A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax

Dr. Soumya P N

==

Missionary grammarians were among the first to write 'grammar books' for Malayalam. They were mostly Europeans and the most prominent among them was Hermann Gundert. His contributions to the grammatical tradition include a descriptive grammar for Malayalam called *Malayalabhashavyakaranam.* There was an eminent native missionary named George Mathan who was the first Malayali to write a grammar book in Malayalam. It was called *Malayazhmayute Vyakaranam*. Gundert's *Malayala Bhasha Vyakaranam* deserves special mention among the grammar books in the missionary period. These two grammar texts can be taken to be representative of the period. Other texts by the missionary grammarians were not as efficient or descriptive as these two. After the missionaries, the prominent grammarian who wrote a comprehensive grammar for Malayalam was A R Rajarajavarma. The ensuing grammatical texts were largely influenced by his *Keralapaniniyam*.

It is only recently that linguistic studies at the level of sentence attained prominence in Malayalam. In traditional grammars, language was studies at the level of phoneme and morpheme primarily. The sentence structure received only a brief mention if any. This is true in the case of linguistic studies in Malayalam.

There are brief discussions on what is now called quantifiers in Gundert's *Malayala Bhasha Vyakaranam* and George Mathan's *Malayazhmayute Vyakaranam*. Joseph Peet mentions some of the quantifiers in his work *A grammar of the Malayalim Language*. But in the later grammars including *Keralapaniniyam*, quantifiers receive very little mention. We take into discussion the works of Gundert, Mathan, A R Rajarajavarma and Kovunni Nedungandi.

As some of the above-mentioned grammars exemplify, traditional grammars only list out and describe the grammatical categories in the language. They do not attempt to describe and analyze the structure of the language. But Mathan's grammar and to an extend Gundert's grammar gives descriptions of grammatical categories with some structural insight. In these works, quantifiers are categorized as pronominal like adjectives or numerals.

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   308

Intentions of Writing Grammar Texts Books in the Missionary Period

The specific purpose of writing traditional grammars needs mention here. In the case of missionary grammars, their intention was to write study materials for the Europeans who wish to learn Malayalam. When it comes to native missionaries like Mathan, native speaker's insight of the features of his mother tongue gives him an advantage over Gundert who had to resort to literary and religious texts for data.

As to the later grammarians such as Rajarajavarma and Kovunni Nedungadi, the primary goal was to describe language in such a way as to help speakers use idiomatic language without mistakes. That is, their way of writing grammar was prescriptive in nature. At the same time, it has to be mentioned that Rajarajavarma has incorporated descriptive approach as well in his work. One can also attest an attempt to regularize the grammar and linguistic system in these works. Rajarajavarma describes Malayalam following the western linguists such as Caldwell and Gundert. The later grammars also followed the same path may be because Keralapaniniyam was a decisive influence to the later researchers of language. Even as syntactic analyses of language at the syntactic level became the norm in Chomskyan tradition elsewhere, no such attempt was made in Malayalam.

A Survey of the Discussion of Syntactic Elements in Traditional Grammar

This is an attempt to study the representative works from the different periods of Malayalam linguistics starting from missionary grammars. Gundert was the first person to write a grammar of Malayalam and his *Malayalabhashaavyaakaranam* was largely descriptive. George Mathan, a native missionary who wrote the first grammar book in Malayalam managed to capture the essential features of the grammatical categories in Malayalam as well as giving insights into their possible interpretations.

After the missionary period, the first notable work was Keralapaniniyam. It was deeply influenced by the western grammatical tradition of descriptive method. The post *Keralapaniniyam* era in the history of Malayalam grammar and linguistics was about very sporadic attempts in the line of Rajarajavarma and later some attempts to introduce Chomskyan linguistics in Malayalam.

E V N Namboothiri wrote a study of the transformational generative grammar in the early period illustrating the principles of transformation using Malayalam sentences. That was a praiseworthy attempt, no doubt. But after that there is this vacuum in the field of Malayalam linguistics. It is true that there were some works attempting to describe Chomskyan linguistic principles in Malayalam, but no attempts were made to analyze Malayalam in the light of these principles. There were some articles by Madhavan discussing the syntactic features of Malayalam in the light of generative principles of syntax.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax 309

As it is beyond the scope of this paper to compare the entire grammatical tradition from the perspective of generative grammar, I choose to take a single syntactic feature namely quantifiers which is representative of the approach adopted by various grammarians in the history. So I will compare the works of Gundert, Mathan and Rajarajavarma and other grammarians who I wish to briefly analyze the quantifiers in Malayalam Quantifiers are traditionally described as words referring to the quantity of the noun. They are determiners of nouns and can refer to the number or specificity/ definiteness of the set the noun denotes. Some examples of quantifiers in Malayalam are *ellaa kuTTikaLum, cila kuTTikaL, mik'k'a kuTTikaLum* etc.

