The current state of Sri Lanka Portuguese

Introduction[1]

This paper gives an overview of the state of Sri Lanka Portuguese after the Sri Lankan Civil War (1983-2009). Sri Lanka Portuguese is a Portuguese-based Creole spoken by the Portuguese Burgher population on the East Coast of the island, and by the Ceylon Kaffir population on the West Coast. The Burghers of the East Coast have not been visited by Western linguists since the early 1970s, while the speech of the Kaffirs has never received extensive linguistic coverage. In the following, we will treat the recent developments in four areas of the island and list some linguistic structures which seem fruitful avenues for further research.

Demographic history

The Portuguese arrived in Sri Lanka in the early 16th century and quickly conquered the coastal areas. The conquerors used a pidginized version of Portuguese for communication with the natives. Due to dearth of women among the conquerors, the soldiers took local wives from the Sinhala and Tamil population (McGilvray 1982). The offspring of this union forms the seed of the "Portuguese Burgher" population of Sri Lanka, which soon adopted the Portuguese Pidgin as their language, which eventually creolized. When the Portuguese were evicted by the Dutch in the 17th century, history repeated itself and the Dutch soldiers took local wives. In contrast to the Portuguese from former times, there was a (semi-)European nubile population available, so that the Dutch mainly married with Portuguese Burgher women (McGilvray 1982). This formed the base for the "Dutch Burgher" community. The Dutch continued to use Creole Portuguese so that this language continued to thrive until well into the British period, which started in 1798. During the British period, Creole Portuguese was still used by the Wesleyan missionaries, who also produced some literature in the language, but it started to decline when the community switched to English or immigrated to Australia or South Africa altogether. Today, Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese is spoken by the Portuguese Burgher population of the Eastern shore and the "Kaffir" population of African descent in the West. See Smith (1977,1979,2011) and Jayasuriya (2003) for a more thorough account.

History of research

Sri Lanka Portuguese has the privilege of sporting a grammatical description of the 19th century variety (Dalgado 1900) as well as word lists, (Christian) literature from that century, and a substantial record of oral traditions (Jackson 1990). Unfortunately, as shown by Smith (submitted), this material is in an acrolectal variety, which does not reflect actual usage in daily communication. Some of the works also show influences from English, suggesting that the authors wrote down their own L2 variety of SLP, which was influenced by their L1 English.
Study of SLP lay dormant until Hettiaratchi (1969), who already notices that the

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Vahakottee variety in the Sinhala-speaking area had all but disappeared. He provides some cursory information about the varieties from the other places and lists three phrases from the Batticaloa dialect. Ian Smith and K. David Jackson went to Sri Lanka in the 1970s and did research on the phonology and discourse traditions of the Portuguese Burghers, respectively, leading to the publication of a phonological description of the language (Smith 1977) and a collection of texts and songs from the 19th century with modern counterparts (Jackson 1990) . The APICS project (Michaelis et al. forthcoming) inspired new life to research on SLP, and we eagerly await a grammatical sketch of SLP by Ian Smith (forthcoming). In the meantime, Shihan de Silva Jayasuriya had collected historical data and contemporary data and compiled this into her thesis and some subsequent works (Jayasuriya 1999 and passim)
An anonymous writer from the *Movimento de Solidariedade Lusófona* in Lisbon compiled a word list and a grammatical sketch of 16 pages and a dictionary of 29 pages in 2000, which allows some insights into the structure of the Batticaloa variety of the language (FNMAM 2000). Bandara (2011a) is a B.A. thesis dealing with SLP phonetics, Bandara (2011b) gives an overview of the demographics of SLP.

Aside from linguists, cultural anthropologists have also studied Sri Lanka Portuguese, most notably Dennis McGilvray, who analysed the (putative) differences between Portuguese Burghers and Dutch Burghers in 1982 and the fate of the Burghers after the Tsunami of 2004 (McGilvray 1982, 2007). His 2010 book also contains a chapter on the Burghers. Goonetilleke (1972) analysed the interrelations between the cultures of Sri Lanka and Portugal. The freelance writer Asiff Hussein contains the most recent description of Sri Lanka Portuguese language and culture in his anthology of ethnic groups of Sri Lanka (Hussein 2009).

Recent trip

As a result of the improved security situation after the end of the war in 2009, travel to the Eastern province, where Trincomalee and Batticaloa are located, became possible again. Since 1975, no Western linguist had set foot there and the situation of the language was completely unclear. Fernando had established contact with a Burgher family in Trincomalee in 2001, a contact which could be revived. On a round trip of about 10 days, we found the following situation:

Vahakoottee: The language in this small Catholic village in the middle of a Sinhala Buddhist region has been extinct for several generations, confirming reports in Hettiaratchi (1969). There are still some cultural practices attributable to Portuguese influence, most notably Catholicism and the pilgrimage to St. Anthony's church in Vahakottee on St. Anthony's day (June 18). The priest we met in the church comes from a Sinhala family in Colombo but has contacts with Burghers from the East Coast.

