

Topics in Sinhala Syntax

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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.

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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 <i>Atiṅ</i> 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	- <i>La</i> Participle Construction	82
3.3.10.2.2	<i>Kotə</i> Participle Construction	87
3.3.10.2.3	<i>Gamaŋ</i> Participle Construction	89
3.3.10.2.4	Controllee in <i>gamaŋ</i> clauses	91
3.3.10.2.5	Controller in <i>gamaŋ</i> clauses	93
3.3.10.2.6	Interaction between causatives and <i>gamaŋ</i> 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

5.2.1	Adjectives	152
5.2.2	Postpositions	157
5.2.3	Nouns and Nominal Predicates	160
5.2.4	Action Nominals	162
5.2.5	Null-Copula and No Copula	164
5.2.6	Summary	165
5.3	Non-Verbal Sentences and Negation	166
5.4	VSs, NVSs and Kariyakarawana (1998)	173
5.4.1	Embedding	174
5.4.2	Subject Extraction	175
5.4.3	Complement Extraction	178
5.4.4	Topic Interpretation	182
5.4.5	Nominalisation and Inflectional Suffixes	183
5.4.6	Relativisation	184
5.4.7	Quantifier Float	185
5.4.8	Summary	186
5.5	Is There a Copula or Hidden Verb in NVSs?	186
5.5.1	Action Nominals	193
5.6	Problems posed by Copula-less Clauses	195
5.7	Concluding Remarks	196
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

Chapter 7	Phrase Structure	255
7.1	Introduction	255
7.2	Unmarked Constituent Order.....	256
7.3	Non-configurationality and Sinhala	257
7.3.1	Discontinuous Constituents.....	258
7.3.2	Pro-drop.....	259
7.3.3	Does Sinhala have a VP?	259
7.3.4	Focus: further evidence against VP.....	260
7.3.5	Pronominal Binding Relations	265
7.3.6	Summary and Concluding Remarks.....	267
7.4	Word Order Freezing	268
7.5	Sinhala Phrase Structure.....	269
7.5.1	Functional Categories.....	271
7.5.1.1	Functional Category: CP.....	271
7.5.1.2	Functional Category: Focus Phrase ‘FP’	274
7.6	Concluding Remarks	280
Chapter 8	Conclusion	283
8.1	Summary and Concluding Remarks	283
8.2	General Observations on Colloquial Sinhala Morphosyntax	287
8.3	Future Research	288
Bibliography		291

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 <i>we-</i> ‘to be/happen’ and <i>kərə-</i> ‘to do’	55
Table 3-3: Verb morphology and nominalised form / <i>kad-</i> / ‘break’ / <i>mar-</i> / ‘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

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

REDUP	reduplicated form of verb acting as participle
REL	relative clause
REP	reportative focus marker <i>lu</i>
SG	singular
TAG	n'est ce pas/tag question marker <i>ne</i>
TOP	contrastive topic marker <i>naŋ</i>
VADJ	verbal adjective
VOL	volitive
-	separates morpheme boundary
.	separates glosses of fused meanings in portmanteau morpheme

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 <i>cat</i>)
ə	schwa
ŋ	velar nasal
ⁿ d	prenasalised dental stop
^ŋ g	prenasalised velar stop
^m b	prenasalised bilabial stop
ⁿ ɖ	prenasalised retroflex stop
ɖ , ʈ	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)