

# Having come to be a copula in Sri Lanka Malay – an unusual grammaticalization path

## Abstract

Sri Lanka Malay has innovated a prominent and productive copula, which sets it apart from other descendents of colloquial Malay varieties. This copula has developed from the verb *dhaathang* ‘to come’, which is a grammaticalization path not yet attested in the literature. This paper describes the forms and functions of this copula and shows that it cannot be traced to any of the main input languages of Sri Lanka Malay (Trade Malay, Tamil, Sinhala). Comparing the Sri Lanka Malay case to attested grammaticalization paths, this paper concludes that the grammaticalization of COME to a copula is less surprising when assuming intermediate stages of ‘resultative’ and ‘stative’. These subpaths are illustrated by a variety of Creole and non-Creole languages.

## 1 Introduction<sup>2</sup>

Languages with copulas are widely known in Europe and beyond, but languages without a copula are also frequently encountered. If languages without a copula develop one over time, the source is normally either a former locational verb or a deictic (Stassen 1997:91). In this paper, I want to highlight yet another source for a copula, namely the participle of the verb COME, which has grammaticalized into a copula in Sri Lanka Malay.

I will first give some information on Sri Lanka Malay (Section 2) and the types of copula sentences we find in that language (Section 3). I will then show that neither other varieties of Malay nor the contact languages Sinhala and Tamil provide models for the development of this particular copula in Sri Lanka Malay (Section 4). I then discuss common sources for the grammaticalization of copulas in Section 5 and common targets of grammaticalization for the verb COME in Section

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6, showing that the particular combination COME→copula is not attested. However, three subpaths, namely COME→resultative, resultative→stative and stative→copula are attested, which, when chained, can explain the Sri Lanka Malay facts.

## 2 Sri Lanka Malay

Sri Lanka Malay is the language of the descendents of soldiers, exiles, convicts and slaves who were brought to the island by the colonial powers of the Dutch and the British between roughly 1650 and 1850 (Hussainmiya 1990). The grammar of the language has changed dramatically ever since (Adelaar 1991, Smith et al. 2004, Ansaldo 2008, Nordhoff 2009) and has shed most of its Austronesian origins to align with the Sri Lankan sprachbund (Bakker 2006), although some traces of Malay grammar still remain (Slomanson 2006). For instance, the language has changed from SVO to SOV and from prepositional to postpositional. The language has developed more than 20 new bound morphemes, mainly for the marking of TAM and case – something which is virtually unheard of in other parts of the Malay world. Most of the changes the language has undergone since its arrival on the island 350 years ago were triggered by language contact. The copula, however, does not seem to have a clear origin in any contact language or any historical variety of Malay.

## 3 The copula in Sri Lanka Malay

The copula in Sri Lanka Malay is homophonous to the conjunctive participle of the verb *dhaathang* ‘come’. The Sri Lanka Malay verb can take a number of prefixes, one of them being the conjunctive participle. This form is used to indicate that the event depicted in the clause thus marked is prior to the event in the main clause. In this sense, it is similar to an English construction like *Having done X, having done Y, finally Z happened*. An illustration of this form is given in (1).

- (1) a. Oorang pada **asà**-pìrrang,  
           man     PL     CP-wage.war  
           ‘After having waged war’  
       b. derang=nang **asà**-banthu,  
           3PL=DAT     CP-help  
           ‘and after having helped them’  
       c. siini=jo     su-ciiŋǵgal.  
           here=EMPH PAST-settle  
           ‘the people settled down right here.’ (K051222nar03)

Alternatives to the form with *asà-* shown in (1) are the form with *=apa* shown in (2) and the form with both *asà-* and *=apa*, shown in (3). These three forms seem to be functionally equivalent.

