Sinhala Object Scrambling Revisited

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Overview: The prevailing assumption in the scarce Sinhala syntax literature is that the OSV word order in Sinhala (1b) is syntactically derived from its canonical SOV word order (1a) by constituent scrambling (Chandralal, 2010; Gair, 1998; Kanduboda, 2011; Kariyakarawana, 1998; Kishimoto 2005; Sumangala, 1992; Tamaoka et.al, 2011, among others).

(1) a. sarat   kawiyak   liyuwa.   **[Focus Set: TP, VP Object]**
    Sarath.$_{NOM}$ poem.$_{ACC}$ write-$_{PAST-A}$
    Sarath wrote a poem.

     b. kawiyak$_i$ sarath t_i iyuwe.   **[Focus Set: Object]**

This study provides a systematic analysis of so-called object scrambling in Sinhala OSV word order (1b), which has not received any formal treatment in generative syntax. A goal is to analyze Sinhala and determine its place in the typology of human languages as characterized by a Minimalist theory of principles and parameters. Using diagnostics standard in scrambling research, including (radical) reconstruction, binding relations, Weak Crossover (WCO) effects, scopal ambiguity and parasitic gaps (Bošković, 2004; Dayal, 1994; Karimi, 2005; Mahajan, 1990; Miyagawa, 2006 & 2009 and Neeleman & Reinhart, 1998; Saito, 2004 & 2006), I argue that: (i) the OSV word order in Sinhala is derived through syntactic movement (contra Bošković, 2004; Bošković & Takahashi, 1998 for Japanese) (ii) it is uniformly an A-bar movement operation (contra Mahajan, 1990; Miyagawa, 2009) and (iii) the movement of the object results in clear semantic effects as the fronted object is obligatorily associated with a topic or focus interpretation (contra Bošković, 2004; Bošković & Takahashi, 1998; Saito, 1985 & 2006). Based on these semantic/syntactic properties, the study concludes that topic/focus driven A-bar movement (Rizzi, 1997 & 2003) can readily account for the OSV word order in Sinhala without appealing to 'scrambling,' a cross-linguistic phenomenon that has remained problematic for different theoretical approaches.

Data & Observations: So-called object scrambling, illustrated in (1b), exhibits at least five important properties in Sinhala. *First*, a scrambled object neither feeds nor bleeds binding. For instance, the anaphor embedded in the subject remains unbound in both (2a) and scrambled (2b):

(2) a. *thamange$_i$ malli   sunilwə$_i$ taumedi   dækka.
       self's   brother.$_{NOM}$ Sunil-$_{ACC}$ town-in   see-$_{PAST}$
    * Self's$_i$ brother saw Sunil$_i$ in town.'

     b. *sunilwə$_j$ thamange$_i$ malli t$_j$ taumedi   dækka.

Second, (3a) and (3b) are equally grammatical, implying that Principle A is satisfied at LF through reconstruction, a property generally associated with A-bar movement:

(3) a. demawpiyo$_i$ thamange$_i$ lamaitə   adarei.
       parents.$_{NOM}$ self's-$_{GEN}$ children.$_{ACC}$ love
    'Parents$_i$ love their$_i$ children.'

     b. thamange$_i$ lamaitə$_j$ demawpiyo$_i$ t$_j$ adarei.

Third, Sinhala object scrambling can license parasitic gaps.

(4) parənə karekə   sara   [t_i hadanne nætuwa] t_i wikunuwa.
       old   car.$_{ACC}$ Sara.$_{NOM}$ repairing without   sell-$_{PAST}$
    'The old car, Sara sold without repairing.'

Fourth, similar to other SOV languages (Karimi, 2005), object scrambling in Sinhala does not trigger WCO effects: (5a) shows that wh-in-situ in Sinhala triggers WCO effects due to LF wh-movement (Kariyakarawana, 1998), but object scrambling in the same clause in (5b) does not.

(5) a. *eya-ge$_i$ amma   katə$_i$ də adare?
     he-$_{GEN}$ mother.$_{NOM}$ who-$_{DAT}$ $_Q$ love-$_{PAST-E}$
     *Who$_i$ does his$_i$ mother love t$_i$?
  b. katə$_i$ də   eya-ge$_i$ amma   *t*$_i$ adare?

Finally, the application of Neeleman & Reinhart' (1998) *focus rule* shows that the scrambled (1b) has a different focus set from the canonical word order in (1a). Thus, (1a), with neutral intonation on the object, can be the answer to any question targeting the *Object* (What did Sarat write?), *VP* (What did Sarat do?) or the entire *TP* (What happened?). But in contrast, the scrambled (1b) can only answer a question targeting the object (What did Sarat write?), which has now been scrambled to a clause initial position.

Analysis: Based on a variety of empirical evidence, Chou & Hettiarachchi (2013) conclude that the subject in Sinhala volitive constructions (1a) undergoes case-driven A-movement to Spec-TP. If their analysis is on the right track, the landing site of the scrambled object in (1b) must be a position higher than TP. This prediction is borne out given that object scrambling in (1b) exhibits A-bar properties: (i) object scrambling does not feed binding relations (2b), (ii) scrambling allows reconstruction (3b) and (iii) the scrambled object can license a parasitic gap (4) (Mahajan, 1990). Even though the absence of WCO effects (5b) is generally assumed to be a property associated with A-movement (e.g., Mahajan, 1990), even in English some instances of A-bar movement do not trigger WCO effects (Lasnik & Stowell, 1991: 691): *This book$_i$, I expect [its author] to buy e$_i$.* Also, notice that scrambling in (1b) is neither optional nor semantically vacuous (contra Bošković, 2004; Bošković & Takahashi, 1998; Saito, 1985 & 2006 for Japanese): scrambled (1b) has a different focus set from (1a). To account for these empirical observations, I adopt Rizzi's (1991, 1997 & 2004) split CP hypothesis and argue that in Sinhala, object scrambling is triggered by topic/focus features in the CP domain: Topic/Focus heads in the CP drive the movement of the object into their Spec. The topic/focus distinction for the scrambled object is also indicated by contrasting verbal morphology, as illustrated in (6).

(6) a. kawiyak$_i$ sarath   *t*$_i$ liyuw**e**.   b. kawiyak$_i$ sarath   *t*$_i$ liyuw**a**.
     poem.$_{ACC}$ Sarath.$_{NOM}$ write-$_{PAST-E}$ poem.$_{ACC}$ Sarath.$_{NOM}$ write-$_{PAST-A}$
     It was a poem that Sarath wrote.   A poem, Sarath wrote.

The –*e* affix on the verb (6a) denotes a focus interpretation for the scrambled object. By contrast, the –*a* affix (6b) denotes a topic interpretation for the scrambled object, the only interpretation possible in -*a* constructions.

Selected References: Bošković, Z. (2004). Topicalization, focalization, lexical insertion, and scrambling. *Linguistic Inquiry* 35(4), 613–638. **Karimi, S. (2005)**. *A Minimalist approach to scrambling: Evidence from Persian*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter. **Mahajan, A. (1990)**. *The A/A-bar distinction and movement theory*. Doctoral dissertation, MIT, Cambridge, Mass. **Miyagawa, S. (2009)**. *Why agree? Why move? Unifying agreement-based and discourse configurational languages*. Linguistic Inquiry Monograph 54. MIT Press, Cambridge, MA. **Neeleman, A. & Reinhart, T. (1998)**. *Scrambling and the PF-interface. In the projection of arguments: Lexical and compositional factors*, eds. M. Butt and W. Geuder, 309-353. Chicago: CSLI Publications.