

# Aspectogenesis in South Dravidian: On the Origin of the 'Compound Continuative' *KONTIRU*

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## 1.0 Introduction

The languages of the Indian sub-continent are well-known for their use of compound verb constructions, or verb + verb sequences in which one of the members has attained a grammaticalized or semi-grammaticalized status. A number of linguists and grammarians have hypothesized that the diffusion of the strategy in Indo-Aryan is due to early contact with the Dravidian languages of the south. Commenting on the origin of such constructions in Bengali, Chatterji (1926; quoted in Vale 1948:281), observes that "[i]n the Dravidian languages, compound verbs of exactly similar formation and function occur. It is very likely that here we have another contribution of Dravidian in the formation of modern Indo-Aryan speeches". More recently, Hook (1991:62) hypothesizes that the compound verb "may have come into Indo-Aryan as a calque on parallel (and more ancient) structures in Dravidian or in Altaic".<sup>1</sup>

The opposite view has been claimed as well. On the basis of an extensive comparative study, Vale (1948:317) concludes that "there is hardly any contribution of Dravidian towards Indo-Aryan in this respect. Probably Dravidian [verbal] composition is of a later date." While considering the phenomena in the two language families to be essentially the result of independent parallel evolution, Vale suggests (p.277) that in some instances the reverse influence — that of Indo-Aryan on Dravidian — might have taken place.

Despite conflicting speculations of this sort, surprisingly little attention has been directed towards the history of the phenomenon within Dravidian itself. This lack is all the more curious when contrasted with the plethora of recent studies (Schiffman 1969, Agesthalingom & Srinivasa Varma 1980, Fedson 1981, Steever 1983, Nayar 1983, Annamalai 1985, to cite only a few) devoted to the synchronic description of auxiliary verbs in individual Dravidian languages. What is the source of these auxiliaries, and how did they develop?

The present paper explores the genesis of aspectual auxiliaries in the South — and to a lesser extent, the Central — branches of Dravidian, which include the oldest and best-attested members of the language family. Of the various auxiliary types in Dravidian, the one most frequently discussed in the literature is the aspectual auxiliary. Morphologically, aspectual auxiliaries differ from auxiliaries expressing nega-

tion and modality in that the main verbs with which the former are associated typically appear as conjunctive verbal participles, rather than as bare stems or infinitives. Semantically, aspectual auxiliaries encode the stages and aspects of verbal situations independent of their location in time.

Three aspectual auxiliaries are widespread in South Dravidian: *VITU* (perfective), *IRU* (perfect), and *KONTIRU* (continuative).<sup>2</sup> In this paper, I devote particular attention to the continuative construction *KONTIRU*. Two competing explanations of the origins of this construction are considered. According to the first of these, *KONTIRU* existed as far back as Proto-(South) Dravidian, and was inherited with only minor modifications by the daughter languages. According to the second, it was innovated in one of the daughter languages, and spread throughout South India later as a consequence of inter-language borrowing. A third logical possibility — that the construction was innovated independently and developed in parallel in each of the daughter languages — is dismissed as unlikely on the basis of the number of coincidences that such an explanation would have to account for. Based on the construction's diachronic and geographic distribution, I argue against the first and in favor of the second hypothesis. Further evidence for the spread of the construction via borrowing is adduced from the existence of a similar construction in Sinhala, a non-Dravidian language with centuries of close Dravidian contact. I conclude by considering the implications of these observations for the question of Dravidian influence in the development of Indo-Aryan compound verbal forms.

## 2.0 The compound continuative

While numerous verbs function as aspectual auxiliaries in South Dravidian (cf. Schiffman 1969), three are especially productive, both in terms of the functions they assume within individual languages, and their distribution across languages within the family. These are the verb *IRU* 'to be', which forms the perfect aspect, the verb *VITU* 'to leave/let', which grammaticalizes as perfective or completive aspect,<sup>3</sup> and a verb *KOL* meaning literally 'to take/hold', which together with a verb of being or a verb of motion, expresses continuative aspect.<sup>4</sup> The continuative construction has a distinctive structure which makes it especially amenable to comparative analysis: it is a transparently 'compound' auxiliary which is itself made up of two auxiliary verbs. Thus in the languages under discussion here, an English sentence of the type 'John is writing' might be rendered literally as 'John write-take-is', 'John write-take-comes', or 'John write-take-goes'. This fact sets the continuative off as unique among the aspectual auxiliaries found in Dravidian, the others of which typically involve only one auxiliary element.