Description of Quantifiers in Missionary Grammar

I consider the discussion of quantifiers in Gundert and Mathan primarily from the missionary tradition. In Gundert's malayalabhashavyakaranam, thee is a discussion of number cardinal determiners. The examples for cardinal determiners include *ellaa . ellaa marangaLum* (all trees) is given as an example for pronouns denoting numbers. It is not mentioned that –*um* is a part of the interpretation of *ella* or even that they both always occur together. There is another category of words referring to limitlessness for which the examples given are *etru vaidyanum, etra engilum etc*. These are also described as quantifiers in the contemporary terminology. Gundert gives a description of the morphological composition of these structures as well. He says that these are composed of a question word and –*um*. They are grouped as a category different from pronouns, but the categorization is not morphologically driven but based on their meaning. This is clear from the fact that *mik'k'atum* (most of) which is morphologically composed of *mik'k'a* and –*um* is grouped with *anekam* (a lot). Both these refer to maximal quantity as is clear from the corresponding English expressions. Gundert lists *pala, cila* and *walla* as words referring to nanatwavaachi. There are two more categories mentioned which comes under quantifiers, they are words referring to minimal quantity and words referring to 'other'.

George Mathan's work on Malayalam grammar called malayazhmayude vyakaranam is more descriptively adequate than Gundert's grammar, especially in the discussion of quantifiers. There is a detailed discussion of the morphological structure of quantifiers in this book. He categorized words such as *oruttan, cilavan, palavan, ellaavanum* as indeterminate pronouns. He explains that they refer to words denoting whole. Mathan categorizes words composed of question words and –*um* too as indeterminate pronouns. It has been observed cross linguistically that question words combine with conjunction markers to get universal quantifier reading. Mathan's observation that question words combine with the conjunction marker –*um* to form indeterminate pronouns is indicative of this fact in Malayalam.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   310

Recent works introducing the concepts of morphology and syntax sometimes fail to be as descriptive as Mathan. For example, *ellaa kuTTikaL-um* (all the children) is given as an example for discontinuous morpheme in Prabodhachandran Nair's works. That is *ellaa…um* is a single morpheme. But Mathan rightly describes it as composed of two parts, ellaa and the conjunction marker *–um.* He captures the complex morphological structure of the expression and explains that it divides the noun (here, children) into different parts or sets. This observation is immensely relevant in the discussion of the multifunctionality of conjunction markers and in the morphosyntactic analysis of quantifiers in the generative framework.

In fact, Mathan does discuss the multifunctionality of the particle *–um.* The term morpheme was not in use at that time, so he used a word meaning particle in his discussion of *–um.* Among the various functions of *–um,* he mentions conjunction, adjunction, focusing, exhaustivity and completeness(?) (thikav). This observation may not be that relevant in the conventional discussion of Malayalam grammar; but it has much relevance in the cross linguistic analysis of similar syntactic features in the UG approach of generative tradition. For example, morphemes corresponding to *–um* in Hungarian, Japanese and Sinhala involve in the morphological composition of quantifiers in those languages.

Discussion of Quantifiers in *Keralapaniniyam* and After

Rajarajavarma mentions quantifiers only briefly. He notes that they are modifiers of noun and refer to the quantity of the noun. He gives examples of words referring to minimal quantity. Besides, *ellaa* and *mik'k'a* are given as examples for pronouns denoting all and part. He does not note that they always occur with *–um.*

It took many decades to have at least a brief discussion of quantifiers in Malayalam after this. Abraham (2012) describes the modifiers referring to quantity, cardinality and definiteness of nouns in his book. He categorizes quantifiers as referring to countable numbers and lists *ellaa, mik'k'a* as examples. He also mentions that they always occur with *–um.*

Quantifiers in the Generative Framework

Generative grammar is a model of linguistic analysis developed by Noam Chomsky. Its basic goal is to write a grammar explaining the universal principles of grammar that is underlying the languages of the world and thereby generate all and only the possible and correct sentences of the languages. The principles and parameters of universal grammar has to be described and formulated to this end. This is what those who do research in the generative framework of syntax aim to achieve. To consider/ study each linguistic feature or structure of a language on the basis of the above-mentioned principles and if some features or linguistic

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   311

phenomenon stands as anomaly, try to explain why that is so and adjust the principles accordingly if need be.

The necessity of comparing various linguistic features across languages must be clear enough now. When a particular linguistic feature is analysed in the generative framework, it should be studied not just in the light of the principles of that language but also with respect to the principles of UG.

