

# Tibeto-Burman - Dravidian Connection?

## Adjectives in Magar and Malayalam

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Disclaimer: NOT a historical connection  
between Tibeto-Burman and Dravidian,  
rather, structural similarities in some  
constructions

All Magar data presented here is primary  
data collected by the Centre for  
Endangered Languages, Sikkim  
University during various field visits  
between 2017 and 2019

# Introduction

## Magar:

- Belongs under the Bodic subgroup of Tibeto-Burman
- Spoken in Nepal, Sikkim, Darjeeling, parts of Assam and NE India
- Variety spoken in Sikkim: Eastern Magar; regional variation
- Agglutinative SOV language

# Introduction

## Malayalam:

- Belongs under the Southern branch of Dravidian
- Spoken in Kerala, Lakshadweep, Puducherry;  
Regional variation
- Agglutinative SOV language

# Adjectives in Magar

The most productive class of adjectives in Magar takes a suffix *-tsə*

(1) *min-təsə ãp*  
ripe-TSƏ mango  
Ripe mango

(2) *k<sup>h</sup>an-təsə di*  
hot-TSƏ water  
Hot water

(3) *gja-təsə bər<sup>h</sup>in*  
red-TSƏ cloth  
Red cloth



# *-tsə* is a relativizer

- Attaches to verbs
- Used in the derivation of adjectives, participles and relative clauses

# In the literature on Tibeto-Burman

It is a common cross-linguistic pattern  
attested across the language family

Reduced relative clause analysis



# Adjectives in Malayalam

The most productive class of adjectives in Malayalam takes a suffix *-a*

(6) *taṇutt-a vellam*  
cold-A water  
Cold water



(7) *melinṇ-a kuṭṭi*  
thin-A child  
Thin child

(8) *cuvann-a pu:*  
red-A flower  
Red flower

# Again: Not just adjectives

This morpheme *-a* occurs in participials and relative clauses as well

(9) *vi:ŋ-a pu:*  PARTICIPIAL  
fell-REL flower  
Fallen flower

(10) *innale vann-a a:|* RELATIVE CLAUSE  
yesterday came-REL person  
The person who came yesterday

# **-a is a relativizer**

- **Attaches to verbs**
- **Used in the derivation of adjectives, participles and relative clauses**

# In the literature on Dravidian

It is a common cross-linguistic pattern  
across the language family

Reduced relative clause analysis

# Similarities

Adjectives, Participles and Relative Clauses  
share some similarity in morphological form  
in both Magar and Malayalam