## 2.1 The distribution of the compound continuative

At first glance, the geographic distribution of the compound continuative would appear to correspond to a genetic grouping: South Dravidian, or South-Central Dravidian, depending on the classification scheme adopted. A compound continuative is found in Tamil, Malayalam, Irula, Kodagu, Pania, Kāṭṭunāicka, Tulu, some dialects of Telegu, and marginally in Kannada. Of these, Tamil, Malayalam, Kannada, and Telegu are national languages with a written literary tradition, while the others are tribal languages spoken principally in the hilly regions of southern India. The tree diagram in Fig. 1 shows the genetic relationships among these languages.<sup>5</sup>

Fig. 1 Genetic classification of Dravidian languages with compound continuative

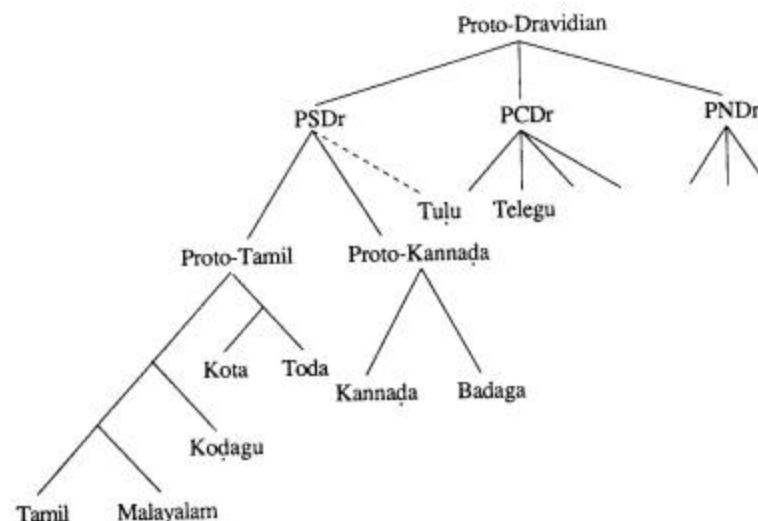


Fig. 1 shows that all of the languages classified as belonging to the South Dravidian (SDr) sub-group attest the compound continuative construction, except for Toda and Kota.<sup>6</sup> In the Central sub-group, however, only Telegu and Tulu have it, and Tulu has been grouped by at least one scholar (P.S. Subrahmanyam 1971) with South Dravidian, so that its position within the Central sub-group is controversial. (This is indicated by a dotted line which connects Tulu with the SDr node in the diagram.) Conversely, the compound continuative is entirely lacking in the remainder

of Central Dravidian (CDr) and in Northern Dravidian (NDR), as indeed it is in the Indo-Aryan languages of the north. Examples of the construction are given in (1) - (8) below:<sup>7</sup>

- (1) (Ta) *Malai peytu-kont- iru-kkiratu.*  
rain rain- KOL-be- Pr3ns  
'It is raining'.
- (2) (Ma) *Malai peytu-kont- iri-kkunu.*  
rain rain- KOL-be-Pr  
'It is raining'.
- (3) (Ir) *Naamu paadi-kont- iru-kkeemu.*  
we sing- KOL-be- Pr1pl  
'We are singing'. (Periwar 1980)
- (4) (Kod) *Naani oodiy- end- i- ppi.*  
I read- KOL-be-F  
'I will be reading'. (Balakrishnan 1980)
- (5) (Pa) *Aben band- and- i- kkinrom.*  
he come-KOL-be-Pr3ms  
'He is coming'. (Lawrence 1980)
- (6) (KN) *Bered- on- i- ddeene.*  
work- KOL-be-Pr1sg  
'(I) am working'. (Natanasabapathy 1980)
- (7) (Tu) *Ayklu santoos- ontu keen- oont- i- tta.*  
they happiness-KOL<sup>8</sup> hear- KOL-be-P3  
'They were hearing (it) with happiness'. (Shankara Bhat 1967)
- (8) (Te) (Coimbatore dialect)  
*Neenu vaasu- kooni-unn-aanu.*  
I write- KOL- be- P1sg  
'I was writing'. (Karunakaran 1980)

### 3.0 Structure and meaning of the compound continuative

In each of the eight languages illustrated above, the continuative verbal complex has the structure V(main) + V(aux1) + V(aux2), where V(aux1) is a conjunctive participial (CP) form of the auxiliary *KOL* 'to take/hold', and V(aux2) is a finite form of

a verb 'to be'. The 'be' verbs in examples (1) - (7) are cognate forms (cf. Old Tamil *iru* 'to sit'), and the auxiliary *unn* in the Telugu example (8) also appears as an existential copula in Tamil (i.e. *untu<u>*) and elsewhere. In some languages, V(aux2) may also be a verb of motion.

The language which exhibits the widest range of possibilities with respect to the second auxiliary is Tamil. This is illustrated in sentences (9) - (12) below, all of which can be translated into English as 'Mother-in-laws are always finding fault':

- (9) (Ta) *Maamiyarkal eppootum kurram kurai collik- kontu- iru-ppaarkal.*  
m.in.law-pl always fault defect say-CP-take-CP-be- F3pl
- (10) (Ta) *Maamiyarkal eppootum kurram kurai collik- kontu- varu- vaarkal.*  
say-CP-take-CP-come-F3pl
- (11) (Ta) *Maamiyarkal eppootum kurram kurai collik- kontu- poo-vaarkal.*  
say-CP-take-CP-go- F3pl
- (12) (Ta) *Maamiyarkal eppootum kurram kurai collik- kontu- kitai-ppaarkal.*  
say-CP-take-CP-lie- F3pl  
'Mother-in-laws are always finding fault'.