- (2) a. Oorang pada thiikam=**apa**  
 man PL shoot=CP  
 ‘People having been stabbed,/People were stabbed and’
- b. oorang pada=nang theem̃bak=**apa**  
 man PL=DAT stab=CP  
 ‘people having been shot,/people were shot and’
- c. se=dang bannyak creeveth pada su-aada.  
 1s=DAT much trouble PL PAST-exist  
 ‘I had a lot of problems.’ (K051213nar01)
- (3)a. Siithu **asà**-blaajar=**apa**,  
 there CP-learn=after  
 ‘After having learned there,’
- b. thaauun nnamblas=ka se skuul **asà**-luppas=**apa**,  
 year sixteen=LOC 1s school CP-leave=after  
 ‘after having left the school at 16,’
- c. pukuran asà-caari anà-pii.  
 work CP-find PAST-go  
 ‘I looked for work and went (away).’ (K060108nar01)

The Sri Lanka Malay copula is built around the lexical verb *dhaathang* ‘come’ in its conjunctive participle form. All three forms mentioned above are possible for the copular use. The following three examples illustrate this.<sup>1</sup>

- (4) Se=ppe naama **asà**dhaathang Cintha Sinthani.  
 1s=POSS name COPULA Chintha Sinthani.  
 ‘My name is Chintha Sinthani.’ (B060115prs04)
- (5) Se=ppe baapa dhaathang**apa** Jinaan Samath.  
 1s=POSS father COPULA Jinaan Samath.  
 ‘My father was Jinaan Samath.’ (N060113nar03)
- (6) Estate=pe *field officer* **asà**dhaathang**apa** kithang=pe kaake  
 estate=POSS field officer COPULA 1PL=POSS grandfather.  
 ‘The estate field officer was our grandfather.’ (N060113nar03)

<sup>1</sup>Note that the word order in copula sentences is NP Cop NP, while in verbal sentences, it is typically NP NP V.

The three examples above illustrate the use of *(asà)dhaathang(apa)* as a copula. Any of the three forms mentioned can also be used as a conjunctive participle proper when combined with *dhaathang* ‘come’, as shown in the following three examples.

- (7)a. Moonyeth pada=le **asà-dhaathang**  
 monkey PL=ADDIT CP-come  
 ‘The monkeys would go and’
- b. creeveth athi-kaasi.  
 trouble IRR-give  
 ‘cause (some other) trouble.’ (K070000wrt01)
- (8)a. oorang mlaayu siithu=dering **dhaathang=apa**  
 man malay there=ABL come=CP  
 ‘The Malay men came from there and’
- b. cingala raaja=nang=le anà-banthu  
 Sinhala king=DAT=ADDIT PAST-help  
 ‘helped the Sinhalese king.’ (K051206nar04)
- (9)a. incayang islaam=nang **asà-dhaathang=apa**  
 3S.POLITE Islam=DAT CP-come=CP  
 ‘He came to Islam’
- b. inni siigith=nang asà-dhaathang  
 PROX mosque=DAT CP-come  
 ‘and came to the mosque’
- c. giini girja  
 like. this make  
 ‘and does like this (=observes Islamic rites).’ (K051220nar01)

An interpretation involving an event of coming is mandatory in examples (7)-(9), but impossible in examples (4)-(6). We are, thus, dealing with polysemy of the form *(asà)dhaathang(apa)*.

In the languages of the world which have a copula, the copula is normally used for one or more types of non-verbal predicates (Stassen 1997). The predication types which are often found to require support from a copula are property assignment (*John is tall*), class inclusion (*John is a doctor*), existence (*There is a solution*) and location (*John is in Dubai*). Additionally, identification (*The murderer was the butler; I am John*) and specification (*The president is Obama*) also often require the use of a copula (Hengeveld 1992). This is exactly what we find in English, where the copula *to be* is present in all these cases.

In Sri Lanka Malay, the copula is mainly used for naming people

and for indications of group membership. Property assignment or location are not areas which trigger the use of the copula. Among these uses, naming is the most common and has been illustrated in (4) and (5) above. Apart from naming, the copula is most frequently used for indicating membership in ethnic, professional or gender classes or groups. These three uses are given in (10)-(12). The three forms with *asà-*, *=apa* and *asà-...=apa* appear to be used indiscriminately for these functions.

- (10)a. *Se=ppe daughter-in-law=pe mother asàdhaathang binggaali.*  
 1s=POSS daughter-in-law=POSS mother COPULA Bengali  
 ‘My daughter-in-law’s mother is Bengali.’
- b. *Ithukapang daughter-in-law=pe father asàdhaathang mlaayu.*  
 then daughter-in-law=POSS father COPULA Malay  
 ‘Then my daughter-in-law’s father is Malay.’ (K051206nar08)
- (11) [Seelong=nang duppang duppang anà-dhaathang mlaayu]  
*asàdhaathang oorang ikkang.*  
 Ceylon=DAT before before PAST-COME Malay]  
 COPULA man fish  
 ‘The Malays who came to Ceylon very early were fishermen.’  
 (K060108nar02)
- (12) *Kàthama anak dhaathangapa klaaki.*  
 first child COPULA male  
 ‘My oldest child is a boy.’ (G051222nar01)

Another use frequently found is the indication of kinship relations, another type of class membership. Example (13) illustrates this use.