A Syntactic Analysis of Quantifiers

Expressions referring to quantity or cardinality are called quantifiers. Examples for quantifiers in English are *every, all, no, some many,* etc. corresponding words in Malayalam are *ellaa, ooroo,cila, mik'k'a,* etc. Apart from these, there are quantifiers denoting more (*orupad, ottiri*) and those denoting less (*ittiri, alpam*). And as is already discussed, there is a mention of question word quantifiers in Mathan itself.

The analyses of quantifiers have mainly focused on three aspects, namely, their morphological composition, scope and distributivity. Of these, traditional grammarians have only focused on the morphological composition, however little. Even that has to be yet studied for comparative analysis of quantifiers. Many such studies have been done in English though. It can be noted that coordination markers such as *–um and –oo* are part of the composition of morphologically complex quantifiers. It is the aim of studies in this area to theoretically account for the specialized readings made available by the coordination markers in the composition of quantifiers. *–um* is an obligatory element in the composition of quantifiers such as *ellaa, mik'k'a* and *walla. Pala* has two occurrences –one with *–um* and the other without. They should be considered as separate words. Quantifiers composed of *–um* share some syntactic features. Similarly, quantifiers composed of question words and *–um* also share some particular linguistic features. Such phenomena can be explained only through morphosyntactic analyses based on specific theoretical approach.

Studies on the scope of quantifiers are relevant syntactically as well. When more than one quantifier is used in a sentence analyzing the scope interaction is important in judging specific interpretations. Scope interaction generally depends on the word order in Malayalam as suggested by the recent studies in the area. Consider the sentence given in (1).

1. ellaa   kristyanikaL-um   oru   pusthakam   vayicciTTuNT
   All   chistian-CONJ   a   book   read-has
   'All Christians have read a book'

==
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   312

There are at least two possible interpretations for this sentence. One is that all Christians have read books (at least one book). When *oru* is spoken with an emphasis, the reading that there is one book that all Christians have read (that is Bible) is also possible. The first reading is possible when the quantifier *ellaa* takes scope over the whole sentence. The second reading is made available when *oru* takes scope over *ellaa*. The second interpretation is termed as inverse scope taking, that is to say the scope interaction is inverse to the surface word order. This reading can be syntactically derived as well by changing the word order.

2. oru   pusthakam   ellaa   kristyanikaL-um   vayicciTTuNT
   a   book   all   christian-CONJ   read-has
   All Christians have read a book.

This sentence has primarily the reading where all Christians have read a particular book, i.e, Bible. Syntactic focusing is quite natural in Malayalam and it affects the scope readings of quantifiers. Thus, the scope readings of quantifiers in Malayalam largely depend on the word order. Besides, the morphological composition of quantifiers can affect their scope properties. Cross linguistic analysis of quantifiers helps deduce the UG principles in this regard.

Apart from the morphological structure and scope, there is another property called distributivity that needs to be discussed in the syntactic analysis of quantifiers. There are some insights on the distributive properties of certain quantifiers in the discussion of numerals and indeterminate pronouns in Mathan. He discusses the reduplicated forms of numerals and other words which we call quantifiers. He observes that the reduplicated forms divide the countable objects into parts. This is particularly interesting considering the definition of distributivity. Distributivity is the phenomenon a set is equally distributed over another. The set which is distributed is called the distributed share and the set upon which distribution happens is the sorting key. The set which is the sorting key in an event has to get exhaustive interpretation in order to be distributive.

Conclusion

The traditional grammarians were primarily concerned about giving a description of the language so as to learn it as a second language. There are insights of the nature of various syntactic elements in their works. It is in the work of the native grammarian Mathan that the insights on the morphological structure as well as the semantic composition of quantifiers discussed in detail. The main concepts involved in analyzing quantifiers in the generative framework are discussed here. Mathan provides some notable insights on these concepts as well. Studies of this kind are important in the interface of traditional grammar and generative linguistics as well.

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940** **18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   313

===
Bibliography

Abraham, P.T. 2012, *Malayalavyakaranam chila veenduvicharangal,* Changanacherry:
    Association for comparative study.

Gundert, Herman. 1991. *Malayalabhashavyakaranam*, Kottayam: D.C. Books.

Mathan, George. 2000, *Malayazhmayude Vyakaranam*, Thiruvananthapuram: Kerala Bhasha
    Institute.

Peet, Joseph. 1841, *A Grammar of the Malayalim Language*, Kottayam: CMS Press

Rajarajavarma, A R. 2001, *Keralapaniniyam*, Kottayam: D.C. Books.

===

Dr. Soumya P N
Assistant Professor on contract
Thunchathezhuthachan Malayalam University, Tirur
soumyapaloor@gmail.com

===
Language in India www.languageinindia.com **ISSN 1930-2940 18:12 December 2018**
Dr. Soumya P N
A Comparative Study of the Discussion of Quantifiers in the Traditional Grammars of
Malayalam and in Generative Syntax   314