In Tamil, the choice of V(aux2) conveys subtle nuances of meaning: 'be' is relatively neutral, while 'come' implies longer duration, and both 'go' and 'lie' add a slightly pejorative nuance of activity allowed to continue unchecked (Fedson 1981). Kannada also forms a continuative with 'take-come', as illustrated in example (13):

- (13) (Ka) *Idu yaavaagalu maadi-kondu- bandidda paddati.*  
this always do-CP-take-CP-come-PAJP practice  
'This is a practice (we) have been following for years'.<sup>9</sup>

Without exception, V(aux1) in these examples can be traced back to a common etymon, the verb *KOL*, which we may gloss loosely as 'to take and hold' or 'to take to oneself'. In the compound continuative construction, it has the form *kont-* in Tamil, Malayalam, and Iruḷa, *kond-* in Kannada, *end-* in Koḍagu, *and-* in Panja, *on-* in Kāṭṭunāicka, *ont-* in Tulu, and *koon-* in Telugu. The sense contributed by *KOL* in this construction appears to be that of temporal simultaneity. A simultaneous meaning is also evident when the conjunctive participle of *KOL* appears by itself in subordinate clause-final position, as in the Tamil example below:

- (14) (Ta) *Ammaa paati- kontu kuli- kkiraal.*  
mother sing-CP- KOL-CP bathe-Pr3fs  
'Mother bathes, singing (all the while)'.

The simultaneity of *KOL*, in combination with the stative nuance of the 'be' verb or the durative nuance of verbs such as 'come',<sup>10</sup> presumably imbues the compound construction with the meaning of 'process' or 'continuation'.

A curious fact about *KOL* is that it has grammaticalized in another auxiliary function in many of the Dravidian languages, which is as a reflexive (or 'self-benefactive') marker.<sup>11</sup> This function is illustrated in example (15):

- (15a) (Ta) *Ammaa pustakattai vaank-inaal.*  
 mother book-ACC buy- P3fs  
 'Mother bought the book'.
- (15b) (Ta) *Ammaa pustakattai vaanki- kon- taal.*  
 mother book-ACC buy-CP-KOL-P3fs  
 'Mother bought herself the book'.

Likewise, the *KOL* element in the continuative construction in Iruḷa, Koḍagu, Kāṭṭu-nāicka, Tuḷu, Telegu, and Kannaḍa is transparently related in form to the reflexive auxiliary in the language in each case.<sup>12</sup>

Synchronically, the 'simultaneous' and the 'reflexive' meanings of *KOL* appear to be unrelated. The fact that nearly all of the languages which have a reflex of *KOL* in the compound continuative construction also have *KOL* as a reflexive marker constitutes a further "coincidence" which a diachronic account should aim to explain. This coincidence is all the more striking in that reflexive markers deriving from verbal — as opposed to nominal — elements are rare in the languages of the world (Peder-son 1989). Thus it is unlikely that the strategy developed independently in the various languages as a consequence of universally-available principles of grammaticalization.

#### 4.0 The common inheritance hypothesis

Given the above-mentioned facts, the explanation which presents itself most readily is inheritance from a common source. The languages involved are closely genetically related, as indicated in Figure 1. Each of the formative elements in the construction can be traced back via regular phonological processes to Proto-Dravidian main verbs, namely \**kol* 'to take; hold', \**ir* 'to sit; be', \**ul* 'to exist', \**vaa* 'to come', etc.; that is, they are cognate forms. Moreover, the combination of the two verbs has a particular grammatical meaning — continuative aspect — which is preserved, with minor variations, in all of the languages which attest it. There is thus some basis for positing that the construction had already grammaticalized with this meaning at the proto-stage.

The reconstruction of aspectual auxiliaries for Proto-Dravidian is not without precedent. Steever argues that present perfect constructions (whose meaning "is general between a present progressive and a present perfect" (1984:633)) found in

modern Central Dravidian and in Old Tamil have as their source a Proto-Dravidian 'serial verb' construction in which both main verb and auxiliary are finite — i.e. marked for subject agreement — and in which the auxiliary is a reflex of the etymon \**man* 'to be'. While the evidence from Old Tamil (and from South Dravidian in general) is limited,<sup>13</sup> Steever's Central Dravidian data are suggestive that a compound perfect construction must be reconstructed for an earlier stage of the language family.

Nevertheless, no scholar has yet attempted to reconstruct a compound continuative for Proto-Dravidian, or even, for that matter, for the southern sub-group. Subrahmanyam (1971) explicitly discourages such an account. After noting that the conjunctive participle of *KOL* functions as a 'present adverb' (a formative element in the continuative construction) in some languages, he remarks that present adverbs "originated in Dravidian only in the later stages" and "cannot be uniformly reconstructed" for the proto-language (1971:324).

