

## Non-Nominative Subjects and the Involitive Construction in Sinhala

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### 1 Introduction

- Colloquial Sinhala verbs can be divided into two classes, the volitive and involitive (Gair 1970, Inman 1994, Gair and Paolillo 1997). Volitives generally indicate volitional action, and involitives indicate non-volitional action, as in the following (from Coates 1972:471):

- (1) B: *Wiiduruwak binduna, noona.*  
 glass.INDEF.SG break.INV.PST madam  
 ‘A glass got broken, madam.’ (Involitive)
- N: *Kohomə də eekə binde?*  
 how Q it break.VOL.PST  
 ‘How did (you) break it?’ (Volitive)
- B: *Mamə binde næə, noona; eekə binduna*  
 I.NOM.SG break.VOL.PST NEG madam it break.INV.PST  
 ‘I did not break it madam — it got broken.’ (Volitive/Involitive)

- Subjects of involitives may be nominative, ergative, accusative, dative, or instrumental. Inman (1994) argues that each case indicates a slightly different type of non-volitionality.
- In this talk we look at a broader range of data than previously discussed and suggest that while this is largely true, involitives do not represent a single unified phenomenon.
- We argue in particular that the involitive serves not just as a marker of general non-volitionality, but also of lexical and derived inchoatives and even a lexicalized set of causatives.

### 2 Volitive Verbs

- Sinhala volitive verb forms take nominative subjects and typically indicate volitional action.

- (2) a. *Malini dalada maaligavəṭə paiṅ giya.*  
 Malini.NOM Temple Tooth.DAT foot.INST go.PST  
 ‘Malini walked to the Temple of the Tooth.’ (Intransitive Volitive)
- b. *Banda gedərə yanə gaman pol kæduwa.*  
 Banda.NOM home go.PRT while coconuts pick.PST  
 ‘While going home, Banda picked some coconuts.’ (Transitive Volitive)

- Nominative subjects of volitive verbs have unique properties in a clause, such as controlling PRO and binding anaphors, something non-subjects cannot do (Inman 1994:54,56):

- (3) a. *PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> wæðə kərənə gaman, gunee<sub>i</sub> siriwə<sub>j</sub> wiweecənee keruwa.*  
 work do.PRT while Gunee.NOM Siri.ACC criticism did.VOL  
 ‘Gunee<sub>i</sub> criticized Siri<sub>j</sub> while PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> working.’  
 b. *Nimal<sub>i</sub> siriwə<sub>j</sub> tamange<sub>i/\*j</sub> gedərə-di dækka.*  
 Nimal.NOM Siri.ACC self.GEN house.WHILE<sub>AT</sub> saw.VOL  
 ‘Nimal<sub>i</sub> saw Siri<sub>j</sub> at self<sub>i/\*j</sub>’s house. (Inman 1994:54-56, (51), (56))

- It is not necessarily the case that volitive verbs denote intentional acts. Volitive forms are also acceptable in non-volitional contexts:

- (4) *Laməya piŋgannə binda, eet hitəla nemeyi.*  
 child plate broke.VOL.PST but intention without  
 ‘The child broke the plate, but not intentionally.’ (Inman 1994:98)

- Note, however, that for some volitive verbs volitionality is required:

- (5) *#Siri Guneewə minimæruwa, eet hitəla nemeyi.*  
 Siri.NOM Gunee.ACC murder.VOL.PST but intention without  
 ‘Siri murdered Gunee, but not intentionally.’ (#non-volitional modifier)

- Thus some volitives entail volitionality, some implicate it. We turn to involitives next.

### 3 Basic Involitive Forms with Ergative and Dative Subjects

- Involitives are derived by umlaut (vowel-fronting) plus vowel harmony (Inman 1994:23-24):

- |     |                      |             |                        |            |               |
|-----|----------------------|-------------|------------------------|------------|---------------|
| (6) | <b>Volitive verb</b> |             | <b>Involitive verb</b> |            | (Jany 2005:2) |
|     | <i>lissannə</i>      | ‘to slip’   | <i>lissennə</i>        | ‘to slip’  |               |
|     | <i>ahannə</i>        | ‘to listen’ | <i>æhennə</i>          | ‘to hear’  |               |
|     | <i>naʔannə</i>       | ‘to dance’  | <i>næʔennə</i>         | ‘to dance’ |               |
|     | <i>waʔannə</i>       | ‘to drop’   | <i>wæʔennə</i>         | ‘to fall’  |               |

- With transitive involitive verbs the subjects overwhelmingly appear in what Inman (1994:32) calls a generalized “ergative” following Kiparsky (1992).