- (13) *Baapa=pe umma asàdhaathang kaake=pe aade.*  
 father=POSS mother COPULA grandfather=POSS younger.sibling.  
 ‘My paternal grandmother was my grandfather’s younger  
 sister.’ (K051205nar05)

What all the functions mentioned above, with the exception of naming, have in common is that they indicate group membership. Another function is the use of the copula in identificational or specificational sentences. The following two examples show the use of the copula to further specify or identify the nature of a problem.

- (14) [Itthu vakthu kithang=nang nya-aada] *asàdhaathang ini JVP*

katha hathu *problem*.

DIST time 1PL=DAT PAST-exist COPULA PROX JVP  
QUOT INDEF *problem*.

‘What we had at that time was the so-called JVP-problem.’  
(K051206nar10)

(15) suda karang [kithang=nang aada *problem*] **dhaathangapa**

kithang=pe anak pada mlaayu thama-oomong

thus now 1PL=DAT exist *problem* COPULA  
1PL=POSS child PL Malay NEG.NONPAST-speak

‘So, the problem we are having now is that our children do not  
speak Malay.’ (G051222nar01)

To sum up, of the functions commonly associated with the copula, ‘class membership’ seems to be central for the Sri Lanka Malay case, while identification is another use. Identificational uses of the copula are very common as far as naming is concerned, but far less common for the types of identification and specification illustrated with examples (14)-(15).

The domains of property assignment and location do not seem to trigger the use of the copula in Sri Lanka Malay, as illustrated in (16) and (17).

(16) Theembok (\*asàdhaathang) puuthi  
wall COPULA white  
(intended reading ‘The wall is white.’)

(17) Tony (\*asàdhaathang) Kluumbu=ka  
Tony COPULA Colombo=LOC  
(intended reading ‘\*Tony is in Colombo.’, possible reading  
‘Tony has arrived in Colombo.’)

While class inclusion as described above often does show the copula, it is by no means obligatory. The copula can be left out in all the sentences above without affecting truth conditions. This means that together with the sentence in (11), (18) is also grammatical.

(18) [Seelong=nang duppang duppang anà-dhaathang mlaayu]  
**oorang ikkang.**

Ceylon=DAT before before PAST-come Malay] man fish  
‘The Malays who came to Ceylon very early were fishermen.’

It appears that the use of the copula is conditioned more by

considerations of information structure than by syntax or semantics. Especially topic-comment structures seem to favour the use of the copula (cf. Li & Thompson 1977:420). The stretch preceding the (*asà*)*dhaathang(apa)* is the topic, while the following portion is the comment. In that sense, (18) without the copula is less felicitous than (11), where the topic-comment-structure is overtly indicated by (*asà*)*dhaathang(apa)*.

It is not necessary for the topic to be nominal. In (19), we see an adverbial topic *dovulu* ‘in former times’, and the comment is preceded by *abbisdhaathang*, an idiolectal variant of *asàdhaathang*. In (20), we have a spatial topic *siini* ‘here’ instead of a temporal topic.

- (19) **dovulu** *abbisdhaathang* *muuka* *thama-thuuthup*  
 earlier COPULA face NEG.IRR-close  
 ‘Earlier, the women would not cover their faces.’  
 (K061026prs01)

- (20) **siini** *dhaathangapa* *mixed, mixed community*  
 here COPULA mixed mixed community  
 ‘What we get here is a mixed, a mixed community.’  
 (G051222nar04)

Occasionally, the comment can be quite elaborate as in the following two examples.