Trincomalee: The Trincomalee community has never received detailed attention in the literature, with the exception in Smith (1979), who devotes nine lines to dialectal differences. This is probably because the community is much smaller and much less visible than the Batticaloa community.
There are about 170 Burgher families in Trincomalee, mostly in the borough of

Palayittu). They follow their traditional occupation of carpentry and other mechanical trades.
We were surprised to find that despite the small size of the community, the language is well preserved. Language attitudes towards SLP are generally positive. The Portuguese NGO AMI funds Standard Portuguese classes. These classes are popular, but do not lead to stigmatization of SLP. SLP is commonly equated with medieval Portuguese, and is called "Old Portuguese" in contrast to European "New Portuguese" (Similar beliefs are found in Malacca, Baxter forthcoming). One reason for the better preservation of SLP might be that Trincomalee is a pluri-ethnic and pluri-lingual town, where Tamils, Sinhalese and Moors all make up about a third of the population. This contrasts with Batticaloa, which is nearly entirely Tamil-speaking. It can be conjectured that the conservation of multilingualism in SLP in Trincomalee is made easier by the widespread multilingualism found in this town.
The Trincomalee Burghers are organized in the Trincomalee Burgher Union, which works on English language teaching and poverty relief.

Batticaloa: This town is the traditional stronghold of the Burghers, who number about 4250 souls in this town of about 100,000. The majority of the inhabitants are Tamils (Christian or Hindu), with a significant percentage of Moors (Muslims). Both these groups speak Tamil. Use of English is less common than in other towns in Sri Lanka, and Sinhala is all but absent. Tamil clearly being the standard code of communication, Burghers switched to Tamil as their home language about 30 years ago (cf Smith 1977). As a result, there are few speakers younger than 50. The young generation generally do not speak SLP, and often do not even understand it. Cultural practices like particular customs at weddings and funerals with special SLP music, food and dress are valued, but the last music combo consists of five members, all above 60, and replacements are not in sight. The community is conscious of the potential loss of these cultural practices and engages in recordings of these musical expressions.
There is a lot less consciousness about the threatened status of the language. People generally notice that the grandchildren do not speak Portuguese, and deplore the fact, but then they are quickly taken up by different topics and do not devote to much energy on analysing the ongoing language shift or trying to prevent it.
The 2004 Tsunami affected the Burgher community badly. Their traditional area of "Dutch Bar', where many Burghers had moved in the second part of the 20th century, and which is located between the coast and the lagoon, was razed by the tsunami . The community was relocated to the inland village of Panichcheri (McGilvray 2007). The housing situation is satisfactory, but a huge problem is finding work in the village or Batticaloa. Household income is far below average for the people of Panichcheri.
The Batticaloa Burghers are organized in the Burgher Union Batticaloa and the Burgher Foundation. The president of the BUB, Sunny Ockers, is very active in collecting archival material on the language, e.g. FNMAM (2000). The president of the BF was unfortunately absent, but is said to be engaged in word collection for a dictionary.

Sirambiadiya: The last place visited was the hamlet of Sirambiadiya near Puttalam on the East coast, where the Sri Lankan "Kaffir" population lives. The Sirambiadiya Kaffirs are probably descendents of the Kaffir soldiers from colonial times (Jayasuriya 2003).

The community is very small and numbers only a handful of households. Nevertheless, their phenotype is clearly African, and although intermarriage is common, significant in-group marriage persists. This group is isolated from the Portuguese Burghers on the East coast, and the last contacts, if there have ever been any, probably took place at least 150 years ago. Cultural practices are different and show more African influence (drumming etc) as compared to the East Coast Burghers, where European instruments like violin and guitar are more common. The Kaffirs are also Catholics. Their variety of SLP shows some dialectal differences in phonology (Hussein 2009), for example preserving intervocalic /b/ where the Batticaloa variety has /v/ (*kabeesaa* vs *kavasa*). This is most probably due to differences in adstrate phonology: In Sirambiadiya, the adstrate is Sinhala, which has an intervocalic voiced stop. In Batticaloa, the adstrate is Tamil, where intervocalic stops are often spirantized, leading to the reinterpretation of Portuguese /b/. A further difference noted by Hussein is the denasalization of final nasalized vowels into /n/, and not into /m/ as in Batticaloa.
The community has nearly completed the shift to Sinhala. The last fluent speaker died in 2010. There are some rememberers left in one household in Sirambiadiya; the other settlement near the Goodshed Road in Puttalam preserves cultural practices but has completely lost the language. The Barefoot Café in Colombo, a café catering to Western tourists, hosts Kaffir music shows. The group *Kaffir Sthrela* “Kaffir Star” has recorded a CD, which shows a mix of African, Sri Lankan, and Modern Western features, probably as a result of the projected expectations of Western tourists at Barefoot (cf. Sarkissian 2000 for similar phenomena in Malacca).