- (7) a. *PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> wæðə kərənə gaman, gunee<sub>i</sub> atij siriwə<sub>j</sub> wiweecənee keruna.*  
 work do.PRT while Gunee ERG Siri.ACC criticism do.INV.PST  
 Gunee<sub>i</sub> criticized Siri<sub>j</sub> while PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> working.  
 b. *Nimal atij<sub>i</sub> siriwə<sub>j</sub> tamange<sub>i/\*j</sub> gedərədi tallu keruna.*  
 Nimal ERG Siri.ACC self.GEN house.WHILE<sub>AT</sub> pushing do.INV.PST  
 ‘Nimal<sub>i</sub> pushed Siri<sub>j</sub> at self<sub>i/\*j</sub>’s house.’ (Inman 1994:54-56, (52), (57))

- These are only compatible with non-volitional modifiers (though speakers note redundancy):<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Inman (1994) also notes a doxastic use, where an ergative subject acts volitionally but defies speaker expectations:

i. *kellə atij maalu ageeʔə pihenəwa.*  
 girl ERG fish.ACC very.well cook.INV  
 ‘The girl can cook fish very well.’ (despite expectations) (cf. Inman 1994:100, (41))

Our informants were unable to confirm this use of the involitive, and thus we set it aside for now.

(8) *Laməya atij piŋgaanə nosaləkillen/#hitəla binduna.*  
 Child ERG plate unintentionally/intentionally break.INV.PST  
 ‘The child involuntarily/#intentionally broke the plate.’ (#volitional modifier)

- As Inman notes, datives occur with unergatives (e.g. *ændennə* ‘cry’; *hinawennə* ‘laugh’; *gəhennə/wewulennə* ‘shiver’; *æənumak ærennə* ‘yawn’), and show subject properties:

(9) a. *PRO<sub>i</sub> aliya mærenə gaman, minihaṭə aenduna.*  
 elephant.NOM die.PRT while man.DAT cry.INV.PST  
 ‘The man<sub>i</sub> (involuntarily) cried while PRO<sub>i</sub> watching the elephant die.’  
 b. *Shameelaṭə<sub>i</sub> tamange<sub>i</sub> gedərədi hinawuna.*  
 Shameela.DAT self.GEN house.WHILE<sub>AT</sub> laugh.INV.PST  
 ‘Shameela<sub>i</sub> laughed at self’s<sub>i</sub> house.’

- We also find dative subjects with some transitive involitive verbs (*dænennə*, ‘feel’; *peennə*, ‘see’; *əhennə*, ‘hear’; *teerennə*, ‘understand’; *kæwennə*, ‘eat’; *læbennə*, ‘receive’).

(10) a. *PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> kataa kərənə gamaŋ, Guneetə<sub>i</sub> booru<sub>j</sub> kiyəwuna.*  
 talk do.PRT while Guneə.DAT lie.PL tell.INV.PST  
 ‘Guneə<sub>i</sub> told lies<sub>j</sub> PRO<sub>i/\*j</sub> while talking.’  
 b. *Guneetə<sub>i</sub> waha<sub>j</sub> tamange<sub>i/\*j</sub> gedərədi kæwuna.*  
 Guneə.DAT poison self.GEN house.WHILE<sub>AT</sub> eat.INV.PST  
 ‘Guneə<sub>i</sub> ate poison at self’s<sub>i/\*j</sub> house.’ (Inman 1994:54-56, (53), (58))

- Crucially these transitive verbs also have intransitive variants:

(11) *Meeriṭə kiəwuna/kæwuna/teeruna/əhuna.*  
 Mary.DAT speak.INV.PST/eat.INV.PST/understand.INV.PST/hear.INV.PST  
 ‘Mary spoke/ate/understood/heard (unintentionally).’

- Thus dative is only possible with verbs that are in some way intransitive (and have animate subjects; cf. Inman 1994:182). Dative subjects also generally indicate non-volitionality.

(12) a. *Ammaṭə ibeemə/#hitəla dukhwuna.*  
 Mother.DAT involuntarily/intentionally sadden.INV.PST  
 ‘Mother involuntarily/#intentionally became sad.’  
 b. *Joontə mæssik ibeemə/#hitəla kæwuna.*  
 John.DAT fly involuntarily/#intentionally eat.INV.PST  
 ‘John involuntarily/intentionally ate a fly.’