- (21) *Itthu* *abbisdhaathang* *custard powder=dering=jo arà-kirja*.  
 DIST COPULA custard powder=ABL=EMPH NON.PAST-make  
 ‘As for this one, it is such that it is made with custard powder.’  
 (K061026rcp02, K081105eli02)

- (22)a. *Sepakthakrow=pe rules dhaathangapa*  
*sepaktakrow=POSS rules* COPULA  
 ‘The Sepaktakrow rules are as follows:’  
 b. *inni hathu badminton court=ka arà-maayeng*  
 PROX INDEF badminton court=LOC NON.PAST-play  
 ‘You play it on a badminton court;’  
 c. *game hatthu itthe same measurement ambel=apa; height=le same=jo*  
*game INDEF DIST same measurement take=after height=ADDIT*  
*same=EMPH*  
 ‘(For) a game, you take the same measurements, and then the height (of the net) is also the same.’ (N060113nar05)

Furthermore, use of the copula seems to be strengthened by the presence of loanwords in the sentence, as is already evident from the preceding example. For the Sri Lankan context, most of the Malays have an above average command of English, and it cannot be excluded that the use of lexical material from English (loanwords) activates grammatical structures found in English as well, in this case the requirement for a copula in predications of class membership.

#### **4 Where does the copula come from?**

The copula is both synchronically and diachronically analyzable as the conjunctive participle of the lexical verb *dhaathang* ‘come’. The first Malays who arrived in Ceylon in the 17th century communicated in Vehicular Malay, a trade language used in and around the Indonesian archipelago (Smith 2003, Smith et al. 2004). The language has changed considerably in the last three centuries and has typologically converged towards the local languages Tamil and Sinhala (Smith et al. 2004, Smith & Paauw 2006, Ansaldi 2005, 2008, Nordhoff 2009). Given these historical facts, three possible origins for the copula can be suggested: Indonesian varieties of Malay, Sinhala or Tamil. In this section, I will discuss the copula-like structures we find in these languages and the possibility of their influence on the development of Sri Lanka Malay.

##### **4.1 Copulas in Indonesian varieties**

In Indonesian there are two copulas, *adalah* and *ialah*, which are restricted to very formal varieties. Sneddon (2006:98f) informs us that

[t]he copulas *adalah* and *ialah* optionally occur in F[ormal ] I[ndonesian] to link a subject and nominal predicate, and sometimes an adjectival predicate [...] with *adalah* being considerably more common than *ialah*.

*Adalah* also occurs in C[olloquial ]J[akarta ]I[ndonesian], although it is very rare; in about half the texts it did not occur. In most of the others it occurred with very limited frequency. It was only in the meetings and in the two most formal interviews [...] that it occurred frequently. [...] It can be said that *adalah* is marked for formality while *ialah*, being entirely absent from CJI, is very highly marked for formality.

The immigrants to Sri Lanka were mostly soldiers temporarily garrisoned in Batavia/Jakarta and spoke a very colloquial variety of Malay, remote from any formal standard (Adelaar 1991, Smith et al. 2004, Nordhoff 2009). It is unlikely that Formal Indonesian (or the



equivalent historical variety) had a significant impact on their speech. The sociolinguistic profile of Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian is closer to what would have been appropriate for the immigrants, although the relations between the colloquial varieties of the 17th century and the contemporary varieties are not exactly straightforward (Grijns 1991, Adelaar & Prentice 1996). The copula *adalah* can be found in CJI, although it is extremely rare. The following is an example of the copula in informal speech.

- (23) Yang pasti bakal ngebikin gua terpesona banget **adalah**  
 cewek dengan rambut panjang yang tergerai, terus anggun CJI  
 which certain will make me enchanted very COPULA  
 girl with hair long which flowing then elegant  
 ‘What would certainly very much enchant me is an elegant girl  
 with long flowing hair.’ (Sneddon 2006:79)

This specificational use of the copula in (23) is similar to example (14), repeated as (24) for convenience.

- (24) [Itthu vakthu kithang=nang nya-aada] **asàdhaathang** ini JVP  
 katha hathu *problem*.  
 DIST time 1PL=DAT PAST-exist COPULA PROX JVP  
 QUOT INDEF *problem*.  
 ‘What we had at that time was the so-called JVP-problem.’  
 (K051206nar10)

While the functional properties of the copulas in CJI and SLM are similar, they are morphologically very different. The Indonesian form is composed of the existential plus the imperative/emphatic clitic, but the Sri Lankan form is composed of the verb ‘to come’ and the conjunctive participle prefix *asà-*. The possibility that a construction involving a copula crossed the Bay of Bengal with the immigrants cannot be excluded, but given the formal register with which this construction occurs in Indonesia, this is not very likely. An additional argument against a historical relatedness between the SLM and CJI constructions is the use of *dhaathang* ‘come’ in SLM. *Dhaathang* would have had to replace the existential *ada* without any particular motivation. One reason for the replacement of the morphological composition of the copula could be influence from the adstrates. This will be discussed in the following section.