Linguistic observations

The basic linguistic facts of SLP are detailed in Smith (1977,1978,1979, forthcoming). The language is a dependent marking SOV language with accusative alignment and some dative subjects. TAM is marked preverbally and can be stacked, a feature familiar from other creoles. The existence of case suffixes is, however, a feature which set SLP off from other creole languages. Most of the vocabulary of SLP is clearly traceable to Portuguese, but a number of loanwords from Tamil (*neli* “rice with husk”), Sinhala (*lɛɛsti*, “ready”), and Dutch (*kaklun<kalkoen* “turkey”) also exist. SLP distinguishes 8 vowels and 19 consonants.
The brevity of our contact with the SLP speakers does not allow us to make detailed statements about the structure of the language. A number of tentative observations can nevertheless be made. First, SLP phonology and morphology seem much less reduced than the phonologies of Caribbean Creoles. For instance, a word like *disovdisido* < *desobedecido* 'disobedient' with five syllables is retained quite intact and *frakeza<fraqueza* 'weakness' retains the onset cluster and the labiodental fricative (absent from Sinhala and Tamil). There is also phonological elaboration/complication as in *kambram* < *camaraõ* 'prawns', where the syllable structure has diverted from the CV pattern found in the lexifier.

Second, there is at least one 'irregular' verb in SLP. The present tense form *teem*, “to exist, to have”, corresponds to the past tense form *tinha*. This kind of suppletion is also found in the nominal domain, where 1st person direct case *eu* corresponds to 1st person oblique case *pammi* and the possessive *minha*. These baroque features were not

eradicated upon language contact; in fact they were created in South Asia themselves as a result of language contact.
The aforementioned oblique case, which is *-pə* for nouns, is used for both patients and recipients/beneficiaries, as shown in (1) and (2). These would be marked with accusative and dative, respectively, in the contact languages Sinhala and Tamil.

(1) eu bos-pə tə korta
1s 2s.sg-obl pres cut
"I cut you"

(2) eu bospə tə rundai
1s 2s.sg-obl pres help
"I help you"

An interesting question, which emerges from this is what happens if a proposition contains both a patient and a recipient. We found some variation in the solutions employed. There is general agreement that only human participants should be marked in this case.

(3) eu bos-pə cɛlli-∅ tə daa
1s 2s.sg-obl money pres give
"I give money to you"

If both relevant participants are human, two different strategies can be employed: The first one is to ignore the problem and trust the hearer will have enough knowledge of the world to do the disambiguation

(4) eu bos-pə aka pessam-pə tə daa
1s 2s.sg-obl dist person-obl pres give
"I give you to that person/I give that person to you"

The second solution is to resort to locative marking for the recipient in order to avoid the repetition of the same case.

(5) eu bos-pə aka pessam-tə tə daa
1s 2s.sg-obl dist person-loc pres give
"I give you to that person"

(6) eu issi criansa-bə bos-ndə tə daa
1s prox child-obl 2s-loc pres give
"I give that child to you"

As for dialectal differences, we found that the phonology of Sirambiadiya SLP shows some differences when compared to Eastern SLP. We have mentioned the realization of intervocalic /b/ and the nasal codas above.
Trincomalee SLP has borrowed the Tamil polite imperative marker *-nga*, which is not

found in BSLP. The lack of fluent speakers in Sirambiadiya does not allow us to make any statements about the imperative in this variety at this point in time. Table 1 gives polite and familiar imperatives in Std. Portuguese, Batticaloa Portuguese, Trincomalee Portuguese, and Tamil

	Std. Portuguese	Batticaloa SLP	Trincomalee SLP	Tamil
familiar	vem	vii	vii	vaa
polite	vinde (16th c.) venha (modern)	vii	viinga	vaanga

We see that form and function of Tamil *nga* have crossed the language boundary and are now also found in TSLP. The use of the polite imperative is not restricted to the verb *vii* 'come' but seems to be general. It is for instance also found with the verb *kumme* 'eat'. This is thus an instance of morphological borrowing, which is of course less common than lexical borrowing or calquing (Thomason & Kaufman 1988).

One feature which seems to be independent of language contact, yet interesting from a typological perspective is the phonological phrasing of TAM particles. The prototypical sentence pattern is NP TAM V, where TAM indicates the temporal, aspectual, or modal value of the verb (see examples above). Semantically, the marker clearly belongs to the verb, yet phonologically, it attaches to the preceding word, i.e. it is an enclitic on a (usually) nominal host (not marked in the examples above for reasons of legibility). Phonological phrasing and morphosyntactic phrasing thus do not run in parallel, a feature counted as non-transparent in Hengeveld (2011) and not expected in situations of creolization.

Conclusion

Sri Lanka Portuguese is still a living language despite strong pressure to shift to Tamil and the twin disasters of the civil war and the Tsunami. The language is nevertheless threatened by extinction, where we find four different scenarios: in Trincomalee, the youngest speakers are toddlers, in Batticaloa, the youngest speakers are in their 50s, in Sirambiadiya, the last fluent speaker died last year, and in Vahakottee, the language is long gone. The dialectal differences found suggest a split of the language a long period ago, so that an analysis of the dialectal differences will allow insights into historical sociolinguistics. SLP shows many features of linguistic interest, some of which are due to language contact (word order, case marking) while others seem to be independent innovations (phonological phrasing, resolution of case clashes). The time window to document this language is rapidly closing so that rapid deployment of research resources is needed to document and describe the language while it is still alive.

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