

# CONVERBAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF MALAYALAM

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## Abstract

This paper on Malayalam verbal structure with respect to serial verb constructions (SVC) shows that there are two types of converbal affixes in Malayalam. One, an empty element that comes on all conjunctival participle marked verbs of an SVC. Two, an affix which is traditionally considered a perfective marker, *-ITT*. Data shows that there are two forms of *-ITT* converbal affixes, one, a bare *-ITT* and two, a compound with verb *koL* 'bear', which surfaces as *koNT*. The paper also shows that verbs in conjunctival participle form has a 'completive' meaning on them, leading us to the conclusion that they are the 'narrative converbs' of Malayalam. Similarly, *-ITT* form is recognized as 'perfective' in meaning, classifying them as 'perfective converb' markers of Malayalam. *koNT* converbal marker is argued as derived by adding *-ITT* to the *koL* 'bear' verb. The presence of an additional *koL* verb on the otherwise converbal form *-ITT* is justified as directly affixing onto verbs only if the SVC has a single-event reading, whereas if it has multi-event reading, then *koNT* is the converbal marker.

**Key Words:** Malayalam, Language, Verbal structure, Converb

## INTRODUCTION

Of the grammatical categories such as noun, verb, singular, plural, present and past tense, accusative and nominative cases etc. that we find in languages across the world, very few are universal in the sense that they occur in every language. But many are universally applicable or cross-linguistically valid. It is assumed that they belong in some way or the other to universal grammar. By contrast, there are categories of individual languages that are not universal in nature, e.g., the English *-ing* form, 'umlaut' (back vowel fronting) as a morphophonemic phenomenon in Germanic languages (e.g. German).

Verbs are one category that is clearly universal. In their appearance across languages, verbs take different shades of functions. Apart from their main or most common function of indicating an action or event, verbs can function as noun (verbal noun/masdar)- with a syntactic function as argument, as adjective (verbal adjective) - with a syntactic function as adnominal modifier, and as adverb (converb)- with a syntactic function as adverbial modifier ( Haspelmath 1995:4). In this paper, we will look at certain properties of what is assumed to be converb (the adverbial modifier) forms in Malayalam.

### Converbs: identification and definition

Among the different forms of verbs, a nonfinite verb form which cannot form a sentence on its own, stands for a main function of marking adverbial modification. This form of verb is called a converb. Haspelmath (1995:3-8) defines a converb as "a non-finite verb form whose main function is to mark adverbial subordination" (the definition is italicised in the original).

Known and explained under different names like "gerund", "gérondif", "adverbial particle" (Haspelmath 1995:2) "absolute constructions", "conjunctive participle", "free adjuncts", "sentence equivalents", and "embedded predications functioning as satellites" (Bisang 1995:136),

converbs can be analysed basically to be a verb form that is part of the inflectional paradigm of verbs. They are usually marked by an affix that is attached to the verb stem, mostly suffixes, which (can) function as a "clause linking device" (Coupe 2006). Besides inflectional affixes, nonaffixal particles may also be employed as converb markers (resulting in periphrastic converbs), e.g., French *en*, Albanian *duke* (Haspelmath 1995:9). And since they are inflectional, they are not expected to have the degree of autonomy that is expressed by other lexical categories, and therefore the clause containing the converb stands in a dependent relationship to a matrix clause. Below are two examples for converbal constructions.

Japanese (Shibatani 2009:5)

*Kare-ga koko-ni hon-o mot-te ki-ta.*  
he-NOM here-DAT book-ACC take-CON come-PST  
'He brought the book here.'

Korean (Shibatani 2009:6)

*Kunye-nun kel-e ka-tta.*  
she-TOP walk-CON go-PST  
'She went walking.'

Converbal constructions are modifiers that generally modify verbs, clauses or sentences but not nouns or noun phrases. The adverbial modification a converb makes is of the type of subordination (Haspelmath 1995:3). The verb in converb is inherently subordinate and therefore, converbs are subordinate. This is because they are often embedded or incorporated into a superordinate clause, unlike coordinate clauses which are not part of a superordinate clause. Since the converbs are subordinate under a superordinate clause, the converb subject is often coreferential with the subject of the superordinate clause, whence in many languages, the subject of converb is often not expressed explicitly, but is left implicit.

Russian (Haspelmath 1995:10)

*\*oma prigotoviv zavtrak, Zamira razbudila detej she*  
prepare:PFV.CONV breakfast, Zamira woke.up children  
'Having prepared breakfast, Zamira woke up the children'

Like many other grammatical categories, converbs are extensively made use of in grammaticalized constructions. Verbs in a converb form may themselves be grammaticalized into different functions like adposition, subordinating conjunction, applicative marker etc. Below is an example from English (Quirk et. al. 1985:660) for a converb-derived adposition and conjunction.

English (Haspelmath 1995:39)

(Adposition)

*Considering her age, she has made excellent progress in her studies.*

(Conjunction)

*Considering that she is rather young, she has made excellent progress in her studies.*

Chickasaw (Munro 1983 as cited in Haspelmath 1995:42)

*Tali' isht-iiso-li-tok*

rock APPL.INSTR-hit-1SG.ACT-PAST

'I hit him with a rock'

In the Chickasaw example above, if the verb *ishi* 'get, take' is used as a converb, its meaning is bleached to indicate mere instrumentality. Moreover, there happens a phonological and/or morphological reduction on this semantically grammaticalized (bleached) verb, and it (the verb with the converb suffix *t*) becomes attached to the superordinate verb as a prefix which function as an instrumental applicative marker.