## 4.2 Copulas in Sinhala and Tamil

Colloquial Sinhala has no copula as such, but uses a predicative suffix *-yi* on adjectives ending with a vowel (25). Adjectives which end in a consonant (26), and other word classes ending in any sound do not take this suffix (27)-(28).

- (25) mee amu miris hari særa-yi COLLOQUIAL SINHALA  
prox raw chillis really strong-YI  
'These green chillies are really strong.' (Gair 2003:794)

- (26) mee dawaswələ haal bohoma ganang???(*-yi*) COLLOQUIAL  
SINHALA  
prox days rice very expensive(-YI)  
'These days (uncooked) rice is very expensive.' (Gair  
2003:795)

- (27) mamə govi-yek(*-yi*) COLLOQUIAL SINHALA  
1s farmer-INDEF.ANIM(-YI)  
'I am a farmer.' (Gair 1998:241)

- (28) maɽə - niwaadɽu(*-yi*) COLLOQUIAL SINHALA  
1s-DAT vacation(-YI)  
'I'm on vacation.' (Gair 2003:794)

In Literary Sinhala, a similar suffix *-mi* is also used for nominal predications, as in (29).

- (29) mama goviyekmi LITERARY SINHALA  
1s-NOM farmer.NOM.1SG  
'I am a farmer.' (Gair 1998:242)

There is some discussion of whether *mi* in should indeed be analyzed as a copula, or rather as an agreement suffix (Gair 1998:242). Whatever the right analysis of *-mi* and similar forms, it is clear that the variety of Sinhala the Malays were exposed to did not feature this form. The most copula-like element they are likely to have encountered is *-yi*, which does not suggest itself as a possible model for the Sri Lanka Malay copula. Its form as a suffix is very different from the verbal form employed by Sri Lanka Malay, and its use for adjectival predications is precisely one where the use of the Sri Lanka Malay copula is not found.

In Tamil, the existential *iru* is sometimes analyzed as a copula.

This verb is used for predications of existence as in (30) but also for locational predications as in (31).

- (30) kumaar-ukku oru paiyan iru-kkir-aan TAMIL  
 Kumar-DAT one boy IRU-PRES-3SM  
 ‘Kumar has one boy/There exists one boy to Kumar.’ (Lehmann 1989:188)

- (31) inta·k kiraama-tt-il muunru koovil (iru-kkir-atu) TAMIL  
 this village-OBL-LOC three temple IRU-PRES-3SN  
 ‘There are three temples in this village.’ (Lehmann 1989:173)<sup>2</sup>

Uses for property word predications (32) and nominal predications (33) are ungrammatical.

- (32) paippu mukkiyam (\*irukkiratu) TAMIL  
 education importance (IRU.3SN)  
 ‘Education is important.’ (Lehmann 1989:172)

- (33) kumaar vakkiil (\*irukkiratu/\*irukkiraan) TAMIL  
 Kumar lawyer (IRU.3SN/IRU.3SM)  
 ‘Kumar is a lawyer.’ (Lehmann 1989:171)

While in (32) and (33) the English translational equivalent has a copula, it does not seem appropriate to grant the same status to the Tamil form. An analysis as an existential can cover both the meanings given in (30) and (31), namely ‘A boy exists (for Kumar)’ and ‘Temples exist in this village’, while excluding the readings ‘Education exists importance’ and ‘Kumar exists a lawyer’. This is precisely what we find in (32) and (33). It is true that *iru* is sometimes found in nominal predications as in (34), but in that case, the noun is adverbialized by *aakalaay*, and the construction can actually be shown to have a locational reading as well (cf. Lehmann 1989:174).

