

Sinhala Influence in Sri Lanka Malay

Sri Lanka Malay (SLM) is a contact language with Malay vocabulary and South Asian grammar (Adelaar 1991). Smith (2003) notes that the major local languages Sinhala and Tamil show very similar grammatical structure, so that it is difficult to identify the precise source of the South Asian structures we find in SLM. He goes on to argue that subtle differences between Tamil and Sinhala in the marking of indefiniteness, number, and case suggest that Tamil influence is more likely. Smith et al. (2004) add some phonotactic evidence. This talk critically reassesses these claims based on a corpus of about 100 texts and shows that they are empirically problematic. It then discusses additional areas where Sinhala and Tamil diverge and shows that SLM has greater parallels with Sinhala in this extended set.

Smith's first claim is that SLM does not mark definiteness and is like Tamil in this regard, while Sinhala does mark definiteness. The data in the corpus disprove this claim: SLM has a very solid marking of (in)definiteness which is almost identical to the Sinhala system. The second claim relates to the number system. While Sinhala has obligatory number marking, number marking in Tamil and SLM are not obligatory (Smith 2003). However, SLM has simply preserved the traditional optional number marking of Malay, so that no language contact need to be invoked here. Furthermore, Tamil has obligatory number marking on animates (Lehmann 1989), which is not found in SLM. Smith's third claim is that the SLM accusative aligns with the Tamil accusative. A closer observation reveals that the SLM accusative is a very muddled area (Ansaldo 2005, Nordhoff 2009) which combines Sinhala and Tamil features but is no clear copy of either system. In the domain of phonology, Smith et al. (2004) claim that SLM does not have initial retroflex stops, a parallel with Tamil. This claim is empirically wrong as SLM has both initial dental stops as in [ɖaɖtaŋ] 'come' and initial retroflex stops as in [ɖa:ɖur] 'oven'. Incidentally, this is also what we find in Sinhala, so that the domain of phonotactics suggests Sinhala rather than Tamil influence. Of the four alleged areas where Tamil influence should be found according to Smith et al., two rather exhibit Sinhala influence (definiteness and retroflexes), while one is a retention (number marking) and the last one (accusative) is a compromise between the systems of Sinhala and Tamil.

In a second section, this talk discusses three additional areas where Sinhala and Tamil diverge (prenasalized stops, existentials and loanword integration) and shows that SLM aligns with Sinhala in these areas, suggesting a more important contribution of Sinhala than previously assumed.

References

- ADELAAR, K. A. (1991). "Some notes on the origin of Sri Lankan Malay". In Steinhauer (1991), pp. 23–37.
- ANSALDO, U. (2005). "Typological admixture in Sri Lanka Malay. The case of Kirinda Java." Unpublished manuscript, available at <http://home.medewerker.uva.nl/u.ansaldo/index.html>.
- LEHMANN, T. (1989). *A Grammar of Modern Tamil*. Pondicherry: Pondicherry Institute of Linguistics and Culture.
- NORDHOFF, S. (2009). *A Grammar of Upcountry Sri Lanka Malay*. Ph.D. thesis, University of Amsterdam.
- SMITH, I. R. (2003). "The provenance and timing of substrate influence in Sri Lankan Malay; Definiteness, animacy and accusative case marking." Paper presented at the South Asian Language Analysis Roundtable XXIII, Austin, Texas.
- SMITH, I. R., S. PAAUW & B. A. HUSSAINMIYA (2004). "Sri Lanka Malay: the state of the art." *Yearbook of South Asian Languages*, 2004:197–215.
- STEINHAUER, H. (ed.) (1991). *Papers in Austronesian linguistics, Pacific Linguistics*, vol. 1. Canberra: The Australian National University.