### Converbs: classification

The adverbial modification function of converbs is carried out in different styles. These are analysed as different interpretations of converbal constructions. Some of those interpretations are: narrative, conjunctive, coordinative, adverbial, temporal, causal, modificational, concessive simultaneous, concessive conditional, manner, perfective/progressive aspect etc.

Different theoretical accounts have identified converbal constructions of different interpretation type into different classes. All these classifications vary in the terminology they use, though the content is the same. This difference is, mainly, due to the difference in perspective. For instance, Bisang (1995), in a syntactic perspective, identifies three types of prototypical converbs; coordinative, narrative and conjunctive (Bisang 1995:154). Whereas Vladimir P. Nedjalkov, in a typological perspective, identifies "three ideal semantic types of converbs": specialized, contextual, and narrative (Nedjalkov 1995:106). The three types in both the classifications roughly cover the same interpretational domain.

Cordinative converb constructions refer to parallel (or overlapping) events of the same narrative value, which can be contrasted or fused into one event. Narrative converbs refer to the linearity or iconicity by that it expresses a coordinative connection between multiple, completed actions in succession that advances the narration. Conjunctive converbs (or specialized converbs) refer to concession, condition, temporal relation etc. (Bisang 1995:155). Let us look at some examples for different interpretations of converbs.

Narrative interpretation

Tamil (Steever 1989 as cited in Bisang 1995:156)

*mazai pey-tu veyil ati-ttu vānavil*  
*tōnr-iy-atu*  
 rain:NOM rain-CONV sun-NOM beat-CONV rainbow-  
 NOM appear-PAST-3sn  
 'It rained, the sun shined, and a rainbow appeared'

Modificational or simultaneous interpretation

Japanese (Bisang 1995:161)

*uta o utat-te iki-mashi-ta*  
 song ACC sing-CONV go-HON-PAST  
 '[He] went along singing'

Directional interpretation

Japanese (Bisang 1995:164)

*jibun no mono o mot-te ki-mashi-ta*  
 self GEN thing ACC hold/keep-CONV come-HON-PAST  
 '[I] brought my own things'

Now that we have got an outline of the converbal constructions, let us look for similar constructions in Malayalam.

### Similar constructions in Malayalam

It is interesting to see that what has been discussed under the titles "adverbial participles" and "gerunds" in European languages, "converbs", "gerunds", and "*deepričastija*" in Altic languages, "medial verbs" in Papuan languages and finally, "conjunctive participle" in South Asian languages are all the same phenomenon. What was analysed as 'converb' in this paper is explained in Malayalam linguistics under the title "conjunctive participle" (cf. Hanybabu 1997:71). But, it seems there is more to it.

The above discussed examples of converbal constructions of Japanese, Korean, Tamil etc. can be paraphrased into Malayalam in different ways.

*kuTTi karanjə-koNTə uRangi*  
 child cry-koNTə sleep-Past  
 "Child slept crying"

*naaya cerippə kaTiccə muRicə naSippiccu*  
 dog chappals bite-Conj.Prt cut-Conj.Prt spoil-Past  
 "Dog spoiled the chappals, biting and cutting"

*vaathil aTacc-iTT uNTə*  
 door close-Perf be-Past  
 'The door is closed'

What appears to be in the corresponding positions in the Malayalam data to the converbal markers of other-language examples are three different elements; *koNT(ə)*, *-ə* (conjunctive participial (schwa or the past-like inflection)), and *-iTT(ə)*. It may imply, prima facie, that these three are three different ways Malayalam adopts to mark a converbal construction. If we take the word final 'ə', which is common in all three elements above, as a default word ending sound in Malayalam<sup>1</sup>, then we may consider the second instance (example (10)) having a null element of converbal marking. Let us look at each of these three possible converb markers of Malayalam in detail.

<sup>1</sup> /ə/ is an epenthetic vowel inserted word finally when a word ends in a consonant other than /n/ or /l/.

**koNT constructions<sup>2</sup>**

The verb *koNT* has many different meanings and roles in Malayalam. Ranging from a verb with full lexical properties to a phonologically and morphologically reduced, grammaticalized linker of postpositional nature. Its most common use is, it seems, as an instrument marker. In addition to that, there are many other roles of *koNT* which is very functional in the language. Before we discuss its role as a converb, in this section, let us look at some of its common incarnations in the language.

aanakkə veTi koNTu  
elephant gun-shot got  
'Elephant got shot'

messi mazha koNTə kaLiccu  
Messi rain bear play-Past  
'Messi played wet in the rain'

In the above instances *koNT* is functioning in its full lexical form. Here it stands as the past tense of a verb *koLL-uka* which would mean 'to get/ to bear-inf'. We will not explore the process of past-tense marking on the verb '*koLL-uka*' here, instead, we would follow Madhavan (1987) and posit two past tense markers in Malayalam, *-u* and *-tu*, and it is *-tu* that is attached to the *koL* root/stem to form the lexical past tense form *koNTu*. In its full lexical form, the verb does not imply any material possession of the entity denoted by the object associated with it, whereas it can mean a self benefactive/malefactive 'to suffer/feel', a form of 'got' which, perhaps, cannot be analyzed on a 'possession change' scale. See example (12) for a case.

