

## Historical Development of the Malayalam Present Tense Marker '*Unnu*'

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### Abstract

Malayalam is a South Dravidian language. History of the Malayalam language starts with vaazappalli inscription written in 832 AD. The present paper is an attempt to find out the development of the present tense marker '*unnu*' in Malayalam language.

**Keywords:** Malayalam, present tense marker, historical development.

### Introduction

A comparative study of the various non-past tense forms in the Dravidian languages reveals that the formation of the present tense as distinct from the future tense is a later development in the family. The present tense suffixes in many of the languages are historically relatable to the future tense suffixes found in the same language or in the some other sister languages.

According to Keralapaanini, the Dravidian languages did not consider the present as a distinct time. In instances where Aryan languages use present tense, the Dravidian languages use future tense. The present form of the predicates is of later origin. (C J Roy, 1999).

### Literature Review

Many scholars have different opinions about the development of Malayalam present tense marker '*unnu*'. Some of these are given below.

Keralapaanini, a well-known Malayalam grammarian, stated that the present tense form which denotes the sense of some sort of continuous action, and this continuous action is attained

in Tamil and Malayalam by the base 'ira'. And he stated that *unnu* in Malayalam is derived from *inRu*.

L.V. Ramaswami Iyer(1936)suggested that the present tense marker *unn* in modern Malayalam is developed from mid Tamil suffix *-ind*.According to him early west coast inscriptions forms with the present tense suffix *ind*, appears as in verbs like *ceyyinda*, *kollindaavar*, etc. This *ind* which changes to *inn* and finally *unn* in modern Malayalam according to the phonological rule of the Malayalam language.

*ind* > *inn* > *unn*

*nd* > *nn* due to the nasal assimilation

↳ u, because of the harmonic sequence of vowels which is characteristic of Dravidian language is not popular in Malayalam. But this *-ind* form could not be found in any literary works available in Old Malayalam period.

V.I. Subramoniam, in his work *Present tense markers in Malayalam*, adopted three sets of present tense markers (Gopinathan Nair, 2008). They are

(i) *unnu* and its variants.

*unRu* > *unnu* or *untu* > *unnu*

(ii) *InRu* and its variants, *inRu* > *intu* > *innu* > *inu*

(iii) *aaninRu*

According to him *aanin Ru* is a periphrastic time found easily in middle Tamil and also occurs only in the Kerala inscriptions. But there is no evidence for supporting this. Hence we may consider only the two markers *unnu* and *inRu*. He stated that the - *unnu* set and -/ *inRu* / set are found in varying degrees of frequencies in all texts except *Lilathilakam* and a few other early *manipravala* texts.

In the spoken speech of some communities like ezhava/Tiyyas, the *unnu* and *inRu* and their alternants are found (V.I. Subramoniam, 1974). In the speech of Muslims of North Malabar and Trivandrum *a* and *i*, which are derived from *unR* and *inR* are found.

In the literary text of *Krishnagatha*, only *unnu* is found predominantly. C. L. Antony (1969) in his book *Bhaasaapaatan̄nal* stated that the possibility of *unnu* in Modern Malayalam is directly derived from 'untu' by nasal assimilation. According to him the Malayalam present tense suffix 'unnu' is a direct consequences of nasal assimilation of the consonant cluster *intu*.

Caldwell suggested *-indRu* form as the proto form and *iRu* is the result of the process of denasalization. But he himself doubts this derivation since denazalisation is not common in Tamil. So, the argument is not sound. In Tamil there is a base *KinR*. Here *K* is the future marker in Old Tamil. There are two forms in Tamil *pookinraan* and *pookiraan*. Here the possibility is *ira>inra* by the addition of nasal that is usual in Tamil like

*muuru>muunru* (three)

*kuru>kunru* (hill lock)

From this it is clear that reason for the presence of 'u' in *inRu* is the addition of the confrontational future maker 'u'. It has no relationship with future. So it will fit in perfectly with future. So it will fit in perfectly with *ira*. Gundert, Keralapanini and other grammarians have agreed to this possibility.

### **Historical Development of the Present Tense Marker 'unnu'**

The history of present tense form in Malayalam can be traced through literary works of Old, Middle and Modern Malayalam.

#### **Old Malayalam (800 – 1200)**

In this period *-kinr* and *-inr* forms are widely used

For example, *vaaz-kinra* 'living' (Tarisappalli inscription 1, AD 913)

*Collu- kinra* 'saying' (*Bhasakautilyam*, 12<sup>th</sup> century)

*Ceyy-inra* 'doing' (Perunna inscriptions, 11<sup>th</sup> century inscription)

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var-inra 'coming' ( 12<sup>th</sup> century inscription)

### Early Middle Malayalam (1200- 1400)

-*inr*, *inn* and -*unr* were the present tense markers in this period.

For example: arul-inra 'saying' (13<sup>th</sup> century inscriptions)  
puneyinnu 'making' ( 13<sup>th</sup> century paattu,tirunizamala)  
ponn-unru 'rising' (*Unniaccicaritam* ,14<sup>th</sup> century)

### Middle Malayalam (1400-1600)

Present tense marker -*inn* and -*unnn* were common in this period.

For example: araykkinnatu 'grinding' (*alamkaarasamksheepam*, 15<sup>th</sup> century)  
Cey-innitu 'doing' (*kannasaraamayanam*, 15<sup>th</sup> century)  
kollunnu 'killing' (*krishipaattu*, 15<sup>th</sup> century)  
tozunnu 'greeting' (*krishnagatha*, 15<sup>th</sup> century)

### Modern Malayalam (1600-present)

-*unnnu* is the only present tense form preserved in modern period

For example varunnu 'coming'  
vitunnu 'leaving'

From the above examples it is clear that -*kinr* and -*inr* in Old Malayalam present tense markers change to -*inr* ( loss of initial -k), -*unr* and -*inn* in Early Middle Malayalam period. And in Middle Malayalam period due to the nasal assimilation process- *inr*>- *inn* and -*unnn* (i>u (due to the harmonic sequence of vowel.)

### Conclusion

From the study it is clear that *inRu* is the proto form of the present tense marker which is common in both Tamil and Malayalam. These sister languages became separate from each other independently and Tamil retained the -*inRu* form. In Malayalam this *InRu* changes to -*innnu* due

to nasal assimilation and finally changes to *-uṇṇu*.(i>u). The chrono-isogloss of the development of *inRu* is as follows:

*inRu*- ancient period upto 12th century AD.

*inRu/innu* - medieval period from 13th century to 16th century

*uṇṇu*- later from the 17th century A.D.

In modern Malayam (both literary and colloquial), new forms are also used to indicate present tense 'u'

aaṇu, pooṇu,etc

But in literary and standard colloquial Malayalam, 'u' always freely alternates with *uṇṇu*. In spoken language 'u' are more frequent forms than the *uṇṇu* forms.

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