

Verb Movement and Wh in Malayalam

Although the issue of the position of the verb in a clause has been a widely discussed point at least since Pollock (1989), head final languages posed some difficulties due to the string vacuous nature of the verb movement to higher functional positions. Koizumi (2000) has argued that a prototypical head final language like Japanese exhibits overt movement of the verb to C.

This paper shows that the verb overtly moves to C in Malayalam as well, a South Indian language traditionally described as an SOV head final language. This raises concern about the argument in the literature that Malayalam instantiates a Focus position immediately before the verb (Jayaseelan 2001) to which the question words in Malayalam obligatorily move. It is shown in the paper that contra Jayaseelan, a bare Wh in Malayalam is indeed in situ; it is rather the movement of other elements that creates the illusion that the Wh moves to an immediately preverbal position.

The verb in Malayalam always appears at the end of the sentence, deviation from this results in ungrammaticality which makes it difficult to pin-point the position of the verb:

1. priyaye rajan kandu
 priya-Acc rajan saw
 Rajan saw Priya
2. *rajan kandu priyaye

Assuming that co-ordination is possible only of constituents, (3) shows the Subject and the Object forming a constituent with the exclusion of the verb.

3. [rajane priyay-um] [meeraye aniyam-um] kandu
 rajan-Acc priya-Conj meera-Acc aniyam-Conj saw
 Lit: [Priya Rajan] and [Meera Aniyam] saw
 ‘Priya saw Rajan and Aniyam saw Meera’

This constituent is impossible to form if the verb stays in its base position, suggesting that the verb has moved out of the vP.

A gapping analysis is immediately ruled out because of the SOV character of Malayalam. A conjunction reduction analysis also is not possible because finite clauses cannot be conjoined in the language:

4. *[rajane priya kand-um] [meeraye aniyam kand-um]
 rajan-Acc priya saw-Conj meera-Acc aniyam saw-Conj
 Priya saw Rajan and Aniyam saw Meera

So any analysis that takes (4) as a base with the verb inside the VP is bound to run into trouble. The point is further substantiated by the *do* support facts in Malayalam. In (5), the Tense and Finiteness information appears on the *do* support and the the verb ‘see’ appears in a nonfinite form, lending itself amenable to co-ordination.

5. [priya rajane kan-uka-um]
 priya rajan-Acc see-nonfinite-Conj
 [aniyam meeraye kan-uka-um] ceythu
 aniyam meera-Acc see-nonfinite-Conj did
 ‘Priya saw Rajan and Aniyam saw Meera’

The ungrammaticality of conjunction reduction is evident here:

6. *[priya rajan-e -um] [aniyam meeraye kanuka-um ceythu]
 priya rajan-Acc Ø-Conj aniyam meera-Acc see-Conj did
 ‘Priya saw Rajan and Aniyam saw Meera’

Adopting Cinque’s hierarchy of adverbs and using it as a diagnostic measure, it can be shown that the verb moves to the C domain.

7. [rajane bha:gyathinu priyay-um]
 rajan-Acc fortunately priya-Conj
 [meeraye daurbha:gyathinu aniyam-um] kandu
 meera-Acc unfortunately aniyam-Conj saw
 Lit: Rajan fortunately Priya and Meera unfortunately Aniyam saw

'Fortunately Priya saw Rajan and unfortunately Aniyam saw Meera'

Since the topicalised phrase precedes the adverb, the verb should be above Mood_{evaluative} for the constituent to be formed. And if we take Finiteness to be at the C level, then this means that the verb, when in a Finite form, is in the C domain. Furthermore, note that the do-support option becomes very degenerated with clauses that have a Topicalised object phrase:

8. * $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{rajane} \quad \text{priya} \quad \text{kanuka-um} \\ \text{rajan-Acc} \quad \text{priya} \quad \text{see-Conj} \\ \left[\text{meeraye} \quad \text{aniyan kanuka-um} \right] \quad \text{ceythu} \\ \text{meera-Acc} \quad \text{aniyan see-Conj} \quad \text{did} \end{array} \right]$

The ungrammaticality of (8) can be used to argue that the topicalised element merged above TP disrupts the constituency relations with a non-finite non-tensed verb still below TP, making the sentence ungrammatical since T is manifested on *do*.

The argument that the verb moves to C has direct consequences for the analysis of Wh in the language. Malayalam has been conventionally argued to be a Wh in situ language (e.g.9).

9. $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{rajan} \quad \text{a:r-e} \quad \text{kandu?} \\ \text{rajan} \quad \text{who-Acc} \quad \text{saw?} \\ \text{Who did Rajan see?} \end{array} \right]$

However, the inability of a Subject Wh to appear at the clause initial position (e.g. 10,11) has prompted Jayaseelan (2001 et.seq.) to argue that the Wh in Malayalam undergoes obligatory movement to a Focus position immediately before the verb which he characterises as a vP peripheral Focus position.

10. * $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{a:ru} \quad \text{rajan-e} \quad \text{kandu?} \\ \text{who} \quad \text{rajan-Acc} \quad \text{saw?} \\ \text{Who saw Rajan?} \end{array} \right]$
11. $\left[\begin{array}{l} \text{rajan-e} \quad \text{a:ru} \quad \text{kandu?} \\ \text{rajan-Acc} \quad \text{who} \quad \text{saw?} \\ \text{Who saw Rajan?} \end{array} \right]$

However, once it is shown that the verb moves to C, the immediately-preverbal focus position is called into question. It will be shown in the presentation that the requirement is not that a Wh be moved to a preverbal focus position, but that a $\left[- \text{Specific} \right]$ element cannot occupy the sentence initial Topic position that makes (10) ungrammatical. It will be argued that the V to C movement in effect extends the phase boundaries (see Gallego and Uriagereka 2006, Den Dikken 2005, Baker 1988 for similar arguments), bringing the Wh within the search domain of a Wh probe in C, and thus making the corresponding feature on a Wh word accessible. This renders the Wh as in situ. This argument is substantiated by data drawn from island effects and intervention effects. For example, like most of the well studied Wh in situ languages, Malayalam also allows for a Wh inside a Relative Clause or a complex NP to receive a question interpretation. In fact, adjuncts also are open for Wh interpretation. However, *because* clauses act as islands (e.g.12). Subscribing to proposals that merge *because* clauses at the C domain, this piece of datum is used to demonstrate that a Wh phrase merged above the projection that the verb moves to is not available for the Wh probe on C and hence the ungrammaticality.

12. * $\left[\text{a:runirbandhiccathu} \text{kondu} \right]$ police avane arrest ceythu?
 who force.Sg.N because police him arrest did
 ≈Who is X such that the police arrested him because X forced them to do so?

References:

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