Apart from its lexical use, *koNT* has a variety of grammaticalized forms in the language too. Similar to the Chickasaw example discussed in (5), *koNT* has semantically bleached roles indicating grammatical functions in Malayalam. A striking property of Malayalam is that there are many instances where lexical and grammatical forms of the same verbs co-exist. Most often, the grammatical meaning is arrived at by a "metaphoric extension of the lexical meaning". Therefore it is crucial to identify which is the grammaticalized and which is the lexical instance of the verb, in order to interpret the sentence. Now let us look at some grammaticalized instances of *koNT*.

**koNT as case marker (Instrument, Comitative)**

**Instrument**

*koNT* has a grammaticalized form where it stands for the meaning 'with/using', referring to the instrumental object. It can be considered a postposition in this role. I would assume, pending a detailed discussion on it, that it is the postposition *koNT* that is marking the indirect object "instrument" in constructions where both the objects are present.

aanakkə katti koNTə kuttə koNTu  
elephant knife with stab got  
'Elephant got stabbed with (a) knife'

maRaDoNa kai koNTə pantə taTTi valayil iTTu

2 In our representation of *koNT*, sometimes we may use *koNT* and sometimes *koNTə*. It has to be clearly understood that the *-ə* on it is epenthetic and that the conjunctive participle indicating non-finiteness and completeness of the verb that was grammaticalized is null phonetically, and it appears as /ə/ for syllabic reasons. Still, when we are discussing solely the verb, we may represent it without the *-ə*.

maradona hand with ball touched net-in drop-Past  
'Maradona netted the ball with hand'

In example (14), there are two instances of *koNT*, and the two have different meanings. In the first instance, *koNT* is a grammaticalized form. That means, it is a postposition which marks the object instrument. On the other hand, in the second instance, *koNT* stands as a full lexical verb with a past tense marker *-u* on it. In (15), theme of the lexical verb *naTannu* 'walk', *kaalə* 'leg' is instrument marked by the grammaticalized verb *koNT*. Interestingly, the same *koNT* has a directly opposite role of this, a non-instrumental marker. Let us look at that type.

**Non-instrumental 'with' (Comitative)**

We saw *koNT* giving the meaning of an instrumental 'with' in the above section. The very same verb can take up another grammaticalized case marker role to mark comitative case; as a 'non-instrument with'. But the presence or absence of an element *-um* on the preceding DP seems to be crucial in arriving at this meaning. That is, it is only in the presence of an *-um* marker on the preceding DP the construction gets interpreted as comitative case marked. The absence of the *-um* marker renders the constructions a completely different interpretation. See the pair of examples below.

Ruuni peena koNTə vannu  
Rooney pen because of/bear came  
'Rooney came because of pen'  
'Rooney brought pen'

Ruuni peena(y)um koNTə vannu  
Rooney pen-Conj with came  
'Rooney came with pen'  
'Rooney brought pen also'

The marker *-um* in example (17), though represented as conjunctive marker, may be called an additive participle whose function is quite different from that of its other incarnations<sup>3</sup>. In the case of (17), it has to be noticed that the postposition which is glossed as 'with' is not an instrument marker in the construction with the additive *-um*, rather a comitative or accompaniment marker. Therefore, this instance of *koNT* has to be glossed 'non-instrumental with'.

We can see that both (16) and (17) can be paraphrased in two ways as shown in the gloss. This can be considered an instance of ambiguity.

The availability of two meanings on the same construction, or ambiguity that is apparent in (16) and (17) is related to the association of *koNT* to one of the two elements it is flanked by<sup>4</sup>. In the absence of any phonological evidence of association to any of the two elements *koNT* is flanked by (the preceding DP or the following verb), the construction is ambiguous between two readings. For instance, in (17) when *koNT* is associated with the preceding *-um* marked DP, it can

3 The element *-um* is used for different functions such as conjunction as in (a), mood as in (b) and quantification as in (c), below.

(a) raajupeena-(y)um pushhaka-(v)um vaangi (b) raaju kaLi niRTi-um Raju pen-Conj book-Conj buy-Past Raju play stop-Mod'Raju bought pen and book' 'Raju will stop playing' (c) raaju ent-um ceyy-um Raju what-Qnt do-Mod 'Raju will do anything'

4 It appears to me that the ambiguity in *koNT* constructions is available only in the case of a limited set of verb combinations. Only when a verb with which *koNT* forms an idiom follows it, the construction appears carrying two possible interpretations. The verbs with which *koNT* forms an idiom are, mostly, a subset of 'motion verbs' (walk, come, go, sit, etc.).

be paraphrased as in the example, 'Rooney came with pen'. Whereas when *koNT* is associated with verb following it, the same construction can be paraphrased 'Rooney brought a pen also'. In the second instance, *koNT* is not functioning in its grammaticalized form. Neither it be said that it is the full lexical form, rather it is an idiomatic role of *koNT* (in combination with *vannu* 'come') that gives the construction the meaning 'brought'. We are not attempting to resolve the ambiguity associated with this type of constructions here. What matters to our point of discussion is that the element *koNT* has ambiguous roles in certain type of constructions and, on a superficial observation, the ambiguity is resolved based on evidence of phonological and/or morphological association such as compounding.

An association-related ambiguity of *koNT* is present in (16) too. We will look into the details of this issue in the next section.

