

THE DATIVE SUFFIX /tə/ OF COLLOQUIAL SINHALA

HEMA WEERAKOON

Department of Linguistics, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka

- 1.1 The all too familiar /tə/ suffix of Colloquial Sinhala is indeed a peculiar linguistic phenomenon. It performs a variety of functions; but its primary function however, is as a marker of case. In addition to its case-marking function, /tə/ functions as an adverbialising suffix, as a conjunction and also as a post-position. In the performance of its post-positional function especially, it occurs in a wide variety of environments.
- 1.2 The general theoretical frame-work for this analysis is that of Transformational—Generative grammar (Chomsky 1957, 1965). Sinhala responds well to a system of analysis that recognises the distinctions between case in deep structure and case in surface structure. Therefore a Fillmorean type of approach (Fillmore, 1968) is adopted in the analysis of certain sentence types.
- 1.3 Unlike in English, subject in the sense of volitive actor occurs only in certain types of sentences in Sinhala. These occur in the Nominative case. But there are other noun phrases which occur in other functional roles in subject position. For instance, Dative and Instrumental case NPs occur in this position. The problem arises as to whether such NPs can be called subjects. Can a Dative case NP be called 'subject' when it occurs in subject position? According to Case Grammar, each NP occurs in some case in deep structure. If the sentence contains an Agentive case NP, that NP occupies subject position. But in the absence of an Agentive case NP, any other NP may be moved into that position—i.e. subject position. Thus even an instrumental case NP may occur in subject position. e.g.

1. huləṅgətə gaha vae tuna

Functionally / huləṅgətə / is an adverbial occurring in an Instrumental case relationship with the verb.

- 1.4 In Sinhala, Dative case marked NPs often occur in subject position. e.g.
 2. maṭə e : kə Kiyə una.
 3. eya : tə saddəyə aehuna.
 4. maṭə pansələ pe : nəva

These are transitive—involitive sentences with their subjects occurring with the Dative case marker /tə/. There is a strict sub-categorisational relationship between the subject nouns and the verbs. The NPS which

occur here in subject position are not subjects in the ordinary sense—they are not doers or agents. They denote something like “involuntary experiencer” rather than “doer”. Hence they are not entitled to be called subjects. Speaking of the Sinhala subject, J. Gair says, : “It seems clear that subject in Sinhala is virtually restricted to voluntary actor.” (Gair 1976 p. 62). In examples 2, 3 and 4 the NPs occurring in second position are objects. What term can we use to denote the NPs which occur in subject position in these sentences? One way out is to postulate a Primary NP constituent or PNP. (Gair 1976 p. 61). This is a main NP constituent which occurs in construction with a VP. In Sinhala, the PNP enters into several kinds of relationships with the verb. Therefore it is characterised by a number of features such as volitive actor, involitive actor, experiencer, patient. Thus subject as volitive actor would only be a subset of PNP. In this paper the term PNP will be used in place of the traditional “subject”.

- 2.1 The functions of /tə/ may broadly be divided into four categories: i.e. its functions as a case-marker, as an adverbialising suffix, as a conjunction and as a postposition.
- 2.2 As mentioned earlier, though /tə/ is regarded as being primarily a marker of the Dative Case, it occurs in several other cases too—the locative case (with verbs of movement), the Instrumental case (with passive-Involitive verbs) and it occurs in the deep structure of Genitive NPs too. (Weera-koon 1988 p. 241). It also occurs with the subjects of modals and adjectival verbs. With regard to these latter categories, /tə/ is just one of the case markers, whereas in the case of the Dative case, it is the only marker. Hence /tə/ may well be called the Dative case marker, though this multi-faceted suffix spreads its tentacles over almost the entire case system of Colloquial Sinhala.
- 2.3 In the following examples we see the /tə/ suffix in its primary role as the Dative case marker. e.g.
5. laməyatə Kiri dennə.
 6. eya: matə potə evva.

These are illustrative of the role of the surface structure Dative case which denotes the indirect object.

- 2.4 With verbs of possession the PNP occurs with the /tə/ suffix. e.g.
7. ra:nitə malli kenek innəva.
 8. baba:tə ma:ləyak tiyənəva.
 9. eya:tə salli tiyənəva.

