Morphology-Discourse Interface in Sinhala[1]

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1. Introduction

The information packaging such as Focus, Modality, and Topic are realized morphologically in Sinhala in the form of particles/suffixes. They can attach to any lexical category in an agglutinative fashion and take scope over the domain to the left. When the clause bears one of these particles showing any of the above discourse phenomena, the verb takes a special e-ending, as opposed to neutral a-ending. This special form the verb assumes is a notable syntactic characteristic of the Sinhala clause which warrants a detailed analysis. Example (1) is a neutral sentence, and (2-5) indicate the e-ending with a past tense verb.

1. Nimal   kaareka   seeduwa (Neutral)

   Nimal (Nom) car-def   wash (Pst)

   'Nimal washed the car'

2. Nimal   tamai kaareka   seeduwe/*seeduwa (Focus)

   Nimal (Nom) Foc   car-def   wash-E (Pst)

   'It was Nimal who washed the car'

3. Nimal   lu   kaareka   seeduwe/*seeduwa (Evidential modality)

   Nimal (Nom) Evid   car-def   wash-E (Pst)

   'It is said that Nimal washed the car'

4. Nimal   ne   kaareka   seeduwe/*seeduwa (Evaluative modality)

   Nimal (Nom) Epis   car-def   wash-E (Pst)

   'Nimal washed the car' (shared information)

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[1] An Indo-Aryan, spoken in Sri Lanka

5. Kau   da   kaareka   seeduwe? /*seeduwa (Wh)

   Wh   Q   car-def   wash-E (Pst)

   'Who washed the car?'

However, in order for the e-suffix to surface, a number of other syntactic requirements are necessary, as shown below.

a) The particular NP/DP should be in the narrow scope of the discourse particle (examples 2-5 above)

b) Only one such particle can occur in a matrix clause (example 6)

6) *Nimal   tamai kaareka   tamai   seeduwe/**seeduwa**

   Nimal (Nom) Foc   car-def   Foc   wash-E (Pst)

   'It was Nimal and it was the car he washed'

c) When the discourse particle has wide scope (sentential scope), e-morphology does not appear (example 7)

7) Nimal   kaareka   seeduwa/*seeduwe   **tamai/lu/ne**

   Nimal (Nom) car-def   wash (Pst)/ wash-E (Pst)   Foc/Evid/Epis

   'It was Nimal who washed the car'

   'It is said that Nimal washed the car'

   'Nimal washed the car' (shared information)

The above examples indicate the diverseness of discourse phenomena – such as focus, evidential modality, evaluative modality, and Wh- affected by e-marking on the verb. This differential behavior of the –e suffix highlights among other things: (1) it is not simply the modal/focus/wh- particle that determines the contrastive discourse interpretation, but the verbal inflection also takes part in this process. (2) It shows the scope marking potential of the discourse particle and the corresponding verbal morphology.[2] That is, when the discourse particle attaches to any phrase level constituent, the verb inflects for –e. This creates a set of alternatives out of which one individual/entity is given saliency. But, when the same particle attaches to the whole

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[2] Karunatillake, W.S. (1992) calls this particular verb form with the –e suffix "emphatic verb". However, he does not attempt a separate analysis of –e.

clause, it does not inflect for the–e suffix indicating that the alternative set is not available in this instance.

These examples which highlight the interaction of e-marking with the left periphery of the clause provide ample ground to explore the morphology-discourse interface with respect to Sinhala.

2. Objectives

This paper seeks to investigate morphology-discourse interface by examining the following in sufficient detail.

a) What is this e-morpheme?

b) What is the kind of phenomena that trigger it?

c) Can the diverse discourse phenomena affected by this e-morphology be captured in a single generalization?

3. Theoretical Framework

The recent studies in the left periphery of the clause by Rizzi (1997, 1999), and Cinque (1999), have far reaching theoretical and empirical implications for further research on the clause structure of individual languages. Rizzi argues for a multiple layer approach to CP with two distinct head positions, FORCE and FINITENESS, interacting with two interfaces and activating a Topic Focus field. The C-system is interpreted as an interface between two layers of an information system, one interfacing with the domain of discourse - typing the clause as interrogative, relative, adverbial, etc., -- and the other interfacing with the domain of the sentence - expressing the content within IP, and determining its finiteness properties. Accordingly, the information contained in the higher structure is called the specification of Force (or Force) and the lower, more inward-looking structure headed by IP, as Finiteness. Unlike the Force-Finite system, which is an essential part of the C-system present whenever there is a CP, the topic-focus field is present in the structure only when it is activated, that is, when a constituent bearing topic or focus needs to be licensed by a Spec-Head criterion. Since Force and Finiteness closes off the C-system upward and downward, the topic-focus field is located between the two C-Heads on either side as shown below.