- (34) kumaar vakkiil-aakalaay iru-nt-aan TAMIL  
 Kumar lawyer-ADV IRU-PAST-3SM  
 ‘Kumar was a lawyer.’ (Lehmann 1989:174)

Whatever analysis one prefers for *iru*, this Tamil form seems to be

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<sup>2</sup>The dot · separates the grammatical word from the first part of a long consonant which is the result of certain morphosyntactic environments. The words in isolation would be *inta* and *kiraama*. One could also choose to write *inta kkiraama* to correctly represent pronunciation and orthography, but Lehmann chooses to leave the first part of the long consonant as the coda of the preceding syllable, although he separates it with a dot to indicate the special status.

more closely related to the Sri Lanka Malay existential *aada*, which would be used for translations of (30) and (31), given in (35) and (36).<sup>3</sup>

(35) Ini nigiri=ka thiiga koovil aada SLM

PROX village=LOC THREE temple EXIST

‘There are three (Hindu) temples in this village.’

(36) Kumaar=nang hatthu aanak klaaki aada SLM

Kumar=DAT one child male EXIST

‘Kumar has one boy.’

While *iru* and *aada* are quite similar, the parallels between *iru* and (*asà*)*dhaathang(apa)* are less striking, and it seems unlikely that Sri Lanka Malay emulated the Tamil form *iru* with (*asà*)*dhaathang(apa)*. Sinhala and Tamil both have conjunctive participles as well. The conjunctive participle forms of the verb meaning ‘to come’ in Sinhala (*ævillaa*) and Tamil (*vantu*) are not used in a copular sense in these languages; they can only be used in the original reading of temporal anteriority.

(37)a. lamayaa pantiya=ɟa ævillaa,

child class=DAT come.CP

‘The child came to the class and/The child having come to class,’

b. liyuma livvaa SINHALA

letter write

‘(He) wrote the letter.’ (Karunatilake 2004:161)

(38)a. naa[ai kumaar va-ntu,

tomorrow Kumar come-CP

‘Tomorrow Kumar will come and/Kumar having come tomorrow,’

b. eṇka[-ai-c canti-pp-aan TAMIL

1PL-ACC meet-FUT-3SM

‘(he) will meet us.’ (Lehmann 1989:267)

To sum up, while the Malay ancestor language, and Sinhala and Tamil all have structures which come at least close to a copula, none of these structures is similar enough to the SLM structure as to suggest itself as the driving force behind the development of the copula in Sri Lanka

<sup>3</sup>Note that *aada* SLM is only an existential, whereas the historically related form in Colloquial Jakarta Indonesian *adalah* (Section 4.1) is a copula which can also be used for non-existential predications, e.g. as in (23).

Malay. It thus seems likely that the copula in Sri Lanka Malay is an independent development.

## 5 The emergence of copulas

The most common etymological source for copulas is an existential (Munro 1977) or a positional verb (Stassen 1997:94). Stassen illustrates this with data from Kiowa, gathered by Watkins; I shall repeat this data here.<sup>4</sup> In (39) we see the last reflexes of the original positional/locational use of *do:*. This locational use has given way to the general use of *do:* as a copula, which can be seen in (40). In return, most of the original uses of *do:* for locational purposes are now expressed by other morphemes, e.g. *-cél* in (41). *Do:* has thus nearly fully completed the grammaticalization from locational verb to copula.

- (39) p'ó· hě· gyà-dó· K<sub>IOWA</sub>  
 moon gone PL-be  
 'There is (temporarily) no moon.' (Watkins 1984:216)

- (40) té· kóygú bà-dó· K<sub>IOWA</sub>  
 all Kiowa 2PL-be  
 'You are all Kiowas.' (Watkins 1984:227)

- (41) é-gó yí· ól è-cél kí·còy-kyà K<sub>IOWA</sub>  
 here two hair 3DUAL-be.in soup-in  
 'There are two pieces of hair in the soup.' (Watkins 1984:211)

The other common source for copulas are pronouns. This can be seen in the famous example from Chinese (Li & Thompson 1977).

- (42) jì yù qí shēng yòu yù qí sǐ, **shì** huò yě ARCHAIC CHINESE  
 already wish 3SG live also wish 3SG die this indecision DCL  
 'Wishing him to live and wishing him to die, this is indecision.' (Li & Thompson 1977:424)

The demonstrative *shì* in this construction type was reanalyzed as a copula *shì* (Li & Thompson 1977:424).

- (43) nèi-ge rén **shì** xuéshēng MODERN MANDARIN  
 that-CLF man COP student  
 'That man is a student' (Li & Thompson 1977:422)

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<sup>4</sup>Stassen uses the 1980 PhD-thesis; in this article, I use the newer version (Watkins 1984) and put stripped diacritics back in place.