### *koNT* in causative constructions

#### **Ambiguous: 'Because of' and/or 'bear'**

Another grammaticalized instance of the verb *koNT* is in constructions like the ones below.

messi veedana koNTə naTannu  
 Messi pain because of/bear walk  
 'Messi walked because of /bearing (the) pain'

In this construction, there is a clear ambiguity associated with what meaning *koNT* carries; 'because of' or 'bear'. As we discussed in the previous section, choosing between the two meanings available depends upon the compounding of *koNT* with one of the two elements it is flanked by. Below are the two possible representations of the meanings associated with (18) above.

messi veedana-koNTə naTannu  
 Messi pain-because walk-Past  
 'Messi walked because of pain'

messi veedana koNTə-naTannu  
 Messi pain bear-walk-Past  
 'Messi walked (around) bearing (the) pain'

In (19), *koNT* can be considered implying a meaning 'because of', and it is not standing free as a separate lexical verb because it is associated with or morphologically closer to the DP preceding it, *veedana* 'pain'<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, the only possible interpretation for this construction is 'Messi walked because of pain'. In (20), *koNT* can be read as associated with or morphologically compound to V2. Therefore, it can only have an interpretation 'Messi walked (around) bearing the pain'. This difference can be seen clearly if we look closely at the two positions *koNT* can come in, one, as associated with the preceding DP and two, as a compound verb with the following verb.

Meaning changing associations of similar type, sometimes, have their morphological reflections too. That is, if *koNT* gets interpreted as 'because of', then it is associated morphologically with the preceding DP, whereas if it gets the interpretation 'bear', then it is associated with the following verb, morphologically. The 'associations' we refer to here are of the form of phonological compounding. And therefore,

certain rules of compounding are at play here. That is, there is a noticeable phonological and morphological shortening happening between the two close but separate words in such contexts. For instance, when attaching to the preceding DP, the verb *koNT* comes in its phonologically and morphologically bleached form, *-NT* and attaches as a suffix on the DP. And similar shortening is visible when it attaches to the (superordinate) verb that is following it too.

Data from dialects show that such shortening is a common phenomenon in the language. For example, in the Mappila dialect of Malayalam, there is a strong evidence to show that *koNT* of the above pair of examples is associated with the DP 'pain' in example (19) and with verb 'walk' in (20). See the dialectal variants of the constructions.

messi veedanoNT karanju  
 Messi pain.because of cry-Past  
 'Messi cried because of pain'

messi vedana koNTaTannu  
 Messi pain bear/take walk  
 'Messi walked bearing/taking the pain'

Similar phenomena are observed in some other languages also. Analysing conversion of converb to applicative marker in Chickasaw, Haspelmath (1995) talks about a type of converb which has its meaning so that it indicates mere instrumentality (cf. Examples 83 and 84). He calls it "semantic grammaticalization", and it is observed accompanied normally by phonological and morphological reduction, whereby the verb becomes attached to the superordinate verb as an affix (prefix, in the data he discussed). The process of *koNT* can also be analysed in similar lines. When it is associated with the preceding element, the first syllable of the verbal element is deleted and the remaining part, *-NT* attaches as an affix onto the preceding DP (cf. e.g. 21). Similarly, as in (22), there is some kind of phonological/morphological shortening happening at the word boundaries when *koNT* is compounding with the following verb.

At this point, we are not going into the intricacies of the phonological process of word formation or compounding happening in Malayalam. But the point is clear that there is a compounding induced trimming happening at the word boundaries. And what the morphological compounding of the two words indicate is that they were 'compoundably close' to each other. Let us look at our constructions in this frame.

messi [veedana.koNTə] naTannu  
 Messi pain.because of walked  
 'Messi walked because of pain'

messi veedana [koNTə.naTannu]  
 Messi pain bear/with.walked  
 'Messi walked (around) bearing (the) pain'

In the absence of any phonological evidence, the construction appears ambiguous between the two meanings; that is, between 'walked because of pain' and 'walked bearing the pain'. But the phonological evidence of association to either of the two elements resolves that ambiguity.

Another role *koNT* plays with respect to causative constructions is in the marking of primary causee. Let us see some examples.

<sup>5</sup> The 'association' claimed here is purely phonological. This is because there is an auditorily perceivable proximity between the two words in casual speech.

**Primary causee marker in causative constructions**

The primary causee is the prime agent of causation when there are multiple events of causation in a causative construction. In other words, the agent who caused the other causations of the whole event can be called the primary causee. In a multi-causation construction, *koNT* can be used to mark the primary causee of different causation events. See the examples given below.

pooliis kaLLane-kkoNTə ottakkaalil caaTippiccu  
 police thief -by one foot-on jump-Caus-Past  
 'Police made the thief jump on one foot'

naaTTukaaR pooliisne- kkoNTə kaLLane caaTippiccu  
 villagers police-by thief jump-Caus-Past  
 'The villagers made the police make the thief jump'

The difference between (25) and (26) is that in (25) 'police' is the agent and 'thief' is the primary causee. Whereas in (26), 'police' is the primary causee and there is another causing agent over that. This is clear if we shift the element *koNT* to 'thief' from 'police'. Then the whole causation implication changes and gives a meaning that 'thief' is the primary causee who then caused 'police' to do the event denoted by the verb. See the example below.

naaTTukaaR pooliisne kaLLane- kkoNTə caaTippiccu  
 villagers police thief-by jump-Caus  
 'The villagers made the thief make the police jump'

Close to the "causative" reading of *koNT* there is another possible interpretation of it. The progressive aspect marker. Let us look at that.