8) .....Force...... (Topic)...... (Focus)........Fin   IP

The positions occupied by Force and Finiteness are justified on empirical grounds using the behavior of complementizers "di" and "che" in Italian (which Rizzi says is applicable to Romance in general).

Cinque (1999) proposes a universal hierarchy of functional heads represented by moods/modalities/tenses/and aspects which construct the natural language clause. Based on a wealth of cross-linguistic evidence, Cinque (1999) builds up the argument, that natural language clause is a construct of Moods, Modals, Tenses, and Aspects. He argues that these major clause-building categories are rigidly hierarchically ordered with respect to each other, as in (09) (Cinque (1999: 56).

9) MOOD speech act > MOOD evaluative > MOOD evidential > MOOD epistemic > T(Past) > T(Future)> MOOD (Ir)realis > ASP habitual > T(Anterior) > ASP perfect > ASP retrospective > ASP durative > ASP progressive > ASP prospective / MOD root > VOICE > ASP celerative > ASP completive > ASP(semel) repetitive > ASP iterative

Cinque further proposes that adverb phrases are unique specifiers of this fixed universal ordering of the set of Moods, Modals, Tenses, and Aspects.

Consequently, the above two proposals provide strong motivation to explore the discourse particles of Sinhala- focus, mood/modality and Wh- in a similar theoretical framework.

4. Previous Literature

Gair, (1998), Hagstrom, (1998), Henadeerage, (2002), Kariyakarawana, (1998), (among others) have researched on Sinhala syntax. But there is no separate syntactic study on morphology-discourse interface where the interaction between verbal morphology (e- morpheme) and discourse phenomena is sufficiently explored. Also, most of these works are based on Chomsky's theory of Generative syntax – rather than cartographic. Nevertheless, their observations related to the verbal morphology (e- marking) of Sinhala are presented in brief below as this would throw light on how marginal is their treatment of this particular phenomenon.

Gair (1998) discusses the e-suffix as a special marking on the tensed verb which occurs in the focus construction. He concludes that the e-suffix indicates that the focus is external to the verb- that is, that the focus does not include the verb. He also generalizes that the clitics/ particles such as *da* (question), *yi* (emphasis or limitation), *tamai* (certainly, forsooth), *lu* (reportative) and *nan* (if) are Focus particles. Their occurrence on any constituent other than the verb requires the presence of the e-suffix.

Hagstrom (1998) discusses the WH question formation extensively by examining the syntax, morphology, and semantics of questions. Consequently he investigates the movement of the Q-particle (da) in Sinhala, the nature of the movement involved, constraints on movement, and the co-relation of Q-particle with e-morphology on the verb. Further, he discusses the Focus construction of Sinhala in relation to the question formation as the Q-particle "da" shows a similar distribution and shares similar scope marking properties. Hagstrom maintains that the role of e-suffix is central to the understanding of the movement relation and establishing the identity of the moving particle/constituent. He proposes that e- Suffix serves a scope marking function that depends on the distribution of the Q particle. Where Q (da) is clause internal, the embedded verb is marked with –e, but a clause peripheral Q (da) does not trigger -e on the verb. He identifies a strong syntactic parallel between WH and Focus on the basis of the above distributional evidence. He concludes that the e-morpheme is a morphological reflection of an unchecked feature and suffixation of the Q-head "da" or the focus head "tamai" can check this feature via movement.

Heenadeerage (2002) examines the role of the e-suffix in the context of the Sinhala focus construction. He identifies three distinct types of focus in Sinhala as Constituent Focus, Predicate Focus, and Clause-Final Focus. Constituent focus corresponds to morphological marking of focus with a focus particle where a pre-verbal constituent followed by the focus marker receives focus in the discourse. In this case the verb is e-marked. Predicate focus refers to the propositional focus where a focus particle occurs in the clause final position so that the whole proposition is focused. This does not trigger e- on the verb. The post verbal position (with the verb e-marked) where a constituent receives focus is identified as Clause Final focus. This is also identified as syntactic focus in literature. He too lists the particles *tamai* (focus), *yae* (dubitative), *lu* (reportative), *da* (Q-marker), *nang* (conditional), and *ne* (tag) as focus markers so that they share the same structural position and distribution.