- We assume most verbs are lexically volitive but are unspecified for volitionality, which arises instead by Gricean implicature. Involitives are generated by an umlaut-generating affix that adds an entailment of non-volitionality (for *n*-ary V):

(13)  $\llbracket +\emptyset_{[-back]} \rrbracket := \lambda \mathcal{R} \lambda x_1 \dots \lambda x_n \lambda e [\mathcal{R}(x_1, \dots, x_n, e) \wedge NON-VOL(x_n, e)]$

- This correctly predicts that verbs that are inherently volitional (e.g. *minimarannə* ‘murder’) do not have involitive forms, since they would yield a contradiction with (13).
- Some verbs (including some psych predicates like (*dænennə* ‘feel’) and a handful of others lack volitive forms (or the form is suppletive; cf. *atəgaanə* ‘feel.VOL’). These typically describe inherently non-volitional events; nothing about (13) rules out lexical involitives.
- Thus only verbs that describe events with no inherent (non-)volitionality can show both forms, so that lexical semantics partly determines which verbs have either or both forms.
- As it stands, involitives as a class primarily indicate non-volitionality. Yet, there are other uses of the involitive, two of which we turn to below.

#### 4 Nominative Subjects

- Although Inman (1994) claims that nominative subjects do not occur with involitives except when marking inanimates, we have found that many speakers accept nominative subjects:

(14) a. *PRO<sub>i</sub> gaɣen waturə bonna gaman, naiya<sub>i</sub> mæruna.*  
 river.INSTR water drink.PRT while snake.NOM die.INV.PST

‘The snake<sub>i</sub> died while PRO<sub>i</sub> drinking water from the river.’

b. *Naiya<sub>i</sub> eeyage<sub>i</sub> gal guhaavə laɣə mæruna.*  
 Snake.NOM self.GEN rock cave.ACC near die.INV.PST

‘The snake<sub>i</sub> died near self’s<sub>i</sub> rock cave.’

- These occur with unaccusatives (*mærennə*, ‘die’; *gilennə*, ‘drown’; *wæɣennə*, ‘fall’; *bindennə*, ‘break’; *ærennə*, ‘open’), including many with transitive volitive/involitive counterparts:

(15) a. *Aruni Nimalwə gileuwa/mæruwa.*  
 Aruni.NOM Nimal.ACC drown.VOL.PST/kill.VOL.PST

‘Aruni drowned/killed Nimal.’

b. *Aruni atij Nimalwə giluna.*  
 Aruni ERG Nimal.ACC drown.INV.PST

‘Aruni accidentally drowned Nimal.’

c. *Aruni giluna/mæruna.*  
 Aruni.NOM drown.INV.PST/die.INV.PST

‘Aruni drowned/died.’

- Crucially, we argue that these are in fact inchoative, i.e. they are intuitively indeterminate as to any outside cause (reflected in our informants judgments). Most of these are anticausative.
- Chierchia (2004), Koontz-Garboden (2007a,b) propose that anticausatives are derived from causatives via reflexivization. For example, Koontz-Garboden (2007a:5, (11)) gives Spanish inchoative/reflexive *se* a unified semantics (and similarly for related Romance clitics):

(16)  $[[se]] := \lambda \mathcal{R} \lambda x [\mathcal{R}(x, x)]$  (Coidentify the causer and patient)

- When the subject is not agentive it is coidentifiable with the object yielding an inchoative:

- (17) a. *Juan rompió el vaso.*  
 Juan broke the cup  
 ‘Juan broke the cup.’ (Subject is causer but not agent)
- b. *El vaso se rompió.*  
 the cup REFL broke  
 ‘The cup broke.’ (Inchoative)

- When the subject is agentive (via a specific manner or volition) the reading is reflexive:

- (18) a. *Los terroristas asesinó a la senadora.*  
 the terrorists assassinated ACC the senator  
 ‘The terrorists assassinated the senator.’ (Subject is agent; has volitionality)
- b. *El senador se asesinó.*  
 the senator REFL assassinated (by self only)  
 ‘The senator assassinated #(himself).’ (Reflexive/#Inchoative)
- (19) a. *El panadero cortó el pan.*  
 the baker cut the bread.  
 ‘The baker cut the bread.’ (Subject is agent; has specific manner)
- b. *El panadero/#el pan se cortó.*  
 The baker/the bread REFL cut  
 ‘The baker cut himself/#The bread cut.’ (Reflexive/#Inchoative)  
 (Spanish; cf. Koontz-Garboden 2007a:7-9, (13a), (14a), (25a), (28), (26a))

- To support this analysis, Chierchia and Koontz-Garboden give several tests probing the presence of a CAUSE; we examine involitives with nominative subjects in light of these.

