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Conjunctive Verbs in Malayalam

Ravi Sankar S. Nair, Ph.D.

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Introduction – Conjunctive Verbs

Conjunctive verbs (also referred to as copular verbs or existential verbs) in Malayalam are capable of functioning as the main verb, but are grammatically and semantically different from action verbs. They do not take an agent noun as their subject. The semantic role associated with the subjects of conjunctive verbs is that of experiencer. They denote a state of being and not an action.

Traditional grammars of Malayalam like Rajaraja Varma (1917), Gundert (1868), Mathen (1863) and Seshagiri Prabhu (1898) have discussed the morphological aspects and in a limited way, the syntactic aspects of *aak* and *unṭū*, the two conjunctive verbs in Malayalam. Later grammarians like Asher (1968), Venugopala Panikkar (1980), Rajasekharan Nair (1990), Asher and Kumari (1997) and Prabhakara Variyar (1998) have analyzed different syntactic and semantic features of the conjunctive verbs of Malayalam. Ravi Sankar S Nair (2011) presents an elaborate analysis of the syntax and semantics of *aak* and *unṭū*.

The present paper attempts to provide a descriptive analysis of the syntactic and semantic differences and similarities of the two forms.

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aak

aak is used as non action verb and to form cleft constructions.

It has the full range of tense forms- *aayirunnu*(past) , *aakunnu*(present) ,and *aayirikkum*(future).The present tense form has however been replaced by *aanũ* in modern day spoken language. The form *aakunnu* is now limited to formal and ritual language.

- (1) niṇṇaḷ keeṭṭatũ daiva vacanam aakunnu
you-pl hear-PAST-PART-NOMN God- speech be-PRES
'What you heard was the word of God'
- (2) svargaraajyam niṇṇaḷkkullatũ aakunnu
heaven You-PL-DAT-be PART-NOMN be-PRES
'Heaven is for you'

It is similar to the be-verb *uṇṭũ* in many contexts.

- (3) eṇikku paṇi aanũ/eṇikkũ paṇi uṇṭũ 'I have fever'
- (4) eṇikkũ deesyam aanũ/eṇikkũ deesyam uṇṭũ 'I am angry'

Meanings Denoted by *aak*

The basic meanings denoted by *aak* are:

- **Identity**

- (5) ṇaanaṁ meeri aanũ
I(sg) Mary be-PRES
'I am Mary'
- (6) itu keeraḷam aanũ
this Kerala be-PRES
'This is kerala'
- (7) ṇaṇṇaḷ vidyaarthikaḷ aayirunnu
we student(pl) be-PAST
'We were students'
- (8) jaya adhyaapika aanũ
Jaya teacher-FEM be-PRES
'Jaya is a teacher'

- **State**

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- (9) enikkũ paṇi aaṇũ
I-DAT fever be-PRES
'I have fever'
- (10) avaṇũ ennootũ veruppũ aaṇũ
he-DAT I-SOC hatred be-PRES
'He has hatred for me'
- (11) avarikkũ enne viśvaasam aaṇũ
they-DAT I-ACC trust be-PRES
'They have trust in me'

- **Existential**

- (12) keeralattil maḷa aaṇũ
Kerala-LOC rain be-PRES
'It's rain in kerala'
- (13) aviṭe ulsavam aaṇũ
there festival be-PRES
'Its festival there'
- (14) veliyil nalla taṇuppũ aaṇũ
outside-LOC good cold be-PRES
'Its very cold outside'

- **Attributive**

- (15) avaluṭe śabdham madhuraṁ aaṇũ
she-GEN voice sweet be-PRES
'Her voice is sweet'
- (16) raviyuṭe naṭatta patukke aaṇũ
Ravi-GEN walk slow be-PRES
'Ravi's walk is slow'
- (17) aa viiṭu valutũ aaṇũ
that house big be-PRES
'That house is big'

- **Locative**

- (18) enṛe viiṭu kootṭayattũ aaṇũ
I-GEN house Kottayam-LOC be-PRES

‘My house is at kottayam’

- (19) pustakakkaṭa aa valiyil aaṇṁ
book shop that street-LOC be-PRES

‘The book shop is in that street’

(Sentences expressing existential and stative meanings through *aak* can be rewritten using *unṭū*.)

