construction are all related. We argue that the agentless construction should be treated as a different construction from the involitive construction. We also show that the agentless construction and the involitive construction have contrasting characteristics, and that treatment of them as separate constructions can account for some phenomena which did not receive an explanation previously. The valency alternation phenomena are related to the agentless construction, therefore there is no valency alternation in involitive constructions. It will be shown that verbs undergoing the valency alternation can be distinguished from the other verbs in terms of the lexical semantic properties of individual verbs. Chapter 5 examines the structure of non-verbal
sentences in terms of a number of morphosyntactic phenomena. It was previously argued that verbal sentences and non-verbal sentences in colloquial Sinhala differ in terms of clause structure. However, the present study shows evidence to the contrary.

The next two chapters deal with modelling contrastive focus and the phrase structure of the language. Chapter 6 is a detailed analysis of the contrastive focus (cleft) construction in various clause types in the language, and proposes a unified syntactic treatment of contrastive focus. Contrastive focus is in some constructions morphologically encoded, while in others it involves both morphological and configurational assignment of focus. The complex interaction between focus markers and verb morphology in various focus constructions is accounted for by general well-formedness conditions applying to the f-structure, and the principles of Functional Uncertainty and Morphological Blocking. In Chapter 7, we discuss the phrase structure of the language, in particular such issues as its non-configurational nature and the lack of evidence for VP. We propose non-configurational S and some functional projections to account for word order freedom under S and to explain certain morphosyntactic phenomena, such as configurational focus assignment. Finally, Chapter 8 summarises the conclusions made in previous chapters.
## Contents

**List of Figures** xiii

**List of Tables** xiii

**List of Abbreviations** xv

**Chapter 1** *Introduction* ................................................................. 1

1.1 **Overview** .............................................................................. 1

1.2 **The Issues to be Explored** ................................................... 2

1.3 **Relevant Previous Literature** ................................................ 7

1.4 **Theoretical Framework** ........................................................ 9

1.5 **Colloquial Sinhala** ............................................................... 9

1.6 **Colloquial Sinhala Morphosyntax: Relevant Background Issues** 10

1.6.1 Volitive/Involitive Distinction .............................................. 10

1.6.2 Verb Classifications ............................................................... 11

1.6.3 Case Features ................................................................. 12

1.6.4 Case Assignment ................................................................. 14

1.6.5 Instrumental Case and *Ati* Phrase .................................... 15

1.7 **Organization of the Dissertation** .......................................... 16

**Chapter 2** *Theoretical Framework: Lexical Functional Grammar* .... 17

2.1 **C-structure** ........................................................................ 18

2.2 **F-structure** ........................................................................ 20

2.3 **Correspondence between c- and f-structures** ....................... 23

2.4 **A-structure** ........................................................................ 24

**Chapter 3** *Grammatical Relations* ............................................. 27

3.1 **Overview** ........................................................................... 27

3.1.1 Why establishing GRs is problematic in colloquial Sinhala....... 28

3.1.2 Present Study: Another look at Sinhala GRs ......................... 29

3.2 **Previous Studies** ................................................................ 31

3.2.1 Gunasinghe (1985) ............................................................. 31

3.2.2 Kariyakarawana (1992/1998) ............................................. 33

3.2.3 Wijayawardhana et al. (1991) ............................................. 39

3.2.4 Inman (1993) ................................................................. 40

3.3 **Subject in Colloquial Sinhala** ............................................... 40

3.3.1 NP-Marking ...................................................................... 40

3.3.1.1 Is colloquial Sinhala ergative? ........................................ 44

3.3.2 Constituent Order ............................................................. 46

3.3.3 Cross-referencing ............................................................. 46

3.3.4 Relativisation ................................................................. 47

3.3.5 Quantifier Float ............................................................... 49

3.3.6 Nominalisation ............................................................... 51

3.3.6.1 Nominalisation and Subjecthood ................................ 57
3.3.7 Predicate Gapping ................................................................. 60
3.3.8 Reflexive Binding ............................................................... 64
3.3.9 Summary ............................................................................ 68
3.3.10 Control Constructions .......................................................... 68
   3.3.10.1 Control in Infinitive Clauses ............................................ 68
      3.3.10.1.1 Obligatorily controlled infinitive constructions .......... 69
      3.3.10.1.2 Semantic effect on Equi-NP-Deletion ..................... 71
      3.3.10.1.3 Non-obligatorily controlled infinitive constructions .... 72
      3.3.10.1.4 Anaphoric Control ................................................... 75
      3.3.10.1.5 Modal verbs and non-modal verbs ............................. 75
      3.3.10.1.6 Summary ................................................................. 81
   3.3.10.2 Control in Participle Adjunct Phrases ................................. 81
      3.3.10.2.1 -La Participle Construction ....................................... 82
      3.3.10.2.2 Kọṭ Participle Construction ..................................... 87
      3.3.10.2.3 Gamaŋ Participle Construction ................................. 89
      3.3.10.2.4 Controller in gamaŋ clauses ..................................... 91
      3.3.10.2.5 Controller in gamaŋ clauses ..................................... 93
      3.3.10.2.6 Interaction between causatives and gamaŋ adverbials .... 94
      3.3.10.2.7 Participles formed with reduplicated verbs ................ 94
   3.3.10.3 Control Constructions: Summary and Observations .......... 96
3.3.11 Colloquial Sinhala Subject: Concluding Remarks ...................... 101
   3.3.11.1 What is the subject in colloquial Sinhala? ......................... 102
3.4 Object and other Grammatical Relations ..................................... 107
   3.4.1 Why is it difficult to establish the object? .......................... 108
   3.4.2 Nominalisation and Genitive-marking ................................ 109
3.5 Conclusion .............................................................................. 111