Nor does the available textual evidence appear to support the notion that aspectual auxiliaries existed during any stage of the proto-language. In the following section I examine evidence from Tamil, considered to be the purest (i.e. the least influenced by Indo-Aryan) of the Dravidian languages. Tamil preserves the largest and oldest body of written records, dating back two thousand years. If the compound continuative were inherited from Proto-(South) Dravidian, we would expect it to be found in the oldest Tamil texts. In fact, such is not the case.

#### 5.0 The history of aspectual auxiliaries in Tamil

An examination of Tamil written records reveals that the continuative auxiliary *konṭiru*, although common in modern writing and speech, is missing altogether from the oldest texts. Tolkāppiam, the first Tamil grammar (ca. 150 B.C.-200 A.D.), does not mention verbal auxiliaries. Further, although Thinnappan (1980) notes that the language used in Tolkāppiam itself contains some auxiliaries, none of these is clearly aspectual. *kol* occurs as an auxiliary in the reflexive sense, but not in the simultaneous sense, and there is no evidence whatsoever of a compound auxiliary *kol* + *iru* (*konṭiru*). A similar situation is attested in the poems of the Sangam or classical period, a hundred or so years later. Despite a tendency on the part of modern scholars to interpret the final elements of verb sequences as aspectual auxiliaries in their modern sense, there is in fact little evidence that any of the so-called classical 'auxiliaries' had any systematic aspectual value. This situation continues well into the Middle Tamil period. Certain verbs (most notably *taa* 'to give', *itu* 'to place', *vaa* 'to come', and *ii* 'to give') occur as non-main verbs in serial constructions, but without contributing any discernible systematic nuance of meaning. Conversely, the verbs which flourish as aspectual auxiliaries in Modern Tamil, e.g. *kol*, *iru*, and *viṭu*, (perfective aspect) occur only rarely in compound constructions at this stage, and invariably favor a literal, lexical interpretation over an aspectual one.

By the Middle Tamil period, starting around the 9th or 10th century, aspectual

uses of auxiliary verbs begin to emerge, particularly in prose genres. Prose writing during this period consisted primarily of scholarly commentaries on verse works, and inscriptions. The language of the commentaries makes fairly rich use of auxiliaries, including some which are no longer in common use today (e.g. a compound present tense in *nil* 'to stand'). As for the inscriptions, Karthikeyani (1980) notes the use of reflexive *kol*, perfect *iru*, and 'habitual continuative' *vaa* ('to come') in inscriptions dating from the 10th and 11th centuries. The perfective and the compound continuative are still extremely rare, however, if indeed they can be said to be in evidence at all, at this stage.

The earliest unambiguous attested uses of continuative *konṭiru* appear scattered sparsely throughout texts dating from the 12th through the 16th century. However, it is not until the advent of prose fiction writing, beginning around the 16th or 17th century, that aspectual auxiliaries are used with anything approaching their modern frequency. This corresponds, perhaps not coincidentally, to a surge of Christian missionary activity in South India, and resultant exposure to European literary models. Aspectual auxiliaries appear with increasing frequency in written prose dating from this period, a trend which continues through the present century.

To summarize, the textual evidence suggests that Old Tamil did not have a compound continuative auxiliary. The earliest unambiguous uses of *konṭiru* do not appear until around the 12th century, and the construction does not become truly widespread until more than five hundred years after that.

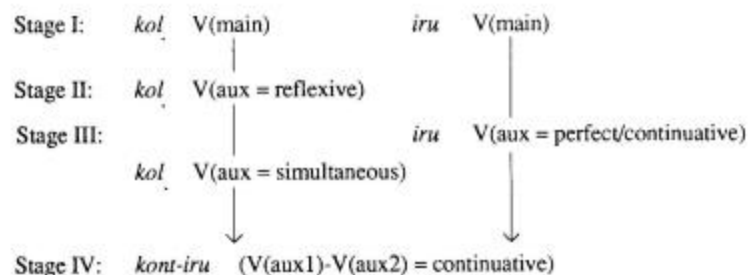
### 5.1 Language-external factors in the later development of *konṭiru*

It is likely that external factors played a role in the sudden sharp increase in the use of aspectual auxiliaries around the beginning of the Modern Tamil period. Tamil prose fiction is known to have been influenced by the European novel; a number of early Tamil works explicitly imitated the Western style. In contrast with Tamil, languages such as English, Latin, and Portuguese possessed well-developed systems of verbal auxiliaries, by means of which subtle nuances of verbal action could be expressed. Contact with and a desire to emulate the European models might have stimulated the use of auxiliaries which the language already had available, but which did not yet occupy a productive position within the grammatical system. It is well known, for example, that the frequency of the "passive" auxiliary *paṭu* in Tamil is highest in Christian treatises (including translations of the Bible) and in modern academic writing, both genres "inherited" from the Europeans. Contact with European languages was not responsible for the innovation of verbal auxiliaries in Tamil, but it might have provided the necessary impetus for their later proliferation in the written language.

