PARTICLE MOVEMENT IN SINHALA AND JAPANESE

1. INTRODUCTION

In Sinhala (Indo-Aryan, Sri Lanka), focus and question constructions are formed with particles that attach to the focused phrase or question word. Although on the surface these particles are usually clause-internal, this paper presents evidence that these particles move before interpretation to the periphery of the clause. The proposal is illustrated below in Figure 1.

Along with strictly Sinhala-internal evidence, we will also consider evidence from Japanese, which (I will argue) shows the hypothesized particle movement in the surface syntax. That is, Sinhala and Japanese form a minimal pair with respect to whether the movement shown in Figure 1 is “overt” (Japanese) or “covert” (Sinhala). To forestall any disappointment, let me say up front that I will not have any concrete proposal as to exactly where the particle moves to, although I take up the issue in some detail in sections 10 and 13.

The syntactic structure of focus and question constructions in Sinhala has been discussed in the previous literature, as has the potential similarity to Japanese. This paper builds on these works to varying degrees, primarily on Gair (1983), Gair and Sumangala (1991), Sumangala (1992), Kishimoto (1991, 1992, 1997, 1998), and Whitman (1997), Yanagida (1995).1

Questions in Sinhala are generally formed with the use of the ‘question particle’ \( d \hat{\sigma} \). Compare the declarative sentence in (1), the yes-no question in (2), the \( wh \)-object question in (3), and the \( wh \)-subject question in (4). The yes-no question differs from the declarative only in that the yes-no question has a clause-final \( d \hat{\sigma} \). As for the \( wh \)-questions in (3)–(4), there are three things to notice. First, there is no obligatory movement of the \( wh \)-word; it appears in its canonical position. Second, the question word – which

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1 It is worth indicating that Kishimoto (1998) has independently arrived at several of the same conclusions we reach here. This approach was also anticipated (in a slightly different form) by Yanagida (1995).
remains clause-internal – is followed by the question particle də. Third, the verb appears in a special form, with a suffix that is glossed as ‘-E’.  

(1) Chitra ee potə kieuwa.  
Sinhala  
‘Chitra read that book.’  

(2) Chitra ee potə kieuwa də?  
Chitra that book read Q  
‘Did Chitra read that book?’  

(3) Chitra mokak də kieuwe?  
Chitra what Q read-E  
‘What did Chitra read?’  

(4) kau də potə kieuwe?  
who Q book read-E  
‘Who read the book?’  

Sinhala also has a focus construction that is formed in a manner similar to the *wh*-questions above. In (5), the focus particle tamay follows the focused constituent, and the verb is marked with the ‘-E’ morphology.  

(5) Chitra ee potə tamay kieuwe.  
Sinhala  
‘It was that book that Chitra read.’

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2 An anonymous reviewer points out that the “focus particle” tamay is potentially too big to be a particle, and might perhaps be analyzed in some interesting compositional way. I have two comments to make about this. First, Gair (1970) indeed considered tamay to be composed of a focus particle tamaa and an “assertion marker” -y, which would be interesting to investigate further in its own right (among the intriguing things about -y is the possible connection to the conjunctive particle -y, perhaps partly parallel with Japanese to). That said, tamay (or tamaa+-y) appears to share the same distribution as other focus particles, including lu (reportative), ye (dubitative), and nee (“tag” question focus), so there is no clearly compelling reason to treat tamay differently (Kariyakarawana 1998: 87–88). Of course, simply being two syllables long can only hint at internal structure, not really serve as an argument for it. For present purposes, therefore, I believe we are on safe enough ground considering tamay (or at least tamaa) to be monomorphemic.  

3 An anonymous reviewer inquired about whether this construction is properly considered a focus construction, as opposed to a topic construction. The existing work on this particle that I have found is quite clear that it in fact conveys a focused interpretation; that is, it marks non-presupposed information, often contrastive.