This presumably, is how the Genitive NP occurs in deep structure. When the Genitivising Transformation is applied to 7, 8 and 9 we get 10, 11 and 12 respectively:

10. ra:nige malli
11. baba:ge ma:le
12. eya:ge salli

2.5 Another instance of the PNP taking the / *tə* / suffix is when it occurs with modal verbs. e.g.:

13. *ma:tə yanne o:nə.*
14. *si:ta:tə mahannə puluvan.*
15. *ma:tə kannə o:nə.*

As these sentences refer to the possession of some kind of desire or ability, semantically the Dative case seems to be justified here. Hence it is probable that the deep structure of these PNPs too contain the Dative case suffix.

2.6 Again we find the / *tə* / suffix occurring in the PNP of intransitive sentences such as the following:

16. *amma:tə dukayi.*
17. *baba:tə badəginiyi..*

In these sentences the verbs which are really verbalised nouns denote some psychological or physical state—the possession of these states. Syntactically these may be treated in the same way as the possession of any material objects. Therefore the deep structure of 16 and 17 would be—

18. *amma:tə dukə tiyənəva*
19. *baba:tə badəgini tiyənəva*

The verb Deletion Transformation operates on these deep structures deleting the verb / *tiyənəva* /. Next the verbalising Transformation verbalises the adjective by adding / *yi* / to it. Thus we get the surface structures 16 and 17. Note that the deep structures 18 and 19 could form the basis for the Genitive NPs—

20. *ammage dukə*
21. *baba:ge badəginna*

2.7 In this same manner / *tə* / occurs in a kind of object-object verb transitive construction with verbal adjectives. Here the indirect object takes the / *tə* / suffix as it is the experiencer of the quality defined by the verb. e.g.

22. *ma:tə e:kə lassənaiyi.*
23. *eya: tə bat hoñdayi.*
34. *puta:tə ambə narəkayi.*

But when these verbal adjectives occur intransitively their NPs occur in the Direct case.

25. *mamə lassənaiyi.*
26. *eya: hoñdayi.*
27. *puta: narəkayi.*

3.1 Another function of /tə/ is as a marker of direction in locative NPs. e.g.

28. eha:tə yannə.
 29. mamə nuvərətə giya:
 30. balla geyin eiyətə a:va.

What we get here is the notion "to somewhere". This is similar to 22, 23 and 24 where the semantics is "to someone". Hence the use of the /tə/ suffix. It is the semantics of the construction that calls for the occurrence of /tə/. Therefore it is a deep structure occurrence.

3.2 In Colloquial Sinhala the Instrumental case is represented by the two suffixes /en/ and /tə/. The latter is used only in certain environments, and these environments generally do not permit the use of the /en/ suffix. eg.

31. a. huləngətə gaha vaeʔuna
 but not
 b. hyləngen gaha vaeʔuna.

But it should be noted that in the case of

32. a. pihiyətə atə kaepuna

we get the /en/ suffix occurring in this environment in some dialects.

32. b. pihiyen atə kaepuna.

To look at another example, we get

33. a. kaʔuvətə atə hil una.

But no dialect permits

33. b. kaʔuven atə hiluna.

Hence we may generalise that the passive-involitive verb requires its subject to occur with the /en/ suffix. This is obviously a surface structure requirement. We may posit the hypothesis that in these instances the sentences occur in deep structure with the /en/ suffix which is the favoured Instrumental case marker, and that the /tə/ suffix is introduced transformationally. viz. 31 b, 32 b and 33 b are the deep structures of 31 a., 32 a and 33 a respectively. If the verb of the sentence has the feature (+pass:- Invol:) then the Suffix—Changing Transformations are applied to the deep structure. First the /en/ Deletion Transformation deletes /en/ and next the /tə/ Sufficing Transformation adds /tə/. Presumably, it is the nature of the verb that decides whether the suffix /tə/ or /en/ is to be used in the Instrumental case.