### 5.2 Language-internal factors in the genesis of *konṭiru*

How then did aspectual auxiliaries arise in Tamil in the first place? Certain logical developments had to have taken place before a compound construction such as *konṭiru* could come into being. First, and most obviously, we would not expect a language to innovate compound auxiliaries until simple auxiliaries were already well-established. In Tamil, the creation of a form *konṭiru* presupposes the existence of an auxiliary *kol* and an auxiliary *iru*, and indeed the textual evidence bears this out, since both simple auxiliaries appear earlier than *konṭiru*. We would also expect that the auxiliary *kol* (which is found in Tolkāppiam functioning as a verbal reflexive) would extend its meaning to that of simultaneity before combining with *iru* or any other V(aux2) to produce a continuative. These hypothesized developments are summarized in Fig. 2.

Fig. 2 Stages in the grammaticalization of Tamil *konṭiru*



Stage I represents the historically oldest pre-auxiliary stage; stage II, the auxiliary (pre-aspectual) stage; stage III, the simple aspectual stage; and stage IV, the compound aspectual stage. The vertical arrows in the diagram should not be taken to imply that later developments replaced earlier ones (since with the exception of *kol* V(main),<sup>14</sup> all of the uses listed continue to be productive in Modern Tamil), but rather that the formative elements of *konṭiru* underwent intermediate stages of grammaticalization before combining to grammaticalize as a compound auxiliary.

Note that at stage III in Fig. 2, the auxiliary *iru* may receive either a continuous or a perfect interpretation, depending on context and on the lexical meaning of the main verb to which it is appended. Thus

Naan utkaarnt-iru-kkireen  
I sit- CP- be -PrIsg



can mean either 'I have sat' or 'I am sitting'.<sup>15</sup> A possible functional motivation for the genesis of the explicitly continuative form *kontiru* in Tamil is that it arose as a means of avoiding ambiguity of this sort.

A second functional motivation can be evoked as well. Proto-Dravidian possessed only two morphological tense formations: a past, and a non-past. Zvelebil (1967) characterizes Old Tamil as a functionally aspect-based system, with the two morphological "tenses" encoding perfective and imperfective aspect, respectively. Since the Old Tamil period, however, Tamil (along with most of the other Dravidian languages) has innovated a special form to express present time, or 'situation co-temporaneous with the moment of speaking'. An explicit present tense marker is first attested in Tamil at the end of the Sangam period, although the form itself (*kinr-*) is not firmly established until the Middle Tamil period. There was thus a period of several centuries during which the language was shifting over from a 2-way to a 3-way system, or in other words, from an aspect-based to a tense-based system. With the establishment of the 3 simple tenses, however, the aspectual distinction which had previously been available — namely, completed vs. continuing — was lost. It is probable that this loss contributed to the creation of auxiliary constructions which were explicitly aspectual in meaning; that is, constructions such as the Modern Tamil perfective and continuative.<sup>16</sup>

These observations have significant implications for the question of the origin and subsequent spread of the compound continuative throughout South India. Given the importance of Tamil in the Dravidian scheme, the evidence that the construction was not available in Old Tamil, but rather was innovated much later, poses a serious problem for the reconstruction hypothesis. Clearly some lag time is to be expected between the popularization of a form in speech and its acceptance as standard grammar in writing. However, when we add to our findings the fact that Tamil is believed to have split off from its sister languages (with the exception of Malayalam) some four to six centuries before the period of the earliest written records (Zvelebil 1962), we are left with a gap of more than sixteen hundred years (a period of time longer than the entire history of the English language) before a construction which Tamil supposedly inherited first appeared in any written text.

### 5.3 On the reliability of the textual evidence

It is at least theoretically possible that colloquial Tamil had aspectual auxiliaries even from earliest times, but that due to poetic conventions, etc. governing the production of written texts, these did not show up in any written records until many centuries later. This theory implies that the vast corpus of written records in Tamil may be inherently unreliable, at least as an indicator of what the spoken language was like at an earlier period. Modern Tamil is highly diglossic, and it might be argued that the rift between colloquial and literary varieties of the language extends back to the time of the earliest written texts. In fact, however, it is unlikely that early diglossia was

extreme enough to account for the sort of gap postulated here. Britto (1986:108) observes that "[i]n the earliest stages of Tamil history, there does not seem to have been any diglossia comparable to what one finds in the Tamil Nadu of today". Rather, the beginnings of a significant rift between colloquial and literary language occurred much later, as a consequence of Christian missionary activity starting in the 16th century.

There are other reasons as well for not rejecting the early textual evidence as entirely unrepresentative of the spoken language of the time. First, it is consistent with reconstruction in other areas of Dravidian grammar, especially phonology and morphophonemics. Moreover, the evolution from simple uninflected verbal forms as attested in the early texts, to complex auxiliary constructions in the modern language, is consistent with a general drift in Tamil towards increasing agglutinative complexity, especially in the verbal paradigm. Thus the absence of aspectual auxiliaries, in particular the compound continuative, from Old Tamil texts can reasonably be taken as evidence that the construction was not yet available for use. An additional piece of evidence is the fact that relatively little phonological reduction has taken place in the compound continuative constructions in the nine languages considered here (see examples (1)-(8) and (13)); that is, all are still transparently made up of a *KOL* auxiliary followed by an *IRU* auxiliary or a verb of motion. Taken together, these facts suggest a more recent, rather than an ancient, development of aspectual auxiliaries in Tamil.