In addition to Chinese, this pattern is for instance found in Hebrew and Arabic as well as in a number of North American and African languages (Stassen 1997:77–91).

With regard to Sri Lanka Malay, we can say that the existential *aada* is different from *asàdhaathangapa* and does not seem to be very much grammaticalized towards a copula. The deictics *ini* and *itthu* are not recruited for copular purposes either.

Changes from lexical meanings like ‘coming’ to more grammatical meanings like ‘COPULA’ have been investigated under the umbrella of grammaticalization. The verb ‘come’ is a frequent source of a number of grammatical functions so that an investigation of the directions of development of this verb might shed light on what we find in Sri Lanka Malay. Stassen (1997:92) notes that a minor class of sources for the grammaticalization of copulas includes motion verbs like ‘go’ and ‘come’, but unfortunately he does not cite languages illustrating the ‘come’-case so that it is not possible to compare the Sri Lanka Malay case to other purported instances of this path.

## 6 Grammaticalization paths of COME

In the languages of the world, verbs meaning ‘to come’ often undergo grammaticalization and can be used for a variety of grammatical functions. In French, *venir de* is used to express immediate past, but the venitive meaning is bleached: it is possible to say *Jean vient de partir*, literally ‘John comes from leaving’, meaning that John has just left (and not that he has just come back). Heine & Kuteva (2002:68–78) list a number of grammaticalization targets for COME: consecutive, continuous, hortative, venitive, ablative, near past, benefactive, change-of-state, future, proximative and purpose. The copula is not found among them. The closest example to a copular use of COME I am aware of is the use as an auxiliary in passive constructions, as found in Italian. In Italian, the verb *venire* can be used to form passives as in (44). Those passives always have a dynamic interpretation.<sup>5</sup>

- (44) Era chiaro che i ragazzi veni-vano maltratta-t-i ITALIAN  
 was clear that the children come-3PL.IMPFT illtreat-PPL-PL  
 ‘It was obvious [that] the children were being ill-treated.’  
 (Maiden & Robustelli 2000:282)

As in the Sri Lanka Malay case, the verb meaning ‘to come’ has lost its original venitive meaning. There is no motion towards the deictic

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<sup>5</sup>For some diachronic information on this development, see Michaelis (1997) and Giacalone Ramat (2000).

center involved in (44). In Italian as in Sri Lanka Malay, the verb meaning ‘to come’ is completely bleached and serves a purely grammatical function, which would in both cases be fulfilled in English by the copula ‘to be’. However, the similarities end here. In Italian, *venire* is used as an auxiliary for diathesis, which is part of a larger construction involving a past participle. Both the auxiliary and the participle agree in number with the subject of the sentence. In the Sri Lanka Malay case, the absence of other verbs in the sentence suggests that *asàdhaathang* is not an auxiliary. There is no participle either, let alone agreement. Furthermore, the Sri Lanka Malay copula typically surfaces in intransitive, non-verbal predications, while the Italian passive construction with *venire* requires at least a bivalent verb. The Italian construction has a dynamic reading, while in the Sri Lanka Malay cases, a stative reading is the norm. For naming uses for instance, a dynamic reading is completely excluded. This all suggests that the grammaticalization path of Sri Lanka Malay *dhaathang* ‘come’ is not comparable to Italian *venire*, nor to any other of the cases discussed in Heine & Kuteva (2002). With the knowledge we have today, it seems that this grammaticalization from COME to a copula is unique to Sri Lanka Malay.

## 7 Possible grammaticalization paths

In the preceding sections, I have ruled out inheritance of the copula construction or emergence through language contact. I have also shown that the existing literature on grammaticalization paths does not cover the phenomenon encountered in Sri Lanka Malay. Given this paucity of literature to hook on to, some speculation as to the possible development may be warranted. One possible path from COME to the copula would lead over an intermediate resultative stage. This resultative reading of come is found for instance in English constructions like (45).

(45) A dream come true

In this case, the original motion meaning of *to come* has been lost. There is no spatial motion involved. What remains is the change of state from A to A’, which is also what we observe in motion events like *John came home from work*. In (45), the state of the dream changes from unrealized to realized/true.<sup>6</sup> While in English, this resultative reading is restricted to a small set of words (*\*A man come tall*, *\*A T-shirt come grey*), in other languages, it has a wider application. In

<sup>6</sup>Note also that the string *come* is present in English *become*, and *venir* ‘come’ is found in French *devenir* ‘become’ and several Romance cognates.