***koNT* as Progressive Aspect marker**

Instances of *koNT* co-existing with modifying verbs (e.g., Manner verbs) is a common phenomenon in Malayalam. In such constructions, the *koNT* verb usually compounds with the modifying verb that precedes it. Here it carries a kind of meaning that the event which the modifying verb describes, has 'been' carried out in that manner. In other words, it shows a 'continuity of the manner' of the main event.

messi mazha koNTə.koNTə vannu<sup>6</sup>  
 Messi rain bear. being came  
 'Messi came being wet in the rain'

In (28), it can be roughly said that the act of "getting wet in the rain" is happening while the act of "coming" is progressing. From this example, it may be assumed that *koNT* is used to mark the progressive nature of the manner throughout the course of action of the main event. If this assumption is on the right track, then we can claim that this is a progressive aspect marking instance of *koNT*. The traditional categorization of it, given below, comes as a corroborative evidence for this assumption.

(Perfective) (Progressive)  
*paRanjə-iTTə paRanjə-koNTə*  
 'Having said' 'Being said'

But there is another type of construction which is traditionally considered bearing a progressive aspect form too. That is the constructions with a verb *ir* 'sit'. Consider the example below.

shahrasaad kadhakaL paRanjə.koNTə.irənnu  
 Shaharзад stories tell -koNTə.be.Past  
 'Shahrazad kept telling stories'

Here, the compound of *koNT* and *irənnu* 'sit' is considered the progressive aspect marking part of the construction<sup>7</sup>. The compound gives the construction a meaning "continued in the state of telling". Then it comes out as a difficult task to distinguish between the two types of progressive aspect constructions mentioned above, the ones with a 'sit' verb (as in (30)) and ones without it (as in (28)). In (28), the subject 'was in the state of being wet' when the 'coming' event happened (beginning to end) and in (30), the subject 'continued to be in the state of telling'. In short, both the instances indicate a durative state, and clearly not a progressive action<sup>8</sup>.

Before we conclude on which of these two, if, is the progressive construction, let us look at another set of data.

kuTTi karanjə karanjə ooTi  
 child cry-Conj.Prt cry-Conj.Prt run-Past  
 'The child ran crying'

pakshi paRannə paRannə pooyi  
 bird fly-Conj.Prt fly-Conj.Prt go-Past  
 'The bird went flying'

This leaves us with many intricate questions. Prominent among them being what is the role of *koNT* in these constructions? What is the role of *irənnu* 'sit'? Which of the above is the progressive aspect construction? etc.

I would argue that continuity of a 'durative state' is induced by reduplication, and not by *koNT*. And *koNT*, on the other hand, stands for an overlapping temporality. For instance, compare example (31) above with example (9), repeated as (33) below.

kuTTi karanjə-koNTə uRangi  
 child cry- ? sleep-Past  
 'The child slept crying'

In the case of (33), we cannot say that the act of "crying" was happening while the act of "sleeping" is progressing (cf. Discussion after (28)). Whereas in the case of (31) (and (32) for that matter), it can be said that event-1 is durative throughout event-2. Therefore, the function of *koNT* in constructions like (33) is more of a "linker" acting on V1 to overlap the verb's temporality to that of the V2.

We will not attempt a detailed study of these constructions now, as it stands beyond the purview of this paper, instead

<sup>7</sup> I assume that there is a difference between *koNT+ir-unnu* constructions and *koNT + 'any verb'*. In the first category, that is *koNT + ir-unnu*, the verb coming after *koNT* is *ir* 'sit/be'. Of the two meanings of *ir*, one refers to an action 'sit' and other refers to a state 'be'. When the meaning is 'sit', *koNT* cannot compound with it, and in that scenario *irunnu* would stand for its lexical meaning, that is 'Sit-Past'. On the other hand, when *ir* implies 'be' meaning, *koNT* forms a compound with it giving the meaning of 'continued to be', in other words, it implies a durative state.

<sup>8</sup> Another difference between (28) and (30) is that in (28), the idiomatic reading is not that easily available with verb coming after *koNT* and hence the construction gets an interpretation of durative action (action represented by V1 with which *koNT* is associated). Whereas in (30), the interpretation is ambiguous. If *koNT* is associated with the preceding verb 'say', then the construction gets a meaning 'sat saying'. On the other hand, if *koNT* is associated with the following verb, *irunnu*, then the construction gets the meaning of 'continued in the state of telling'.

<sup>6</sup> This is another instance of the lexical and grammatical roles of the same verb co-existing. Of the two *koNT*, the first one is in lexical function and the second one is in grammatical function. See example (14) for a discussion on it.

we will leave this open and conclude our discussion on the types of *koNT* constructions in Malayalam here and move on to our main point.

In short, it may be concluded that *koNT* has different incarnations such as a full lexical verb, and grammaticalized instances such as 'with' (instrument), 'because of', 'bear', 'with' (non-instrument), primary causee marker etc. Now that we have got a picture of *koNT*, let us go back to the point of our discussion, converbs. We started our discussion with a Malayalam paraphrase of what is generally considered converbal constructions. Let us look at those constructions once again.

