

# The genesis of Sri Lanka Malay as a multi-layered process

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Preceding discussions have tried to account for the current shape of Sri Lankan Malay by drawing on different processes of language contact: convergence, creolization, metatypy. In this talk, I want to propose that Sri Lanka Malay is not the result of any one of these processes alone, but rather the result of a succession of several steps taking place at different (possibly overlapping) periods of its formation. These periods are

0. - 1550 : pidgin formation back in Indonesia
1. 1550 - 1811 : dialect levelling
2. before 1800 - today: substrate reinforcement
3. ?? - ?? : creolization, convergence, metatypy?
4. 1953 - today: attrition, convergence towards Sinhala

The period of pidgin formation pre-dates the coming of the Malays to Sri Lanka and will not be dealt with here in detail, although it is in part responsible for the shape of SLM, e.g. the loss of morphology. In the period of dialect levelling, the different forms of the pidgin which came to Batavia and Sri Lanka merged and the differences were levelled out. Evidence for this comes from the relative dialectal homogeneity of Sri Lanka Malay, where Moluccan features and Batavian features coexist. This period was finished before Malays from the peninsula arrived in the beginning of the 19th century since close to no peninsular features are found in SLM. Period 2, substrate reinforcement, covers the rise to prominence of structures in SLM which were marginally present in some of the historical varieties but got a boost due to contact with Sinhala and/or Tamil. This includes phonemicization of the dental/alveolar contrast, the plain/prenasal contrast and the plain/geminate contrast as well as some word order features. In Period 3, the features which are definitely not Malay in origin, like postpositions or the accusative, arose. It is difficult to establish the extent and correct processes for this period. Period 4 finally covers attrition and convergence towards Sinhala as a result of the language policies following independence.

Periods 0,1, and 4 are uncontroversial, and Period 2 probably is as well. In this talk, I will discuss to what extent the shape of Sri Lanka Malay can be explained based on the uncontroversial steps, and what is the remainder which must be attributed to Period 3. I will then discuss what processes are most likely to have led to the changes we observe in Period 3.