# Similarities

## Magar

(11) *bo-tsə bə<sup>h</sup>in*  
white-REL cloth  
White cloth

ADJECTIVE

(12) *bat-tsə kɿp*  
break-REL cup  
Broken cup

PARTICIPIAL

(13) *nako-e daŋ-tsə masto*  
2S.HON-ERG see-REL girl  
The girl you saw

RELATIVE CLAUSE

# Similarities

## Malayalam

(14) *karutt-a tuni*  
black-REL cloth  
Black cloth

ADJECTIVE

(15) *potti-ja kuppi*  
broke-REL bottle  
Broken bottle

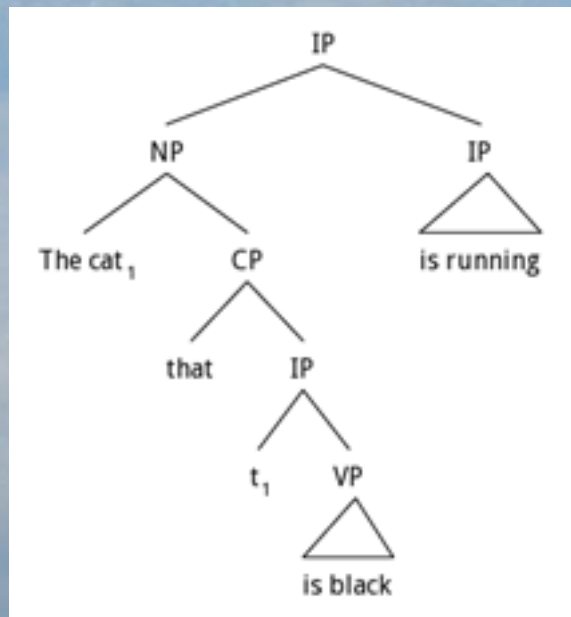
PARTICIPIAL

(16) *ni: kanq-a penkutti*  
2s saw-REL girl  
The girl you saw

RELATIVE CLAUSE

# “Reduced relative clauses”

i.e., these structures are actually relative clauses



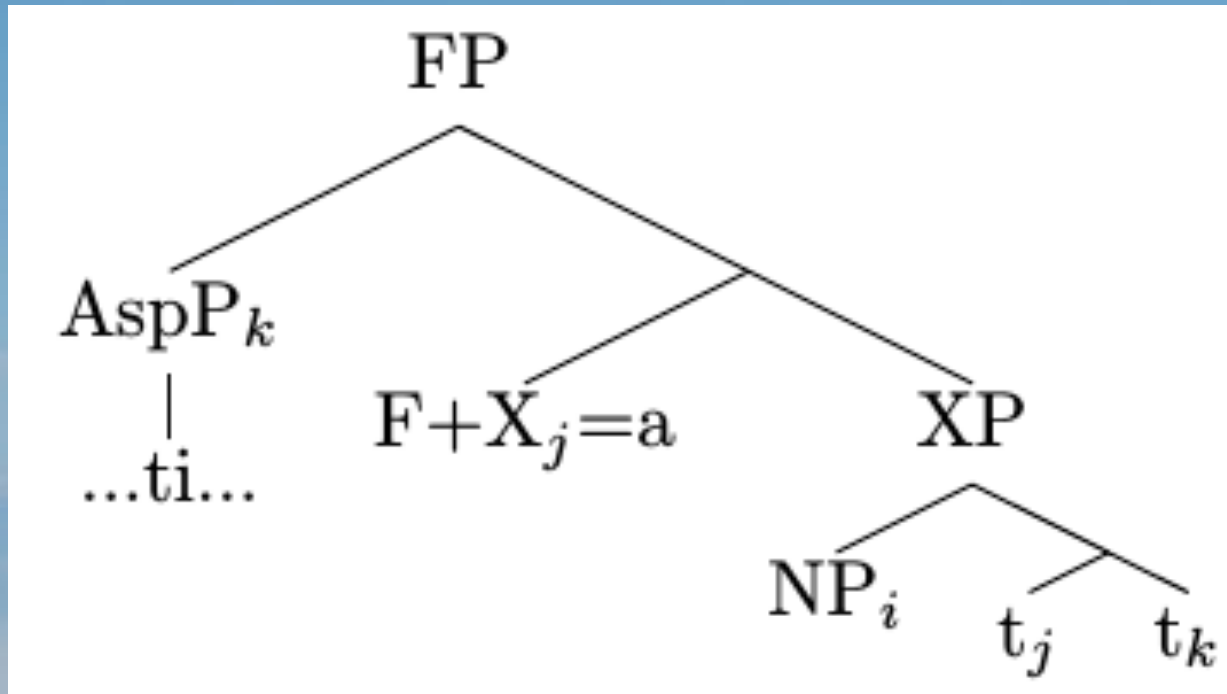


# The relativizer in Dravidian

In earlier work:

- Not relative clauses because none of them are CPs
- They are participials spelled out at different points in the derivation under an Intermediate Spellout analysis
- *-a* is the lexicalized form of the Linker in an operation of Predicate Inversion (*a la den* Dikken 2006)

# The relativizer in Dravidian



Can this analysis apply to the  
Tibeto-Burman relativizers?

(There's more here than what we  
have seen)

# Differences

Major differences between relativization structures in Magar and Malayalam :

Form: Magar relativizer attaches to the verb root, Malayalam to the perfective stem

Function: TB relativizers, more often than not, are also nominalizers - as exhibited by Magar

# “Form” problem:

(18) *pott-i-ja*                      *kuppi*                      MALAYALAM  
break-PRFV-REL bottle  
Broken bottle

(19) *bat-tsə*      *kʌp*                      MAGAR  
break-REL cup  
Broken cup  
(cup that breaks/will break/has broken)

# “Function” problem:

- (20) *pott-i-ja-\*(tu)* MALAYALAM  
break-PRFV-REL-NOM  
The broken one/thing
- (21) *bat-tsə* MAGAR  
break-REL  
The broken one/thing  
(the thing that breaks/will break/has broken)

# Dravidian nominalization builds on relativization

(22) Verb root + PRFV + REL + AGR

(a) *var-nt-a-van* 'the one.M that came'

(b) *var-nt-a-val* 'the one.F that came'

(c) *var-nt-a-tu* 'the one.N that came'

(d) *var-nt-a-var* 'the one.PL that came'

# Any possibility of a unified analysis?

de Vries (2001) typology of relative elements:  
Two different sub-types of “Relative affixes”

Maybe a DM approach?



# Thank you!

## References

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