Chapter 4 Volitionality, Valency and Argument Structure .......... 113
4.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 113
   4.1.1 Agentless Construction & Valency Alternation: An Overview ... 115
4.2 Previous Studies ...................................................................... 118
   4.2.1 Gair (1970, 1990) ............................................................... 119
   4.2.2 Gunasinghe and Kess (1989) .............................................. 120
   4.2.3 Wijayawardhana et al. (1991) ........................................... 121
   4.2.4 Inman (1993) ................................................................. 123
4.3 Problems with Previous Studies .............................................. 126
   4.3.1 Against a Passive Analysis ............................................... 127
   4.3.2 Misanalyses of Agentless Clauses .................................... 129
   4.3.3 Difference between Middles, Involitives, and Agentless Clauses 130
4.4 Towards An Analysis ............................................................. 131
   4.4.1 Distinguishing Agentless Clauses ..................................... 131
   4.4.2 Why the agentless construction is not possible with every verb 136
      4.4.2.1 The Imperative Construction: A Confirmation of the Analysis 141
   4.4.3 Separating Valency from Volition: Arguing for Decausatives ... 143
   4.4.4 Argument Structure of Valency Alternating Verbs ............... 147
4.5 Concluding Remarks ............................................................. 148

Chapter 5 Non-Verbal Sentences .................................................. 151
5.1 Introduction .......................................................................... 151
5.2 Word Classes and Non-Verbal Predicates ................................. 152
## Chapter 6  **Focus in Colloquial Sinhala**  ................................................................................................. 199

### 6.1 Overview ........................................................................................................................................ 199

- **6.1.1** Focus Encoding in Colloquial Sinhala ...................................................................................... 199
- **6.1.2** The Notion of Focus and Focus in Colloquial Sinhala ............................................................... 201
- **6.1.3** Are there different focus constructions in Sinhala? ................................................................. 203

### 6.2 Characteristics of Colloquial Sinhala Focus .................................................................................. 204

- **6.2.1** Focus in Simple Clauses ........................................................................................................... 204
- **6.2.2** Focus in Multi-Clause Constructions (MCCs) .......................................................................... 208
  - **6.2.2.1** Scope Marking and Focus Interpretation .............................................................................. 209
  - **6.2.2.2** Characteristics of MCCs .................................................................................................... 212
- **6.2.3** Non-Verbal Predicates and Encoding of Focus ......................................................................... 216
- **6.2.4** Summary .................................................................................................................................. 220

### 6.3 Previous Studies: Kariyakarawana (1998) .................................................................................. 220

- **6.3.1** Obligatory Cleft Reading ......................................................................................................... 221
- **6.3.2** Negation Selection ................................................................................................................... 224
- **6.3.3** Morphological Marking of Focus ............................................................................................. 226

### 6.4 Colloquial Sinhala Focus: An Analysis .......................................................................................... 227

- **6.4.1** Introduction .............................................................................................................................. 227
- **6.4.2** Functional Uncertainty ............................................................................................................ 228
- **6.4.3** Morphological Blocking Principle .......................................................................................... 232
- **6.4.4** Focus Analysis ......................................................................................................................... 234
  - **6.4.4.1** Simple Clauses: Constituent Focus ..................................................................................... 235
  - **6.4.4.2** Simple Clauses: Predicate Focus ....................................................................................... 239
  - **6.4.4.3** Simple Clauses: Clause-Final Focus .................................................................................... 241
  - **6.4.4.4** Focus in Multi-Clause Constructions ................................................................................... 245
  - **6.4.4.5** Focus in Non-Verbal Sentences ............................................................................................ 249
- **6.4.5** Summary .................................................................................................................................. 250

### 6.5 Conclusions..................................................................................................................................... 251
List of Figures

Figure 2-1: F-Structure as an Attribute-Value Matrix .................................................. 21
Figure 2-2: Cross-classifications of GFs ....................................................................... 22
Figure 2-3: Correspondence between c-structure and f-structure representation for (3) .................................................................................................................... 24
Figure 2-4: Correspondence between lexical-semantics, a-structure and f-structure ... 26

Figure 3-1: PS positions of inner & outer subjects for (5) (from Kariyakarawana 1998:78) ................................................................................................................ 35
Figure 3-2: Accusative and Ergative systems and A, S, O ........................................... 41
Figure 3-3: Cases appearing with arguments on the basis of A, S and O ................. 44

