

## **Known, inferable, and discoverable in Sri Lankan Malay research**

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As specialists in contact languages and in Malay dialectology know, research on the development of unwritten vernaculars is a great challenge, the importance of which should not be overlooked, in spite of the relative lack of hard empirical evidence in the form of attestations. This is doubly true in the case of Sri Lankan Malay, since its diachrony is so unusual and so potentially illuminating for several linguistic subdisciplines. Synchronically, it is a language that resembles other languages spoken in the region, albeit one with mostly Austronesian etyma. Nevertheless, many synchronic facts about the grammar of SLM remain to be investigated.

In spite of considerable recent interest and efforts, the actual mechanisms behind the development of SLM are still imperfectly understood, there is little consensus among researchers, and there are differences of opinion as to the extent of Sinhala influence. I will present historical and linguistic arguments based on what is known and on what can be inferred.

With respect to what is discoverable, I will briefly present desiderata for future SLM research. Strong claims have been made about sociocultural and sociolinguistic factors relevant to (1) the language's development, (2) synchronic variation in the language, and (3) the language's present and projected vitality. Ultimately, such claims need to be based on empirical research in order to be beneficial to linguistic science and to the SLM communities, consequently, much remains to be done.