- First, anticausatives are usually compatible with *by itself* on the reading that there is no external causer (Chierchia 2004:41-42); nominative involitives pass such a test:

- (20) a. *La barca é (\*stata) affondata da sé.*  
 the boat PERF was sunk by itself  
 ‘The boat (\*was) sunk by itself’ (Italian; Chierchia 2004:43, (42b,c))
- b. *Nimalmə giluna.*  
 Nimal.NOM.REFL drown.INV.PST  
 ‘Nimal drowned by himself.’ (Sinhala)

- Second, negated anticausatives are ambiguous: the event didn’t occur or did but was externally caused (Koontz-Garboden 2007a:26-28, (75), (76)). Nominative involitives are similar:

- (21) a. *No se rompió el vaso (sino que tú lo rompiste!)*  
 NEG REFL broke.3SG.PST the glass (rather you CL.3SG broke.2SG.PST)  
 ‘The glass did not break.’/‘The glass didn’t break — you broke it!’

- b. *Shameela mærunē nææ (oya eeyavə minimæruwa).*  
 Shameela.NOM die.INV.PST NEG you her murder.VOL.PST  
 ‘Shameela didn’t die.’/‘Shameela didn’t die — you murdered her!’

- Third, anticausatives are compatible with oblique causers (cp. the English translation):

- (22) *Shameela ginnen mæruna.*  
 Shameela.NOM fire.INST die.INV.PST  
 ‘Shameela died from the fire.’

- This suggests that nominative involitive is the anticausative marker in Sinhala. We tentatively propose a second involitive morpheme mapping transitive volitives directly to intransitive involitives (predicting the existence of inchoatives with no corresponding causative involitive):

- (23)  $[[+\emptyset_{[-back]}]] := \lambda \mathcal{R} \lambda x \lambda e [\mathcal{R}(x, x, e) \wedge NON-VOL(x, e)]$

- This predicts that nominative subjects only occur with non-agentive verbs. Volitionality is ruled out a priori, and verbs that entail manner also do not take nominative subjects:

- (24) \**John kæpuna.*  
 John.NOM cut.INV.PST  
 ‘John cut \*(himself)’

- The difference between (16) and (23) is that *se* does not necessarily mark non-volitionality (even canonical inchoatives can be volitional in context), while involitives do:

- (25) a. ... *Phil se ahogó para salvarle la vida a Jim ...*  
 Phil REFL drowned for save-3SG the life DAT Jim  
 ‘...Phil drowned (himself) to save Jim’s life...’ (Koontz-Garboden 2007a:17, (52a))  
 b. #*Rakshəṇə salli gannə, Meerimə giluna.*  
 insurance money take.INF Mary.NOM.REFL drown.INV.PST  
 ‘Mary drown herself to collect the insurance money.’

- Finally, there are some involitives with nominative subjects based on verbs that have no transitive variant, i.e. internally caused changes (Levin and Rappaport Hovav 1995):

- (26) *Arunige rathu rosa mal pipuna.*  
 Aruni.GEN red rose flower.NOM bloom.INV.PST  
 ‘Aruni’s red rose bloomed.’

- These are simply lexical inchoatives. Given its wide distribution, we assume that nominative is the default subject case; ergative/dative are inherent cases marking non-volitional agents:

- (27) **Subject Realization (Preliminary):**  
 a. Ergative/dative if a non-volitional agent (of transitive/intransitive verb);  
 b. Otherwise nominative.

- Ergative/dative may be quirky experiencer subject case (Moore and Perlmutter 2000), with a split based on transitivity, and thus is reducible to something other than involitives.

## 5 Accusative Subjects

- Accusative subjects commonly occur with unaccusative verbs (e.g. *mærennə* ‘die’; *wætənnə* ‘fall’; *gilennə* ‘drown’; *hirəwənnə* ‘get stuck’; *lissənnə* ‘slip’; *yəwənnə* ‘go’):

(28) a. *PRO<sub>i</sub> pol geḍi baləla, laməyawə<sub>i</sub> wətuna.*  
 coconut.STEM fruit.PL look\_at.PRT child.ACC.SG fall.INV.PST

‘The child<sub>i</sub> fell while PRO<sub>i</sub> looking at coconuts.’

b. *Siriwə<sub>i</sub> tamange<sub>i</sub> gedərədi wətuna.*  
 Siri.ACC self.GEN house.WHILE<sub>AT</sub> fall.INV.PST

‘Siri<sub>i</sub> fell at her<sub>i</sub> own house.’ (Inman 1994:52-54, (55), (60))

- Crucially, there *must* be an external causer (29a), seen also by incompatibility with the reflexive (29b) and negation ambiguity (29c).