Kariyakarawana (1998) investigates the focus phenomena of Sinhala in the theoretical framework of Government and Binding (Chomsky: 1981, 1982, and 1986 a, b) and attempts a comprehensive analysis of the focus construction. His critical examination of focus includes the cleft construction, WH movement, focus particles, focus and pre-supposition, and the verb marking. He lists the particles*lu* (reportative), *da*(interrogative), *ne*(tag), *tamai*(Foc) as focus markers that make any constituent immediately preceding one of them morphologically focused and observes that they attribute a contrastive meaning to the whole proposition, or a constituent that comes under the scope of such a particle thereby contributing to the propositional focus/constituent focus dichotomy. He generalize that the different particles that encode some degree of focus and have a similar distribution are focus particles. Consequently, a critical investigation of the above particles and the corresponding e-marking on the verb has not been attempted.

A general observation that can be made regarding studies on Sinhala focus (and WH questions) that have been discussed in the preceding sections is the centrality of all the arguments and evidence on the focus phenomenon alone. On the basis of focus encoding properties displayed by such particles as *lu*(rep), *ne*(Tag), *yae*(Dub), *da*(Q), *nang*(If), and their similar distribution, all such particles have been subsumed under Focus. Consequently no attempt has been made to establish the exact identity of these particles and their relation to e-morphology in terms of morphology-discourse interface.

5. Methodology

Data for the present study consisted of the grammatical judgments of native speakers of Sinhala. Since the aim of generative syntax is to model the native speaker competence by examining his performance, this study too relied on such native speaker grammatical judgments. Although the researcher himself is a native speaker of Sinhala, it was still necessary to rely on a rather larger corpus. Hence, a sample of 10 native speakers representing different age groups was selected. This included 03 children aged between 8-13, and 6 adults in the age group of 30-60. The researcher too was considered as a member of the sample. About 40 sentences/questions were presented to them with different ordering of modality, focus, and Wh- particles. This was necessary in order to judge the scope properties of such discourse particles, in addition to testing accuracy of the utterances. The utterances included both matrix and embedded sentences.

6. Analysis and Discussion

6.1 Tense and Agreement in Sinhala

The verb inflects for Tense in Sinhala (example 10). However, the verb does not inflect for person/number/gender agreement (Phi-agreement) (example 12). (Kariyakarawana, Chandralal, Gair, Gair and Sumangala)

10) Nimal   kaareka   soodanava/seeduwa

     Nimal (Nom) car-def   wash (Prs)/wash(Pst)

     'Nimal is washing the car/Nimal washed the car'

11) A: oyala   monava-da   kanne/kaeve?

     You (pl)   what-Q   eat (pres) –e/ eat(pst)-e

     'What are you eating?/ What did you eat?'

12) B: **Mama** paan kanava/**kæva**, **Nimal** bath kanava/**kæva**, **meyala** roti kanava/**kæva**

     I bread eat (pres/pst) Nimal rice eat (pres/pst) these people roti eat (pres/pst)

     'I eat bread, Nimal eat rice, these (people) eat roti'

     'I ate bread, Nimal ate rice, these (people) ate roti'

Information structure encoding in Sinhala presents a challenge to the minimalist assumptions where topic/focus related information are considered pragmatic property and hence are not well motivated in the narrow syntax. In Sinhala, the picture is different as focus/modality encoding takes place morphologically through particles. Essentially, then these lexical items/particles should be in the lexicon before they become a Numeration, must have semantic features, and get computed in syntax. Hence, in a way, information structure of the clause is pre-determined. This indicates that, what drives the derivation cannot be the formal features alone, but the feature composition of the discourse particles too. Therefore, the morphological encoding of focus in Sinhala offers further empirical justification for a cartographic approach. This is not surprising because there are other languages too which realize information packaging overtly through particles/suffixes. Aboh (2010) presents evidence from Kwa and Bantu languages, notably from Gungbe and Zulu for focus encoding through focus markers (wɛ), (ya).

Thus, in line with the cartographic approach adopted by Rizzi (1997) and Cinque (1999), I propose that the information packaging particles in Sinhala (modal/focus) are distinct functional heads. Their head order is determined by their order of occurrence as shown in the following sections.

