Morphology-Syntax Interface in Sinhala

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One notable syntactic characteristic of Sinhala clause is the special form the verb assumes in the present and past forms when there is a mood/modality, focus, or question particle in the clause. When the clause bears a particle showing any of these discourse phenomena, the verb takes a special e-ending, (henceforth e-marking) as opposed to neutral a-ending. Example 1 is a neutral sentence, and 2-4 indicate the e-marking with a past tense verb.

1. Nimal   kaareka   seeduw**a**
   Nimal (Nom)   car-def   wash (Pst)
   'Nimal washed the car'

2. Nimal   tamai   kaareka   seeduw**e/*seeduwa**
   Nimal (Nom)   Foc   car-def   wash-E (Pst)
   'It was Nimal who washed the car'

3. Nimal   lu   kaareka   seeduw**e/*seeduwa**
   Nimal (Nom)   Evid   car-def   wash-E (Pst)
   'It is said that Nimal washed the car'

4. Nimal   da   kaareka   seeduw**e? /*seeduwa**
   Nimal (Nom)   Q   car-def   wash-E (Pst)
   'Is it Nimal who washed the car?'

The above examples indicate the diverseness of discourse phenomena – such as focus, evidential modality and Wh affected by e-marking on the verb while showing the interaction with the left periphery of the clause. Hence, the paper seeks to investigate the nature of this e-morpheme, how it is connected with finiteness, and the kind of phenomena that trigger it. The theoretical stand adopted in the paper is both the Minimalist Framework (Chomsky, 2000) and the Cartographic framework (Rizzi, 1997). I also align with Enoch O. Aboh (2010), in proposing

that the notions of information structure start out with the numeration. With respect to data, I relied on the native speaker grammatical judgments. The main conclusions in the paper are that the particular e-morpheme is a reflex of an Agree relation between a higher functional head and a lower constituent: The [+Foc/Modal/Wh] feature of the relevant functional head triggers this Agree relation: The e-marked verb is a finite verb, and although Sinhala lacks overt Person/Number agreement, it displays some information structure related agreement. Finally, the particular e-morpheme indicates morphology-syntax interface in Sinhala.

Key words: Agree, Interface, Morphology, Syntax