### 6.0 The contact hypothesis

The lack of evidence for aspectual auxiliaries in Old Tamil seriously weakens the plausibility of the common inheritance hypothesis. As an alternative to this account, I propose that the continuative auxiliary was innovated by one of the daughter languages well after the languages of the South-Central group are hypothesized to have embarked on their separate paths of development. For a number of reasons, it is likely that the innovating language was Tamil. In §5.2, I described internal developments in Tamil motivating the rise of aspectual auxiliaries, and the genesis of *kontiru* in particular. Around this time — that is to say, the Middle Tamil period — Tamil culture was enjoying a wide sphere of influence both within India and abroad. The reign of the Chola dynasty, extending from roughly the 9th to the 12th centuries A.D., was a period of extensive trade and expansion. There is evidence of the linguistic influence of Tamil on languages as distant as Burmese, Khmer, and Thai, all of which borrowed and adapted the Tamil writing system. This was also a period of intensive Tamil involvement in Sri Lanka. According to this view, the continuative auxiliary — and quite possibly the system of aspectual auxiliaries in general, although this would need to be demonstrated independently — was borrowed into languages which had regular contact with Tamil. The precise social conditions under which such contact took place remain obscure. From a linguistic point of view, how-

ever, the process was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that the languages in question were already closely related, and moreover had available cognate forms of the same formative elements (i.e. *KOL* and *IRU*). It would thus have been a simple matter to borrow the idea of stringing them together with a new meaning, as a calque construction in which the components happened to be etymologically-related as well.<sup>17</sup> The borrowing might have been motivated in part by a functional need, as other languages in the family developed present tense markers and underwent the shift from aspect-based to tense-based systems.

There are a number of reasons for preferring the borrowing/contact hypothesis (or some version of it) to the genetic hypothesis. First, it is not contradicted by any known historical facts. Indeed, what we know of the Chola period in Indian history lends support to the notion of extensive contact between the Tamils and the speakers

Fig. 3 Geographic distribution of compound continuative  
(V+ 'take' + 'be' / 'come' / 'go') in South Asia



of neighboring languages at that time. In contrast, the available linguistic evidence runs counter to the hypothesis that the construction in question is of any great antiquity. Second, the contact hypothesis is consonant with the actual distribution of the phenomenon, in that all of the languages which attest it are geographically contiguous. Genetically-speaking, however, they are not all members of the same subgroup, nor do enough Central Dravidian languages manifest it to motivate its reconstruction for Proto-South-Central Dravidian as a whole. The apparent lack of such constructions in Kota and Toda is also readily accounted for, given that the speakers of these two languages, because of their remote location in the Nilgiri mountains, managed to remain culturally and linguistically isolated from the outside world until the late 19th century. It is also noteworthy that the dialect of Telugu for which the compound continuative is attested in my data is a dialect spoken in Coimbatore district, that is, within Tamil Nadu.<sup>18</sup> The approximate geographical distribution of the *KONTIRU* construction is shown on the map in Fig. 3. (Note: names of Dravidian languages are in capital letters, Indo-Aryan languages in capitals enclosed by parentheses, and city names in lower-case type.)

### 6.1 The Sinhala compound continuative

If the spread of the compound continuative construction is indeed due to contact rather than genetic inheritance, we would expect to find it in neighboring non-Dravidian languages as well. Compelling evidence in support of the contact hypothesis comes from the fact that a similar construction exists in Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Sri Lanka, but which has been in continuous contact with Tamil (and to a lesser extent, Malayalam) for many centuries. In Colloquial Sinhala, the verb *ganna* 'to take' has grammaticalized as both a reflexive auxiliary, as in example (16b), and as the first component in a compound continuative aspectual construction, as in (17) and (18) (examples from Paolillo 1989):

- (16a) (Si) *Gunapaala kaeamak haeduwa.*  
Gunapala meal-indef make-P  
'Gunapala made a meal'.

- (16b) (Si) *Gunapaala kaeamak hadaa- gatta.*  
Gunapala meal-indef make-CP-take-P  
'Gunapala made himself a meal'.

(cf. Tamil ex. 15)

- (17) (Si) *Meyaage bandina wayasa daṇ pahu wee- gana enawa.*  
his/her marry-AjP age now past become-CP-take-CP-come-Pr  
(18) (Si) *Meyaage bandina wayasa daṇ pahu wee- gana yanawa.*  
become-CP-take-CP-go-Pr

'Her marrying age is now passing by'. (cf. Tamil exx. 10 and 11)

The function of Sinhala *gannawa* in these examples closely parallels that of Tamil *kol*.<sup>19</sup> The two grammatical constructions — and the semantic link between them — are unusual enough from a typological point of view that we may safely conclude that they are unlikely to have arisen in Sinhala as the result of simple coincidence. Since Sinhala is not a Dravidian language, the most feasible explanation is borrowing, presumably from Tamil, which attests both the V-take-come and the V-take-go variants of the construction. Although the formative elements of the Sinhala compound continuative are not etymologically cognate with the Dravidian ones, it is perhaps relevant that the verb *gannawa*, like Tamil *konṭu<kol*, has both an initial velar stop and a syllable-final nasal segment. These phonological similarities, along with the meaning correspondences,<sup>20</sup> may have led Sinhala speakers to calque the Tamil construction in much the same way as speakers of Dravidian languages.