**koNT as converb**

Considering the different interpretations available on *koNT* constructions, we have fair evidence to call constructions with *koNT* as converbal constructions. Most of the interpretations we get for it in Malayalam are interpretations recognized for converbal constructions, in different languages. Consider the example (9) repeated below as (34).

kuTTi karanjə-koNTə uRangi  
 child cry-koNTə sleep-Past  
 'Child slept crying'  
 (lit: child slept while crying)

In this instance of *koNTə*, it is used between the two verbs, often appear as attached to the modifier-V1 (here, manner verb) morphologically. The use of *koNT* in this type of construction has some specific properties that might make it a different construction altogether. In these constructions, *koNT* is used as a non-finite verb form marking adverbial subordination such as 'when', 'while', 'then' etc. Such adverbial subordination markers are identified in many languages across the world (cf. Shibatani 2009, Krave 2010). They seem to introduce a co-eventuality or overlapping of events between the verbs and thereby adjoin the verbs in the subordinate clause to the main predication. Such adjuncts without any overt subjects are generally called 'converbs'.

This instance of *koNT* is similar to that of the converbal endings found in Japanese and Korean complex predicates (cf. Shibatani 2009, (6b)). Since they are called converbs in Japanes and Korean grammatical tradition, it may be plausible to consider constructions with this type *koNT* into that frame and label them converb. If this is in the right track, then we can claim that the converbal marker in these constructions is *koNT*.

Before we conclude *koNT* as the converbal marker, let us look at the structure of *koNT* a bit in detail.

**Structure of koNT**

As we said in the beginning of last section, the form *koNTu* is the past tense form of *koL* 'to get/bear' (cf. § 3.1). This type of past tense formation is not an uncommon phenomena in the language. See the examples below.

a. varaL + tu - varaNTu  
 'grow+ Past' 'grew'  
 b. NiiL + tu - niiNTu  
 'prolong+Past' 'prolonged'

But what is crucial is that converbal forms are non-finite. Therefore, it is problematic to assume that Malayalam converbal form is past in tense. For that matter, let us assume

that the past tense marker *-u* is deleted from the verb, and then the verb can be non-finite with a morphological form *koNT*. That means the derivation of the non-finite *koNT* can be considered happening in different levels as shown below.

koL + tu → koNTu  
 u → Ø  
 koL → koNT

But this will not save us here, moreover, this assumption would lead us to deeper chaos. For instance, in the scenario assumed above, it turns out to be difficult to explain why the phonological change that transformed the verb from *koL* to *koNT*, happened, if no past tense suffixation (addition of *-tu*) comes on it. Or, we may have to explain in more elaborate terms what motivates the deletion of *-u* on the past tense of *koL*. Without dismissing this option, let us look at another possibility.

Since, in most of the cases discussed above, *koNT* stands for a 'completive' meaning rather than 'past tense', it is plausible to consider it in terms of aspect rather than tense. see example (9) repeated below as (37).

kuTTi karanjə-koNTə uRangi  
 child cry-koNTə sleep-Past  
 'Child slept crying'

Here the role of *koNT* is more of a perfective aspect, rather than progressive (if we consider it in terms of aspects). That means, the child was already in the manner of 'crying' before the action of sleeping. That may justify our assumption that *koNT* has an aspect reading rather than tense, specifically, perfective aspect. If this assumption is on the right track, then we can discard the option of *koNT* being derived by adding past tense suffix *-tu* to *koL*. Instead, we can argue that it is derived by adding a perfective aspect marker to *koL*. That is, we can dismantle the *koNT* verb into two other constituents; *koL* and *-iTT* (a perfective aspect marker). That means, *koNT* verbal form is derived by adding a perfective aspect marker *-iTT* to the root verb *koL*. If that is the case, then we can show the derivation of *koNT* as given below.

koL + iTT → koNT

If the *koNT* verb is actually *koL* and *-iTT*, then we may conclude that the converbal marker is not *koNT*, but *-iTT*. This is in anticipation of the fact that we have already identified some data projecting *-iTT* as the possible converbal markers in them ( cf. example (11)). This brings a serious change in the idea we developed so far for Malayalam. That the converbal forms in Malayalam, as we observed in examples (9 - 11) is not *koNT*, *iTT* and the conjunctive participle (schwa), instead it can be two instances of *-iTT* and the conjunctive participle (schwa).

So far we discussed only the instances of *koNT* converbal constructions in Malayalam. *koNT* constructions are, to summarise, instances of converbal marking attaching indirectly on the verbs. Instead of directly attaching onto the verb, the converbal suffix *-iTT* attaches onto a *koL* verb and and get grammaticalized as a whole into a converbal function. That means, after the converbal suffix attaching onto the *koL* verb, the whole compound of *koL* + *iTT* behaves as a converbal marker. At this point, we have several questions infront of us. The main two questions are what induces the need of a *koL* verb in *koNT* instances of converbs? Why can't

the converbal form *-iTT* directly affix on these verbs? We will try to answer these questions after we finish discussing some examples for the other two types of converbal constructions.

### Conjunctive participle and *-iTT* constructions of Malayalam

Apart from the *koNT* constructions, there are two other possible instances of converbal constructions in Malayalam. They are the constructions where *-iTT* directly affixes on the verbs in conjunctive participle form and constructions with bare conjunctive participle verb forms. See the examples given below (for the clarity of discussion, we are marking the *-iTT* and the conjunctive participle 'converb' in the examples below).

vaathil aTacc-iTT uNTə  
door close-Conv be-Past  
'The door is closed'

messi panthə vaang-i kaLicc-u  
Messi ball buy-Conv play-Past  
'Messi bought (a) ball (and) played'

In the above examples, the non-finite verb with a converbal marker has a completeness meaning. This completeness cannot be attributed to the presence of *-iTT*, since the construction without it also has the same reading on its verbs. See the example (41) below.

naaya cerippə kaTicc-ə muRicc-ə naSippicc-u  
dog chappals bite-Conv cut-Conv spoil-Past  
'Dog spoiled the chappals, biting (and) cutting'

What is common between (39) and (40) is that the pre-final verbs are in a conjunctive participle form. Therefore, we can assume that it is the conjunctive participle (which is called by different names including 'the gerund', 'past verb', 'past participle', 'adverbial participle' etc.) that gives the meaning of completeness to these constructions (cf. Bh. Krishnamurti 2003:330). In other words, pre-final verbs with conjunctive participle ( *-ə* or *-i*), irrespective of the presence of *-iTT*, have a completeness meaning.

