

Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese

(Batticaloa)

Historical Background

- 483 B.C.: Sinhala established as the primary language in Sri Lanka
- 1505: Portuguese expand trading posts and forts from Goa to Colombo, Sri Lanka
- 1602-1632: Dutch begin contact with Kandyan court and work to expell Portugal from Sri Lanka
- 1638: Dutch control of Batticaloa finalized
- 1658: Dutch control of Colombo, Portuguese withdrawal from Sri Lanka
- 1795-6: English control of Sri Lanka, expulsion of Dutch (cession to Britain in 1802)
- 1948: Sri Lanka gains independence

Sri Lanka (present-day map)



Influences

- Superstrate: Portuguese; substrates: Tamil (Dravidian) (T), Sinhala (Indo-Aryan) (S), Dutch (D), English (E)
 - Sinhala and Tamil are the official languages of Sri Lanka; Sinhala is spoken everywhere but the northernmost tip and eastern coast of the island, where Tamil is the primary language.
 - Batticaloa Portuguese (BP) speakers, as Smith studied, were native speakers of Sri Lanka Creole Portuguese (SLCP), Tamil, or Sinhala.
 - When the Catholic Church returned to Sri Lanka during Dutch authority, many priests made an effort to “indigenize” and consequently provided services and texts for the Church in Sinhala and Tamil

Linguistic Demographics

- According to Ethnologue, the population of Sri Lanka is 19,905,165.
 - 74,170 speak English
 - 13,190,000 speak Sinhala
 - 3,000,000 speak Tamil
 - 3,406 speak forms of Indo-Portuguese
 - Remaining: Sri Lankan Sign Language, Creole Malay
 - *.3% of Sri Lanka's population are “Burghers,” descendants of Portuguese and Dutch. Burghers compose .9% of the population in Batticaloa (according to Statistical Pocket Book of Sri Lanka, 19721). The speakers of BP are likely far fewer now, due to recent Tamil influence. Note that Batticaloa is located on that eastern strip of Sri Lanka where Sinhala is not the primary language.*

Borrowings

- Many Portuguese words had already been assumed into the Sinhala language before BP.
- With the development of BP, these borrowings were cemented.
- SLCP speakers still have contact with Tamil, as well as some Sinhala and English and very little Dutch.
 - Since Portugal withdrew from Sri Lanka in 1658, SLCP dialects have had no influential contact with their superstrate (missionary attempts have been, for the most part, by Goan Catholic priests who encouraged the use of Sinhala in the Church).

Con't...

- Borrowings from Batticaloa Tamil (BT) still continue, but borrowings from S are less common, as speakers of S are relatively few in Batticaloa
- Influence from English is becoming more prominent, although contact with English speakers has been intermittent since the Sri Lanka declared independence.
 - According to Jayasuriya, many Burghers have left behind their (Portuguese) cultural identity, and thus language, for the social advantages of English.
 - Holm estimates that BP is spoken by about 250 families (1989)

Development of SLCP and BP

- Mid 1500s: pidgin emerges with establishment of Portugal in Sri Lanka; likely based on pre-existing forms of pidgin Portuguese used in Goa; creole emerges by end of the century
 - Black slaves brought to Sri Lanka by Portuguese thought to contribute their own creole Portuguese to the Sri Lanka pidgin
- Early 1600s: Portuguese/Sri Lankan mother-tongue speakers of creole emerge; Dutch accept the use of creole Portuguese as a lingua franca
- Mid-late 1600s: some Sri Lanka-born Dutch become native creole speakers; extensive use in households of mixed Dutch and Portuguese, or Sri Lankan and Portuguese ancestry
- 1800s: British control leads to restricted use of creole to Burgher population; SLCP continues as lingua franca until English replaces it in mid 1800s

Phonology of Batticaloa Portuguese

- This inventory considers “closed sets” of borrowed phonology, i.e., Dutch & Portuguese, but not Batticaloa Tamil or English, which continue to have influence upon BP
- Batticaloa Portuguese has eighteen consonants.
 - Tense: /p/, /t/, /k/, /c/, /f/, /s/
 - Lax: /d/, /g/, /b/, /j/, /z/
 - /m/, /n/, /ɲ/, /r/, /l/, /w/, /y/
- It allows consonant clusters of up to three sounds at word-initial, and up to two for syllable-initial; syllable-final can have up to four sounds in a consonant cluster.
- 16thc. P also includes: /ts/, /dz/; BT includes: /T/, /N/, /L/, /v/

Phonology (vowels)

- BP has fourteen vowels, derived from P, but it does not distinguish nasalized from non-nasalized vowels

	front	central	back
– High:	/i/, /i:/		/u/, /u:/
– Mid:	/e/, /e:/	/ə/	/o/, /o:/
– Low:	/æ/, /æ:/	/a/	/ɔ/, /ɔ:/

- Stress and distribution
 - Short unstressed vowels occur in all syllables
 - Short stressed vowels occur only in initial syllables
 - Long vowels can occur in all syllables, but must be stressed
 - There can be only one long vowel per word

Con't...

- Voiceless consonants are unaspirated and may geminate (lengthen).
- Sequences of 2+ vowels, when occurring word-internally in BP, are usually elided, although a glide can be inserted or the first vowel reduced/deleted
- Epenthesis of /i/, /u/, or /a/ can occur between a stop or spirant and /r/.
 - P. /ka:tru/ → B.P. /ka:turu/ 'four'

Morphology and Syntax

- The syntax of BP is very similar to that of BT
 - General sentence word order is SOV, mirroring BT
 - Exceptions for postscripting, contrastive emphasis, or extraposition
 - P and other Indo-Portuguese dialects have SVO word order
- Unlike BP, P and most I-P dialects use only prepositions
- Adjectives in BP and BT precede modifying noun
- BP auxiliaries can either precede the verb (P) or follow it (BT)
- Neither BP nor BT use relative pronouns

Modern Progression of BP

- BP is maintained mostly among the older Burgher population of Batticaloa.
- Tamil is spoken by all residents of Batticaloa and takes precedence over the creole for daily interaction.
- Speakers of BP who have left Batticaloa and returned usually lose their command of BP, although some can still understand it.
- Children who are speakers of BP have usually learned BP and Tamil at the same time, rather than learning one natively and one as a second language at school.
 - There is an extraordinary amount of peer pressure not to speak the creole
- Smith (in 1978) considered the recent influence of Tamil on BP a sign of progressive language death
 - A 1992 study (Philip Baker) noted by Ethnologue suggests that there may be only about 30 speakers of BP left.

Con't...

- P, BP and BT nouns are all inflected for number and case
- BP and BT use verbal base for imperative
 - Batticaloa Portuguese does show more morphological and syntactic similarity to Batticaloa Tamil than it does to P, other I-P dialects *or* SLCP as documented in the 1800s.
 - It does diverge more from BT in verb morphology.

Lexicon

- In light of the recent changes, the lexicon of BP is very likely not the same as it was in 1978.
 - However, Smith's note that BP looks much like BT with Portuguese words (although he completely disavows this theory, given the creole's developmental history) means that it was particularly heavily based on P.
 - The steady replacement of BP with BT in domestic settings may mean that BP is simply going out of use, rather than being lexically “morphed” into BT.

Bibliography

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