## 7.0 Compound verbs in Indo-Aryan and Dravidian

In concluding, I return to the claims mentioned at the outset regarding the influence of Dravidian on Indo-Aryan compound verb formations.

Vale (1948) argues that the proliferation of compound verb constructions in Modern Indo-Aryan — among which aspectual compounds figure predominantly — is a development which has its roots in a continuous tradition of verb + verb constructions dating back to the Vedas of the Early Indo-Aryan period. The semantically 'main' verb of the early compounds was an absolutive form marked for number and gender agreement with the grammatical subject, as in the sentence *mrtakam avalambitam aaste* 'the corpse remains suspended' (lit. 'the corpse one-that-was-suspended sits'). The construction was thus similar in a number of respects to the 'serial verb' construction attributed to Proto-Dravidian by Steever (1984). Only later, in Pali texts, do constructions appear in Vale's data in which the main verb is in the conjunctive participle form; this is the morphological pattern most typical of compounds in the modern Indo-Aryan languages (cf. Sinhala examples (16)–(18) above),<sup>21</sup> and in Dravidian as well. Can the existence of either or both of these strategies in Indo-Aryan reasonably be attributed to Dravidian influence?

If one accepts the claims of Steever (1984) that 'serial verb' compounds were a feature of Proto-Dravidian, then it seems unlikely that these could have been borrowed from Indo-Aryan, although borrowing in the reverse direction is not ruled out. Given, however, that the languages which preserve traces of the 'serial' present perfect are Central and Northern Dravidian languages spoken in close geographical proximity to Indo-Aryan speaking areas, while the evidence for the reconstructed tense is questionable in the more isolated South Dravidian languages,<sup>22</sup> an alternative interpretation suggests itself, according to which the construction was borrowed into Dravidian on the Vedic model. Such a view would of course require further comparative investigation.

Conversely, the use of the conjunctive participle in compound formations is

attested in the earliest Dravidian texts, and may well have been a Dravidian innovation which made its way into Indo-Aryan via Pali. As such, it may have influenced the formation of the modern Indo-Aryan compounds, although it is unlikely to have been entirely responsible for their existence.

Generally speaking, it is possible to trace a common path of development travelled by the two language families, from infrequent use of verbal auxiliaries — possibly involving 'serial verb' compounds, for which there is greater evidence in older South Dravidian than in the modern languages — to a veritable blossoming of their development in more recent times, with the conjunctive participle pattern now dominating the South Asian linguistic area as a whole. At no stage, it would seem, can the possibility of areal influence be ruled out.

With regard to the history of the phenomenon within Dravidian itself, the antiquity of auxiliary verbs remains uncertain. The evidence presented here suggests that the continuative aspect construction — and most likely, the entire system of aspectual auxiliaries in modern South Dravidian — was not a feature of Old Dravidian, but rather was a later innovation which spread among the languages of the south via borrowing. Such a claim is not necessarily inconsistent with the hypothesis that other aspectual compounds (e.g. perfect) existed in the proto-language. What such a position would suggest, however, is that aspectual auxiliaries, in South Dravidian at least, were innovated twice — once prior to the splitting off of the sub-groups during the proto-stage, and again in relatively recent history, the original auxiliaries having become bleached and/or obsolete.<sup>23</sup> Unfortunately, such a demonstration is beyond the scope of the present paper.

To summarize, the available evidence argues against the view that the present-day aspectual auxiliaries in South Dravidian derive from a common source in the proto-language, despite the existence of apparent 'cognate' constructions. Rather, the phenomenon, and in particular the spread of the compound continuative, can be traced to contact with and subsequent calquing of an innovation that arose within a single language, Tamil. The data thus illustrate the ease with which morpho-syntactic borrowing can take place, especially in a region with a strong areal identity, and especially when cognate formative elements are involved.

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June 2, 1989. The responsibility for any errors either of fact or of interpretation rests entirely with the author.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Hook has since revised this view. In Hook (1992:189), he concludes in favor of "the possibility of separate (but parallel) origin and development for compound verb systems in Indo-Aryan and Dravidian".

<sup>2</sup> Here and throughout, italicized caps are used to represent an abstract form which has etymologically-related cognates in the various languages; thus *KOL* 'to take/hold' has the form *kol* in Tamil and Malayalam, *kollu* in Kannada, *koon* in Telugu, etc. An exception is the use of *IRU* to represent reflexes of both Proto-Dravidian \**ir* 'to be, sit' and \**id* 'to exist', both of which occupy the same functional slot in the analysis developed here.