Figure 4-1: Divisions of verbs according to volition and valency ......................... 145

List of Tables

Table 1-1: Volitive and Involitive verbs ................................................................. 10
Table 1-2: A-C-P Classification of Volitive and Involitive Verbs ....................... 12
Table 1-3: Case Features for Animate and Inanimate Nouns ......................... 13

Table 3-1: Properties of subjects and objects of VSs, DSC and NVSs ................. 36
Table 3-2: Compound verbs with we- ‘to be/happen’ and kərə ‘to do’ ............... 55
Table 3-3: Verb morphology and nominalised form /kad-/ ‘break’ /mar-/ ‘kill’ ...... 58
Table 3-4: Modal Verbs ......................................................................................... 77
Table 3-5: Previous studies which employed participle clauses as subjecthood tests .. 82
Table 3-6: Control Constructions: Summary .................................................... 97
Table 3-7: Semantically Conditioned Pivots .................................................... 102
Table 3-8: Syntactic Pivots/Subjects .................................................................. 102
Table 3-9: Processes Sensitive to Argument Structure ..................................... 104

Table 4-1: Verb Classification by Gunasinghe and Kess (1989) ...................... 121
Table 4-2: Transitive verbs with a valence alternation .................................. 137
Table 4-3: Transitive verbs not exhibiting a valence alternation ..................... 140
Table 4-4: Intransitive verbs ............................................................................. 140

Table 5-1: Action Nominals .............................................................................. 164
Table 5-2: Negator selection of different predicate types ......................... 171

Table 6-1: Outline of focus interpretations in MCCs ...................................... 208
Table 6-2: Interaction between focus markers and the e-maker in verbal and non-verbal clauses ................................................. 234
### Abbreviations in Interlinear Glosses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1, 2, 3</td>
<td>first person, second person, third person</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>declarative marker on verbs -a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABS</td>
<td>absolutive case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ACC</td>
<td>accusative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AM</td>
<td>assertion marker -yi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANIM</td>
<td>animate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CAU</td>
<td>causative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMP</td>
<td>complementiser <em>that</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COND</td>
<td>conditional <em>nag</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CONJ</td>
<td>conjunction marker -yi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAT</td>
<td>dative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEF</td>
<td>definite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DUB</td>
<td>dubitative focus marker <em>yæ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>scope marker on verbs -e</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EMP</td>
<td>emphatic marker -m∅</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ERG</td>
<td>ergative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXC</td>
<td>exclusive focus marker <em>wit,wray</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNEG</td>
<td>negative focus marker <em>nemey</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOC</td>
<td>general contrastive focus marker <em>tamay,tamaa/-yi</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUT</td>
<td>future tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEN</td>
<td>genitive case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IND</td>
<td>indefinite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INF</td>
<td>infinitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INAN</td>
<td>inanimate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INST</td>
<td>instrumental case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INV</td>
<td>involitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LOC</td>
<td>locative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NEG</td>
<td>negative particle <em>nææ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NF</td>
<td>non-finite</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOM</td>
<td>nominative case</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NOMIN</td>
<td>nominalised form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPT</td>
<td>optative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PAS</td>
<td>passive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PER</td>
<td>permissive -aawe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PL</td>
<td>plural</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>POSTP</td>
<td>postposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PRE</td>
<td>present tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PST</td>
<td>past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTCP</td>
<td>participle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTG</td>
<td>participle marker <em>gamaŋ</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTK</td>
<td>participle marker <em>kot∅</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>question marker <em>d∅</em></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Transliteration

- In transcribing proper names in Sinhala examples we follow the common orthography used in day-to-day practice, and have not used phonetic symbols such as schwa.
- Long vowels are indicated by doubling the vowel symbol (e.g. aa for long a)
- The following symbols are used in Sinhala examples:
  
  æ  mid front short vowel (as in cat)
  ə  schwa
  η  velar nasal
  n^d  prenasalised dental stop
  n^g  prenasalised velar stop
  n^b  prenasalised bilabial stop
  n^d  prenasalised retroflex stop
  ɽ , t  retroflex stops

Conventions

- The majority of Sinhala data used in this study were obtained by consultation with Sinhala speakers. The data from all the other sources is acknowledged.
- The transliteration and the interlinear gloss of sentences quoted from other sources, have been changed to the conventions of this study for consistency.
- The following acronyms are used in this study:

  AFF affix
  AN(s) Action Nominal(s)
  DSC dative subject construction
  FP Focus Phrase
  FU Functional Uncertainty
  GB Government and Binding Theory
  GR(s) grammatical relation(s)
  IOFU Inside_Out Functional Uncertainty
  LFG Lexical Functional Grammar
  LMT Lexical Mapping Theory
  MBP Morphological Blocking Principle
MCC(s)  Multi Clause Construction(s)
NV      non-verbal
NVS(s)  non-verbal sentence(s)
OBJ     object grammatical function
OBJø    secondary object grammatical function
OBL     oblique grammatical function
OIFU    Outside_In Functional Uncertainty
SUBJ    subject grammatical function
VS(s)   verbal sentence(s)