

# The Syntax of Tense and Aspect in Sri Lankan Malay

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Sri Lankan Malay (SLM) TMA markers are etymologically related to free-standing functional elements in Indonesian contact varieties of Malay (IMV), the lexical source for SLM. I propose a syntactic analysis of the discontinuous distribution of tense and aspect markers found in SLM, presenting data that demonstrate the existence of unspecified functional heads that host more than one type of feature, including tense, but not aspect.

Tense markers such as *so*, *arə* (<*ada*), and (*a*)*nti*, which precede a lexical verb, are reanalyzed IMV aspect particles. They appear to the left of the verb, as in IMV, however they are affix-like in SLM. Their obligatory left-adjacency to lexical verbs is not characteristic of IMV. If we adopt a view of morphology based on Baker's Mirror Principle and Kayne's antisymmetry, a morphological process such as tense affixation cannot lead to the order affix + verb, because this would involve right-adjunction of the verb to its affix (Julien 2002). The SLM order can be derived by means of adjacent functional heads.

- (1) Hanif lima sigrɛt so-minung-(abis).  
Hanif five cigarette TNS-drink-ASP  
“Hanif finished smoking five cigarettes.”

Although the features in the SLM functional projection to the left of the verb must be spelled out by an affix-like element, this can be negation. Spell-out of negation and tense is implicationaly ranked, with negation (2) outranking tense (1). The verb itself only bears the appropriately ranked feature, which is not checked before LF.

- (2) Hanif lima sigrɛt tər-minung-(abis).  
Hanif five cigarette NEG-drink-ASP  
“Hanif did not finish smoking five cigarettes.”

Smith & Paauw (2004) demonstrated contrasting surface positions for tense and aspect in SLM. It has not yet been established, however, why tense elements whose functional status is borrowed from Tamil would be restricted to pre-verbal position, *contra* the Tamil morpheme order. This distributional fact is all the more surprising, given the invariantly head-final status of SLM PPs, pointing to a contrast between the nominal domain, which is relatively convergent with Tamil, and the verbal domain, which is less so (Slomanson 2003). Modeling these asymmetries can strengthen our understanding of contact language development.

In my analysis, the grammar of modern SLM has two functional projections which host temporal features. Based on the morpheme order tense-verb-aspect, the lowest of these is AspP, the only functionally-specified projection of the two. Only AspP attracts the verb. I suggest that aspect is strong, a syntactic effect, because it is morphologically encoded and a primary contrast both in the Malay lexifier and in Tamil. Tamil encodes aspect by raising a lexical verb to the left of its aspect marker. This is replicated in SLM. Although Tamil also encodes tense, the Malay lexifier does not. This led to a syntactic mismatch in which the functional contrast “transferred” from Tamil, but its syntactic representation did not. The projection hosting tense and negation is functionally unspecified. The features it may have are weak and do not attract a verb prior to LF. The verb always raises overtly to AspP, although its feature content is not obligatorily spelled out as a visible aspect marker.