***aak* as Lexical Verb**

aak, functioning as lexical verb conveys the meanings of ‘to have’, ‘to take place’, ‘be able to’ and ‘to spread over’.

- (20) paarṭṭi innū aayaaloo?
party today be-PAST-COND-INTER
‘Can we have the party today?’

- (21) avanū atū ceyyaanaayi
he-DAT that do-PURP INF-be-PAST
‘He was able to do that’

- (22) muṭi muḷuvan eṇṇa aayi
hair all oil be-PAST
‘Oil has spread all over the hair’

Cleft Constructions

The present tense form of *aak* forms cleft sentences with the main verb taking the nominal suffix *-atū*.

- (23) hassan ooṭi → hassan ooṭukayaāṇṁ ceytataṁ
Hasan run-PAST Hasan run-INF-be-PRES do-NOMNL PCPL
‘Hasan ran’ ‘What Hasan did was to run’

- (24) siita paṇam puuṭṭii veccu→ siita paṇam puuṭṭi aaṇṁ veccatū
Sita money lock-PAST-PCPL keep-PAST Sita money lock-PAST be-PRES
keep-PAST- PCPL

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‘Sita locked up the money’.

‘What Sita did was to lock up the money’

Aspectual Form

aak denotes the continuous aspect when it follows the infinite form of the verb.

(25) maḷa peyyuka aaṇṭ
rain fall-INFN be-PRES
‘Its raining’

(26) ṇaṇṇaḷ poovuka aaṇṭ
we go-INF be-PRES
‘We are going’

Emphasizing Different Elements in the Sentence

aak is an extremely mobile form which can be attached to almost any element or group in the sentence producing differences in emphasis .

(27) itaaṇṭ eṇṇe viiṭṭu
this-be-PRES I-GEN house
‘This is my house’ [Emphasis on ‘this’]

(28) ii viiṭṭu eṇṇe aaṇṭ
this house I-GEN be-PRES
‘This is my house’ [Emphasis on ‘me’]

(29) ii viiṭṭu aaṇṭ eṇṇreetṭu
this house be-PRE I-GEN-NOMNL
‘This house is mine’ [Emphasis on ‘house’]

The stative verb *uṇṭṭu* does not have similar mobility.

uṇṭṭu

As noted above, *uṇṭṭu* is similar to *aak* in many respects and the two forms can be interchanged without change in meaning in many sentences. However, *uṇṭṭu* has a basic possessive meaning which is absent in *aak*.

Meanings Denoted by *uṇṭṭu*.

- Possessive meaning.

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(30) enikku kaar unṭũ
I-DAT car be-PRES
'I have (a) car'

(31) avarṭṭu valiya viiṭu unṭũ
they-DAT big house be-PRES
'They have a big house'

(32) janaṇṇaḷḷu dhaaraalam paṇam unṭũ
people-DAT much money be-PRES
'People have a lot of money'

- **Stative**

(33) avanũ samśayam unṭũ
he-DAT suspicion be-PRES
'He has suspicion'

(34) avaḷḷu sneham unṭũ
she-DAT love be-PRES
'She has love'

(35) avanu paṇi unṭũ
he-Dat fever be-PRES
'He has fever'

- **Locative meaning**

(36) keeraḷattil maḷa unṭũ
Kerala-LOC rain be-PRES
'There is rain in Kerala'

(37) aṇṭe malakaḷ unṭũ
there hill-PL be-PRES
'There are mountains (there)'

(38) joon viiṭṭil unṭũ
John house-LOC be-PRES
'John is at home'

Aspectual Usage

Combined with the present tense form of verbs, *unṭũ* denotes the continuous aspect.

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(39) ravi paṭhikkunnunṭū

Ravi study-PRES-be-PRES

‘Ravi is studying’

(40) aval varunnunṭū

she come-PRES-be-PRES

‘She is coming’

Differences between *aak* and *unṭū*

In many sentences *aak* and *unṭū* are interchangeable, but there are subtle semantic differences between them. *aak* denotes a general truth or habitual state while *unṭū* denotes a specific incident or one time occurrence.