<sup>3</sup> While both 'perfect' and 'perfective' aspects involve the notion of completion, they are distinct in that the former is used to encode previously completed situations with continuing current relevance. The perfective contrasts with the continuative in encoding a situation as a completed, undifferentiated whole, as well as indicating disjunction between completed sequential events.

<sup>4</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, I subsume under the label 'continuative' the aspectual notions 'progressive' and 'durative', leaving for a more detailed investigation the discussion of which nuances of meaning are expressed by the forms in question in the individual languages.

<sup>5</sup> The diagram given here is an amalgamation and adaptation of those found in Zvelebil (1962), Emeneau (1967), and Subrahmanyam (1971). The three languages missing from the diagram (Iruḷa, Kāṭṭunāicka, and Paṇia) are tribal languages which have yet to be fit into the classification scheme.

<sup>6</sup> My discussion does not include Badaga, for which sufficient data were not available.

<sup>7</sup> In the examples, language names are abbreviated as follows:

Ta = Tamil	KN = Kāṭṭunāicka
Ma = Malayalam	Pa = Paṇia
Ka = Kannada	Ir = Iruḷa
Te = Telugu	Ko = Koḍagu
Tu = Tulu	Si = Sinhala

Other abbreviations used in the examples are:

F = future tense	1sg = first person singular
P = past tense	1pl = first person plural
Pr = present tense	3fs = third person feminine singular
CP = conjunctive participle	3ms = third person masculine singular
AjP = adjectival participle	3ns = third person neuter singular
ACC = accusative case	etc.

<sup>8</sup> When postposed to a noun, *KONTU* (conjunctive participial form of *KOL*) may function as an instrumental marker; here, 'with happiness'.

<sup>9</sup> This example was elicited from a native of Mangalore, a town on the west coast of Karnataka. The construction appears to be of limited productivity in Standard Kannada, despite the fact that all of the necessary formative elements ('simultaneous' *konḍu*, 'durative' *vaa*) are available. Nor is a form *KONTIRU* (*konḍu* + *iru*) attested in my data, despite the availability of both *konḍu* and *iru*. This may be due to the fact that Kannada has an alternative continuative construction, in which the auxiliary *iru* (or less commonly, *vaa*) is suffixed to the present participial form (-*t*- or -*taa*-) of the main verb. A similar strategy is attested in a number of Central Dravidian languages (cf. Subrahmanyam 1971), as well as in Indo-Aryan.

<sup>10</sup> 'Be' verbs and the verb *VA* 'to come' function alone as durative auxiliaries in many of these languages as well.

<sup>11</sup> Following Pederson (1990), I use the term 'reflexive' to include 'middle voice' situations as well as prototypical reflexive situations in which an agent performs an action upon himself. Dravidian *KOL* encodes situations of both types.

<sup>12</sup> The only exception to this general trend is Malayalam, which has replaced the verbal reflexive (*kol*) with a pronominal one (*taan*).

<sup>13</sup> Steever's (1984) South Dravidian examples — drawn from Old Tamil and Old Kannada — all involve an inflected negative as auxiliary.

<sup>14</sup> The uses of *kol* as a main verb in Modern Tamil are largely restricted to situations involving containment, e.g. *Iniṭa ṣeṇk iraṇṇu liṭṭaṭ peṭṭol koḷḷum* 'This tank holds two liters of petrol'.

<sup>15</sup> A similar usage is found in Vedic, e.g. *upaviṣṭo'sti* 'he has sat', 'he has been sitting' (Vale 1948:249).

<sup>16</sup> In support of this view, it is interesting to note that the modern 'perfective' and 'continuative' auxiliaries fulfill discourse functions in narration similar to those of the simple 'past' and the 'non-past' in Old Tamil; that is, the former, completive forms trace the primary sequence of events, while the latter, continuing forms give supportive background information (Herring, forthcoming).

<sup>17</sup> Vale (1948) remarks on a similar phenomenon in modern Indo-Aryan, citing as an example the borrowing of the auxiliary *caah* from Hindi into Marathi. In his words, "people borrow certain auxiliaries from cognate languages for adding beauty and power to their comparatively dull expression" (1948:316).

<sup>18</sup> In Standard Telugu, as in Standard Kannada (see n.9), the continuative is derived from a periphrastic construction made up of the present participial form of the main verb, plus a verb 'to be'. This construction most probably has its roots in Indo-Aryan.

<sup>19</sup> This is true on the level of analysis we are concerned with here. Paolillo (1989) notes that the *V* + *gannaṇa* reflexive construction (but not the continuative construction) is subject to volitivity constraints, in keeping with the syntactic organization of Sinhala as a whole. Tamil lacks such constraints.

20 Sinhala *ganna*, like Tamil *kol*, denotes the action of 'taking towards (or for) the self'.

21 An exception is Hindi-Urdu, where the main verb occurs in its base form (Kachru & Pandharipande 1980).

22 See n.13.

23 The existence in Old Tamil texts of semantically "empty" auxiliaries such as *taa*, *ina*, and *ii* can be seen as lending support to such a view.

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