Other than the absence of *-iTT*, a striking difference between the two constructions ( (39) and (41) ) is that (41) has a narrative sequential/temporal interpretation available on it. Whereas (39) do not.

We know that the availability of narrative, temporal, modificational, and conjunctive interpretations are properties of converbal constructions (cf. § 2). Therefore, the availability of narrative or temporal interpretation on these conjunctive participle verb constructions (as in (41)) lead us to the assumption that these are also converbal constructions of Malayalam. In that case, we may have to consider that the conjunctive participle markers (*-ə* and *-i*) are the converbal markers in these constructions<sup>9</sup>.

As another option, if we take the '*-ə*' on the pre-final verbs as the same epenthetic/default vowel, then we may consider the converbal markers are null in these instances. This purely is a

matter of naming, however. To avoid any confusion, we will consider the pre-final verb in conjunctive participle form having a null converbal marker, in this paper. Therefore, one of the converbal markers in Malayalam is a null element that comes along with pre-final verbs that are in conjunctive participle form.

What is more puzzling for us is the availability of a completeness in the meaning of the verbs with the conjunctive participle. As we can see from the two types of constructions above, with or without *-iTT*, the pre-final verbs have a completeness meaning on them. And the completeness meaning is crucial for the temporal (converbal) interpretations. This may raise questions like, what role does *-iTT* play in such constructions?

We concluded in section 3, *koNT* constructions are instances of *-iTT* coming affixed on verb root *koL* and hence the actual converbal marker here is *-iTT*. In section 3.3, we raised a question that what role does the perfective marker *-iTT* play in those constructions, if the constructions get the 'completeness meaning' with or without *-iTT*. And now, when we look at constructions like (42) and (43), we may wonder what is the difference *-iTT* brings here. In search of a clearer picture, let us look briefly at the structure of *-iTT* closely.

### *-iTT* constructions

*-iTT* can be considered derived by grammaticalization from a lexical verb *iT* 'put/drop' ( Past: *iTTu*). The transformation can be an instance of V to C grammaticalization, as the grammaticalized form is a subordination marker. The lexical verb root *iT* has a meaning 'put/drop'. Then we can assume that *-iTT* is a de-tensed form of the Past of *iT* 'put/drop', that is *iTTu*. It is interesting to note that Russian has a converb-derived adposition with a meaning 'after' derived from a lexical verb with a meaning 'let down' (cf. Haspelmath 1995:38).

In Malayalam linguistics, *-iTT* is taken as a verb participating in expressing perfective aspect (cf. The three-verb structure of perfective aspect in Jayaseelan (2004)) or as an adverbial participle element that constitute one of the two forms of perfective aspect marking (RE asher, TC Kumari (1997)). Before we conclude on the nature of *-iTT* let us look at the following pair of constructions.

messi panthə vaangi kaLiccu  
Messi ball buy-Conv play-Past  
'Messi bought (a) ball (and) played'

messi panthə vaangi(y)iTT kaLiccu  
Messi ball buy-Conv play-Past  
'Messi bought (a) ball (and) played'  
(= Messi bought (a) ball (and then) played)

What we can see from the above pair of sentences is that, unlike the conjunctive participle which also has the completeness meaning, the *-iTT* gives an 'after' reading to the clause it is attached to (see example (43)). The 'after' reading present here is normally interpreted as 'when', 'while', 'then' etc., which are the markers of adverbial subordination. That means, the affix *-iTT* in Malayalam is subordinating and are perfective in aspect. Subordination marker coming in perfective aspect is a prominent converbal feature. Therefore, *-iTT* can be considered converbal affixes in Malayalam.

9 Some dialects use *-u* instead of *-ə* as a marker of conjunctive participle. In instances like the ones above, the conjunctive participles and past tense markers are homophonous (atleast in some dialects/registers). We are not attempting a descriptive account distinguishing the conjunctive participles from past tense markers here, as the traditional grammar has clearly distinguished between them.

10 It is important to note that the verb final schwa (*-ə*) should not be confused with the epenthetic/default vowel that comes word finally irrespective of the category.

From this discussion, we can conclude that, both *-iTT* and the conjunctive participles are the converbal affixes of Malayalam. The difference between the two being that conjunctive participle converbs are narrative/temporal in interpretation while the *-iTT* converbs are perfective in meaning.

We can extend the assumption that the pre-final verbs, in fact, bear a 'completive' meaning, with or without the converbal affix, to the *koNT* instances of converbal marking. Let us look at those constructions once again.