(41) keeraḷattil maḷa aaṇū

keeraḷattil maḷa unṭū

‘There is rain in Kerala’

(42) kaṭallooraṇṇalil paṭṭini aaṇū

kaṭallooraṇṇalil paṭṭini unṭū

Participial forms

The relative participle of *aak* is an extremely productive construction. It converts derived nouns and Sanskrit loans into adjectival forms.

(43) miṭukkaṇaaya kuṭṭi

smart-MASC-be-PCPL boy

‘Smart boy’

(44) paraññataaya kaaryam

say-PAST-PCPL matter

‘Matter that was said’

(45) bhiiruvaaya naayakan

coward-be-PCPL hero

‘Cowardly hero’

(46) vicitrāmaaya bhaavana

strange-be-PCPL imagination

‘Strange imagination’

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The relative participle form of *uṇṭū* combines with nouns and adverbials. With nouns it denotes possessive meaning.

- (47) vaṇṇamuḷḷa kuṭṭi
fat-be-PCPL child
'The fat child'

- (48) vellamuḷḷa kiṇar
water-be-PCPL well
'Well with water'

With adverbs, *uḷḷa* denotes manner or a meaning similar to the locative copula.

- **Manner**

- (49) neereyuḷḷa nooṭṭam
straight-be-PCPL look
'A straight look'

- (50) veegattiluḷḷa pookku
fast-ADV-be-PCPL going
'A fast going'

- **Locative copula.**

- (51) avanre ippooluḷḷa varavu
he-GEN now-be-PART coming
'His coming at this time'
(= avanre ippoolatte varavū)

- (52) innuḷḷa paripaati
today-be-PART program
'Today's program'
(= innatte paripaati)

Verbal Participle of *aak*

The verbal participle of *aak* when added to nouns semantically extends the meaning of cases like postpositions.

- **Exclusive meaning.**

- (53) penkuṭṭikaḷkkaayi oru skuuḷ uyarunnu
girls-be-PCPL one school come-up-PRES
'A school for girls is being built'

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(54) kuraccu paṇam avarṅkaayi maarṛiveccu
 some money they-DAT-be-PCPL put aside-PAST
 ‘Some money was set apart for them’

- **Benefactive meaning**

(55) avar svaatanṛyattinaayi pooraatuka aayirunnu
 they independence-DAT-be-PCPL fight-INFN be-PRES
 ‘They were fighting for independence’

(56) jantukkaḷ vellattinaayi alaṇṇu
 animals water-DAT-be-PCPL wander-PAST
 ‘The animals wandered for water’

- **Distributive meaning**

(57) sainyam raṇṭu karakaḷilaayi nirannu
 army two banks-LOC-be-PCPL spread-PAST
 ‘The army spread over the two banks’

(58) maṇsuuṇ pala maasaṇṇaḷilaayi peyyum
 monsoon many months-LOC-be-PCPL fall-FUT
 ‘The monsoon will fall over many months’

- **Extensive meaning**

(59) ninne kaṇaṇ maasaṇṇaḷaayi kaattirikkunnu
 you-ACC see-PURP INFN months-be-PCPL wait-PRES
 ‘(I am) waiting for months to see you’

(60) ii skuḷ varṇaṇṇaḷaayi aṭaṇṇu kiṭakkunnu
 this school year-PL-be-PCPL close-PAST-PCPL remain-PRES
 ‘This school has remained closed for many years’

- **Comitative meaning**

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(61) avan paṇavumaayi ippoollettum

he money-be-PCPL now-come-FUT
'He will come now with the money'

(62) taṇuppumaayi vaṭakkaṇ kaarū ettum

coldness-CONJ-be-PCPL north-NOMNL wind come-FUT
'The North wind will come with chilliness'

- **Manner**

(63) ii viśadiikaraṇam puṇṇamaayi śariyaanū

this explanation complete- be-PCPL correct-be-PRES
'This explanation is completely correct'

(64) ceyyunna kaaryam nannaayi ceyyaṇam

do-PRES-PCPL matter well-be-PCPL do-must
'Things that (you) do must be done well'

- **Sociative Meaning**

(65) ayaal kuṭṭikaḷumaayi samsaariccu

he children-CONJ-be-PCPL speak-PAST
'He spoke with the children'

(66) ellaarumaayi itu caṛcca ceyyaam

all-people-be-PCPL this discussion do-HORT
'We can discuss this with all'

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