- 4.1 Thus far we have examined the functions of / *tə* / as a case marker and found that it occurs at the level of deep structure in some sentences, while in others it is introduced at the surface structure level by means of transformations. Closely related to this case marking function of / *tə* / is its postpositional function. Here too it covers a very wide range. It occurs with the meaning of "to" in—

34. panəhaʔə ganān kəraṇṇə.
35. e: kə kaʔəʔə rasayi.

- 4.2 / *tə* / is equivalent to "for" in-

36. potəʔə rupiyal dahayak dennə.
37. veḍi saddeʔə mamə bayə una.

- 4.3 In-

38. gamba liṇḍəʔə paenna.
39. mamə ba:ldiyəʔə vaturə daemma.

/ *tə* / has the meaning "into".

- 4.4 When / *tə* / is suffixed to verbs it has the meaning "though" eg.

40. eya: giya: ʔə vaedak une: nae hae.
41. gattaʔə palak naeha.

- 4.5 / *tə* / sometimes has the semantic value of "because" as in-

42. balla maerunaʔə maʔə dukayi.
43. e: ka kivvaʔə maʔə taraha giya.

But note that negatation has the effect of bringing about a change in the semantic value of / *tə* / in 42 and 43 eg.

44. balla maerunaʔə maʔə dukak naehae.
45. e:kə kivvatə maʔə tarahak nae hae.

In 44 and 45 the meaning of / *tə* / is "though". In the above examples, in 40-45 / *tə* / is actually functioning as a conjunction. When the / *tə* / suffix occurs post-posed to a verb as in the above examples, its function takes on the nature of a conjunction.

- 4.6 Lastly, we see / *tə* / occurring with the meaning of "at" in:-

46. sarat ganānvələʔə hoṇḍayi.
47. ae: sindu ki: maʔə daksayi.

- 5.1 Viewed from yet another angle, ie. from the point of view of the environments in which it occurs, / *tə* / occurs with all classes of words - - with nouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbal nouns and even with verbs. Its field of operation is indeed phenomenal.

As shown earlier in this paper, the /tə/ suffix is postposed to nouns as a case marker. This is its main function, but almost equally important is its adverbialising function. The Colloquial Sinhala adverb is characterised by a word final /tə/. *

48. ma-mə ikmənətə giya.
49. mamə e:kə lassənətə mæhuva.
50. æ: reddə hondətə he:duva.

In Colloquial Sinhala most adjectives can be changed into adverbs by the addition of /tə/. The adverbs in 48, 49 are all derived from adjectives. Colloquial Sinhala derives most of its adverbs in this manner.

5.3 It is not only adjectives that are turned into adverbs by suffixing /tə/. Even nouns too are made to function as adverbs in this manner eg.

51. ma:tə e:kə mahatətə penuna.
52. dukətə æñduna.
53. si: ta bayətə vevlannə paʃangatta.

Also, entire noun phrases may be changed into adverbial phrases by the addition of /tə/ eg.

54. me: rasnetə hariyətə da:diyə da:nəva.
55. gedivələ barətə attə kaḍa: vae tūna.
56. e:mahattəyage hoñdə nama:tə kavurut saləkənəva.

5.4 /tə/ is suffixed to verbal nouns too. eg.

57. ehe vaedə kiri:mətə eya: kaemətiyi.
58. redi se-dillətə malli daksayi.
59. e: iñdi:mətə tae: gi dennə o:nə.

5.5 Verbs too take on the /tə/ suffix as easily as other words do. This has been discussed in 4.4.

5.6 In some dialects /tə/ is postposed to infinitives: e.g.

60. ra:ja piʃəratə yannətə kaemətiyi
61. ma:tə daen bat kan:tə bæhae.
62. eya: miniheku:tə gahan:tə giya.

All the facts discussed above make it clear that the /tə/ suffix occurs in an extremely wide range of environments. No other suffix in Sinhala has such a wide coverage or such flexibility of functions. What is most remarkable is that the /tə/ suffix carries out this multiplicity of functions without giving rise to any ambiguity or confusion.

* In comparison with written Sinhala which has a large repertoire of adverbs and adjectives. Colloquial Sinhala limits itself to a comparatively small stock of modifiers.

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