

## Two Types of Quirky-case Subjects in Involitive Constructions in Sinhala: A Study under Theta System Theory

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Involitionality in Sinhala, as reflected in the verb morphology, usually has the subject marked with quirky (non-nominative) cases, which are either *atin*-marked or dative, as shown in (1) and (2).

- (1) a. laməya            atin            kooppe            biñduna. (Inman 1994: 82)  
child            ATIN            cup            break. INV.PAST  
'The child (accidentally) broke the cup.'
- b. kellə    atin    maalu    ageeṭə    pihenəwa. (Inman 1994: 100; De Silva 1960:101)  
girl    ATIN    fish. ACC.PL    very\_well    cook.INV  
'The girl can cook fish very well.'
- (2) a. maṭə            kawi            kiyəwenəwa. (Inman 1994: 76)  
I.DAT.SG    poetry            recite.INV.PRES  
'I start reciting poetry (despite myself).'
- b. laməyaṭə    æñḍuwa. (Inman 1994: 82)  
child:DAT    cry.INV.PAST  
'The child cried (involuntarily).'

Common to these two types of involitive construction is the fact that both of them can alternate with the nominative-subject construction, encoding volitionality. Reversely, the volitive construction alternates with either *atin*- or dative construction, but not both. For instance, causative verbs, e.g., *break* and *drown*, select the *atin* construction but resist the dative one, whereas verbal predicates (e.g., *recite* and *speak*) and unergative predicates (e.g., *cry* and *laugh*) choose the dative construction instead of the *atin* one. Given this, it would be significant to syntactically discriminate between the *atin* construction and the dative construction. We thus explore the distinction under the Theta System Theory (Reinhart 2002; Marelj 2004) and come to the following conclusions:

- (3) a. the *atin* construction: verb ([+m], [-c-m])(Sentient, Theme)  
b. the dative construction: verb ([-c], [-c-m]) (Recipient/Benefactory, Theme)

The *atin*-marked subject is [+m], roughly equivalent to Sentient, and it is compatible with the [+c] feature. This can explain why *atin*-construction must be transitive as well as why it can convey implicit modality (e.g., potentiality). On the other hand, the [-c] feature can capture its occurrence in an intransitive construction. Semantically, the *atin*-marked subject can be a Cause, albeit involuntary, of an event, while the dative subject can never be a cause ([-c]). Therefore, "involition" in Sinhala should be understood as either the underspecified feature of "cause" or the absence of "cause".

**Key words:** *atin*-marked subjects, dative subjects, quirky-case subjects