#### ***koNT as converb: revisited***

In our discussion on *koNT* converbal constructions in section 3.1.4, we reached at a conclusion that the affix is of the structure where the perfective aspect marker *-iTT* attaches to a verb root *koL* 'bear' and together they function as the converbal marker. At that point we were left with some questions such as, what is the role of *koL* 'bear' verb in these constructions? Why can't the converbal form *-iTT* directly affix on these verbs? We will try to answer these questions in this section. But before we take up these questions, let us change an assumption we had developed in that section. Consider the example (9) repeated below as (44).

kuTTi karanjə-koNTə uRangi  
child cry-koNTə sleep-Past  
'Child slept crying'

We had assumed that *koNT* constructions are of a 'completive' meaning rather than 'past tense'. And based on that we had considered the converbal marker is of perfective aspect. But, in our discussion on the other forms of converbal markers, we identified that the verb forms onto which the converbal markers attach are already in a 'completive' meaning, with or without the converbal marker. That means, we don't have to attribute *koNT* as the provider of the 'completive' meaning, and that the pre-final verbs, by default, bear the 'completive' meaning. This liberates *koNT* from the aspectual function, and allows it to stand solely for the adverbial function of subordination.

We have already identified that *koNT* converbal markers are a compound of *-iTT* and a verb root *koL* 'bear'. We also identified *-iTT* itself is standing for a subordination function in its converbal role. From that, we can conclude that both *koNT* and *-iTT* are two different appearances of the same converbal affix, *-iTT*. In certain instances the converbal affix is bare *-iTT* and in some other instances it comes compound with a *koL* verb and morphologically appear as *koNT*, functioning as a converb.

In that scenario, it is reasonable to ask what is the need of an additional *koL* 'bear' verb on it. To explain this, I would like to bring in the topic of Serial Verb Constructions (SVC).

#### ***Serial verbs and converbs***

The functional areas covered by verb serialization and by converb constructions are roughly the same. Verb serialization is a means by which converbal constructions express their function (cf. Bisang 1995:156). I will not elaborate on these points here. What is relevant for our discussion is that the nature of the serial verb constructions (SVC) has a role in the selection between the two forms of the converbal affix, *koNT* and *iTT*.

SVCs are of two types, single-event and multi-event. In the single-event SVCs, the pre-final verbs, which are in conjunctive participle form, will modify (manner, cause etc.) the final verb. On the other hand, in the multi-event SVCs, the verbs constitute a temporal sequential coordinative connection. The converbal marker *-iTT* joins to these two types of constructions in two different forms. In multi-event SVCs the converb *iTT* directly joins the verb in the conjunctive participle form. Whereas in single-event SVCs, the *-iTT* do not directly affix onto the verb, instead it compounds with a *koL* 'bear' verb and then together they function as a converb. This distinction can be made clear with the help of an example that can be interpreted in both the ways; i.e., as single-event SVC and as multi-event SVC. See the example given below.

#### **SVC**

messi pantə taTTi ooTi  
Messi ball kick run-Past  
'Messi kicked the ball (and) ran.'

#### **Single-event SVC**

messi pantə taTTikkoNTə ooTi  
Messi ball kick-Conv run-Past  
'Messi ran kicking the ball'

#### **Multi-event SVC**

messi pantə taTTi(y)iTTə ooTi  
Messi ball kick-Conv run-Past  
'Messi ran after kicking the ball'

In the above examples of SVCs, (46) and (47) are two different event interpretations of the serial verb construction given in (45). In (46) the construction has the converbal affix *koNT*, and it has a single-event interpretation with the pre-final verb modifying the final verb. Whereas in (47), the construction carries the converbal affix *-iTT* and it has a multi-event interpretation.

The particular interpretation that (45) takes in each of the two cases ((46) and (47)) is strongly related to the form of converbal marking coming on it. It is difficult to say, at this point, which influences the other. That is, whether it is the converbal marker that gives the construction the particular event-specificity or is it the event-specificity that decides on the selection of the converb form. Whichever be it, the association between the two, the event-specificity and the form of converb is clear here. If the construction has single-event interpretation, then the converb form is *koNT*. Similarly, if the construction has multi-event interpretation, then the converbal form is *-iTT*.

With that, we have reached at the end of our preliminary observation of the converbal paradigm of Malayalam.

#### **Summary**

Converb is usually marked as an affix or postposition in Malayalam. There are, at least, two clear instances of converbal forms in the language. One is a null element which surfaces under what is called conjunctive participles ( *-ə* or *-i* ), in the traditional grammar and the other one is *-iTT*. The conjunctive participle element "expresses a coordinative connection between multiple completive actions in succession that advance the narration". The converbal affix *-iTT* appear in two different forms; *-iTT* and *koNT*. Of the two forms, *koNT* is a complex of *-iTT* with a verb root *koL* 'bear'. The bare *-iTT* appears on constructions with a temporal meaning of simultaneity, anteriority (perfective aspect) etc. Whereas,

koNT joins on constructions with a non-temporal meaning of manner, cause etc. The selection between the two forms of -iTT depends upon the type of verb serialization the converbs are expressed in. If the SVC has a multi-event reading, then the converbal marker -iTT affixes onto the verb directly. On the other hand, if the SVC has a single event reading, then the converbal affix -iTT attaches with a koL verb, forming complex koNT and that functions as a converbal marker in that context. Therefore, we can conclude that -iTT can be a perfective (anterior) and/or non-temporal converbal affix, and the null elements ( in the form of conjunctive participles -ə and -i) are narrative converbal affixes of Malayalam (cf. Vladimir P. Nedjalkov (1995:106) for a discussion on the terminology).

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