(29) a. *#Ammawə lissuna, eeth kowwuruwath eeyawə lisseuwe nəæ.*  
 Mother.ACC fall.INV.PST but somebody her push.CAUS.PST NEG

‘Mother fell, but nobody pushed her.’ (Non-cancelable external causer)

b. *#Shameelawəmə hirəwuna/lissuna.*  
 Shameela.ACC.REFL get.stuck.INV.PST/slip.INV.PST

‘Shameela got herself stuck/slipped on her own.’ (#reflexive)

c. *Bandawə gilune nəæ.*  
 Banda.ACC drown.INV.PST NEG

‘Banda did not drown/was not accidentally drowned.’ (negation ambiguity)

- It furthermore must involve causer addition, since it shows up with at least one unergative:

(30) *Maawə nətuna.*  
 I.ACC dance.INV.PST

‘I danced involuntarily’ (caused by an outside force).

- We could analyze this as adding an existentially bound causer (leaving the verb intransitive), another type of involitive marking:

(31)  $[[+\emptyset_{[-back]}]] := \lambda\mathcal{R}\lambda x\lambda e\exists y[\mathcal{R}(x, e) \wedge CAUSE(y, e) \wedge NON-VOL(x, e)]$

- However, this was the least stable for our speakers, probably due to the existence of a productive morphological causative, suggesting that this is lexicalization of a dying pattern.
- Nonetheless, subject case is again determined first by inherent semantics:

(32) **Subject Realization (Final):**

- Accusative if a non-causer patient that is acted upon;
- Ergative/dative if a non-volitional agent (of transitive/intransitive verb);
- Otherwise nominative.

- Just as ergative/dative may mark experience subjects, accusative case may follow independently from its general association with being outranked by a causer (Wunderlich 1997).

## 6 Conclusion

- Although we tentatively proposed ambiguity for  $+\emptyset_{[-back]}$ , functionally it seems anticausativization and causativization have piggy-backed on involitivity, all distinguished by case:
  - Non-volitional agents (some lexicalized) (ergative/dative)
  - Patients of covert causatives (perhaps wholly lexicalized) (accusative)
  - Patients of unaccusatives (lexical or anticausativized) (nominative)
- The case-marking follows from independent quirky case and default subject-marking rules.
- The most interesting cases are the inchoatives. Why should Romance reflexives and Sinhala involitives come to have the same function?
- Crucially, recall that anticausatives are decomposable into two properties: reflexivization and lack of agentivity (specific manner/volitionality). Consider the contrast:

- (33) a. *Nimal se ahogó*  
 Nimal REFL drowned.  
 ‘Nimal drowned.’ (Spanish; *se*=REFL, non-agentivity implicit)
- b. *Nimal giluna.*  
 Nimal.NOM drown.INV.PST  
 ‘Nimal drowned.’ (Sinhala; involitive=non-agentivity, REFL implicit)

- In a sense, Spanish and Sinhala are opposites: each has taken the formal marking of one of the two defining properties of inchoativity and extended it to mark the other as well.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>— Spanish extends overt reflexivization into the inchoative through non-agentivity</li> <li>— Sinhala extends overt non-agentivity into the inchoative through reflexivization</li> </ul>
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- Interestingly, *se* has some uses marking non-agentivity without reflexivity (Nishida 2007):

- (34) *Ese liquido se vio horrible, pero me lo tomé con los ojos*  
 that liquid REFL looked horrible but REFL CL.ACC.3SG drank with the eyes  
*cerrados porque me quieria sanar pronto.*  
 closed because CL.1SG.DAT want get.well soon  
 ‘That liquid looked horrible, but I drank it down with my eyes closed because I wanted to get well soon.’ (Spanish, non-volitional; Nishida 2007:23, (61))

- Conversely, our informants gave the following purely reflexive involitive (note the dative/accusative case, indicating agentivity or patientivity):

- (35) *John-tə/wə kəpuna.*  
 John-DAT/ACC cut.INV.PST  
 ‘John cut himself (accidentally)’

- Thus each formal marking device indicates one half of an inchoative/anticausative, but has some extension into the other half.
- This suggests broadening the typology of anticausatives: while reflexivization is important, there may be other avenues for getting at the same function.

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