6.2 Head Order

In Sinhala, Focus and an evaluative/epistemic modal cannot co-occur, as shown in the following examples. Example (13) shows narrow scope marking while examples (14-15) show wide scope marking of the discourse particles. In both, these heads cannot co-occur in either order.

13) *Nimal   tamai lu/ne   kaareka   seeduwe

    Nimal (Nom) Foc Evid/Eval car-def   wash-E (Pst)

    'It was Nimal as the people say/shared information/(disappointment) who washed the car'

14) *Nimal gaha kaepuwa thamai lu/ne
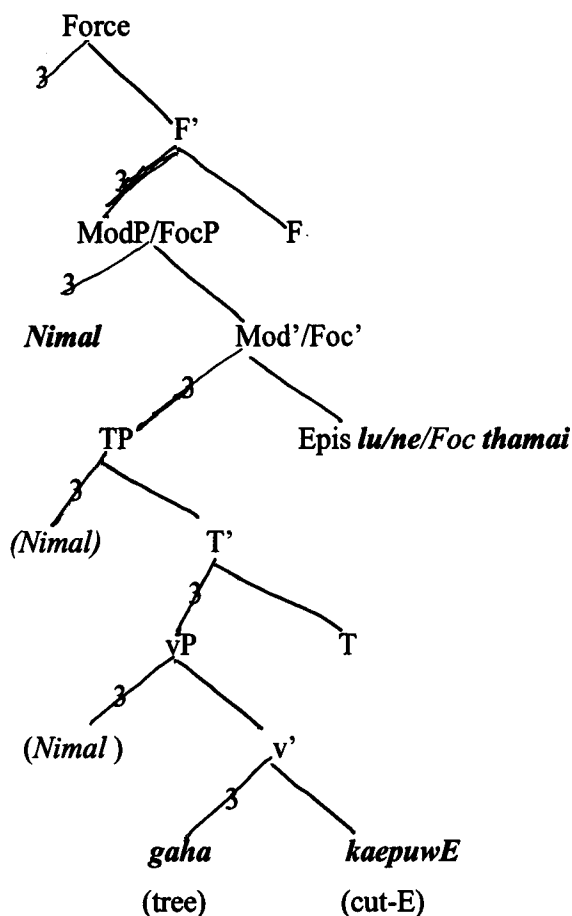
    Nimal tree cut(past)   Foc Evid/Eval

15) *Nimal gaha kaepuwa lu/ne   thamai

    Nimal tree cut(past)   Evid/Eval/ Foc

This complementary distribution shows that both Focus and epistemic modals compete for the same Head position. Further, these Heads are located in the C- domain, below Force. That these Heads are located below Force is evident as the highest Head in the clause is the C/Force as shown below (16).

16) [Nimal **thamai** gaha kaepuwe **kiyala**] Amma kiuwa

    Nimal Foc   tree cutE(past) Comp mother said

    'Mother said that it was Nimal who cut the tree'

The syntactic analysis I propose for the information packaging particles in Sinhala is that, in narrow scope marking, the particular DP moves to the Spec of the Modal Projection, triggering Spec-Head agreement. What triggers this movement is the feature checking requirement of the particular Head and the DP. An overt reflex of this Agree relation is the –e marking on the verb (17).

17)

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                    Force
              3
                      F'
                 3
           ModP/FocP    F
              3
       Nimal        Mod'/Foc'
                 3
            TP        Epis lu/ne/Foc thamai
           3
      (Nimal)    T'
              3
           vP        T
          3
      (Nimal)    v'
              3
         gaha      kaepuwE
         (tree)    (cut-E)
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7. Conclusion

This paper sought to investigate morphology-discourse interface with respect to data from Sinhala. The major claim in the proposal was that the e-marking on the finite verb which surfaces when there is a discourse particle in the clause provides sufficient evidence for morphology-discourse interface. As revealed in the data and the analysis, this e-marking also contributes to the particular modal/focus/Q/Wh interpretation. Although Sinhala lacks overt Person/Number agreement, it displays some information structure related agreement which is between a higher functional Head (Foc/Mod) and a lower constituent (NP/DP).

As discourse particles in Sinhala are introduced lexically in the derivation, and, among other things, these discourse particles determines the surface structure of the sentence, Sinhala provides sufficient evidence for discourse configurationality. Since this e-morpheme is an overt reflex of an Agree relation, agreement in this language is tied to discourse phenomena. Sinhala speakers acquire these information structure sensitive particles as part of the lexicon.

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