

## **The development of infinitival complementation in a Malay contact variety**

Mufwene and Dijkhoff (1989), following Bickerton (1984), argued that what is called an infinitive in the Atlantic creoles is not in fact an infinitive, and that syntactic criteria commonly invoked to justify the characterization of certain embedded clauses as infinitival argue against this characterization in the relevant creoles. Applying their argumentation on Papiamentu (Spanish/Portuguese-based) to the two main Sri Lankan contact languages, I argue that the evidence for infinitival status is strongest in Sri Lankan Malay (SLM). I then draw a parallel between the development of infinitival complementation in Old English and apparent infinitival complementation in SLM, whose lexifier unambiguously lacks a finite/non-finite distinction. The late Old English and SLM constructions both involve *to*-infinitives seemingly based on adpositional phrases, specifically infinitival *to* + lexical verb in Old English and lexical verb + infinitival *nang* in SLM, where *nang* is also a dative marker. There is no evidence however that these verbs were ever nominalized in SLM. Los (2005) argued that the apparently dative forms found in Old English obscure the fact that their actual syntactic status was verbal and that the constituents containing them were clausal. While *nang* is post-verbal, SLM infinitives simultaneously bear a prefix that only marks infinitival status. Etymologically, this element is irrealis, which parallels the subjunctives that the English *to*-infinitive progressively replaced. Cross-linguistic comparisons with early stages of well-attested languages can help us to reconstruct the development of underattested contact languages lacking diachronic corpora, and more specifically, in this particular case, to understand pathways to the development of new complementation strategies in these languages.

## **References**

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