To'aba'ita, the verb *mai* 'come' has an ingressive/resultative meaning when used with a property concept as in (46).

- (46) fanua-'e    rodo    na-mai    To'ABA'ITA  
 place-it:PFV be.dark PERF-come  
 'It has become dark.' (Lichtenberk 1991:487)

Heine & Kuteva (2002:74) note that "[t]his grammaticalization appears to be particularly common in pidgin and creole languages." While it is not entirely clear whether Sri Lanka Malay should be seen as a Creole (Smith & Paauw 2006) or not (Ansaldi 2008, Nordhoff 2009), it is clear that the immigrants to Sri Lanka spoke Vehicular Malay, a trade language for inter-ethnic communication which has been likened to a pidgin (Adelaar & Prentice 1996). As such, it is interesting to note that Fa d'Ambu Creole Portuguese (47), Guyanese Creole French (48), and Seychelles Creole French (49) show the resultative reading of the verb meaning 'to come' as well.<sup>7</sup>

- (47) tyipa    bi    sxa    dual eli kumu pasa    FA D'AMBU  
 stomach come PART hurt 3s east surpass  
 'His stomach hurt; he had eaten to much.' (Post 1992:159)

- (48) i    vini    malad    GUAYANESE CREOLE FRENCH  
 3s come sick  
 'He has become sick.' (Corne 1971:90)

- (49) i    n    vin    larpâter    SEYCHELLES CREOLE FRENCH  
 he CPL come surveyor  
 'He became a surveyor.' (Corne 1977:80)

The grammaticalization from 'to come' to a resultative marker is the first step in a grammaticalization chain I want to propose. The second case involves the change from resultative to stative. For this case, especially the Seychelles Creole French example in (49) is interesting. It shows a great resemblance to one of the main uses of the SLM copula, namely membership in a (professional class) as in (11) or also in (50) below.

- (50) Umma=pe    baapa    dhaathangapa    hathu    *inspector of police*. SLM  
 mother=POSS father COPULA    INDEF inspector of police.  
 'My mother's father was an inspector of police.'

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<sup>7</sup>Furthermore, this is also found in Ghanaian Pidgin English (Huber 1996) and Chinook Jargon (Grant 1996:236).



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The difference between the Seychelles Creole French example in (49) and the Sri Lanka Malay example in (50) is the change from resultative to stative. The Seychellois sentence is necessarily resultative, while the SLM sentence is necessarily stative. In the Sri Lanka Malay sentence, the information is not about the grandfather having passed an exam, thereby becoming an inspector of police (unlike the Seychellois surveyor). Rather, it is the first mentioning of the grandfather in this text, indicating his profession as a stative predicate without forcing a resultative interpretation.

However, it is logically necessary that the grandfather must have made the step from prospective inspector of police to certified inspector of police at one point in time since it is unlikely that he was born inspector. With many predicates there is a reciprocal entailment between the stative reading and a prior ingressive/resultative one. This is especially true for predicates of profession: If you become a professor, you are then a professor; if you are a priest, you must have become a priest before.<sup>8</sup> The second step of the grammaticalization chain is then the change from a resultative reading entailing stative to a pure stative reading. This is likely to have been pioneered by predicates of profession, which are still one of the most frequent predicates found with the copula in Sri Lanka Malay. Only later would other predicates where a resultative meaning is impossible (e.g. sex) have followed suit. The proposed development can then be summarized as follows:

(51) come

> resultative

> resultative entailing stative

> copula (professions)

> copula (other predicates)

## 8 Conclusion

Sri Lanka Malay has a copula, which is mainly used for naming and predications of class membership, although some information structure use, especially with regard to topic and comment, is also found. This copula is derived from the conjunctive participle form of the verb *dhaathang* ‘come’. Neither the formal properties of the copula, nor its functional uses show parallels to any of the possible languages of origin, i.e. Indonesian varieties, Sinhala, or Tamil. This suggests an independent development. This independent development, however, is

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<sup>8</sup>A similar case of resultative entailing a subsequent stative reading is Latin *cognovi* in the perfect, literally ‘I have learnt’, which very often means ‘I know now’ with a present reading.

not of a type attested in the literature on grammaticalization and seems to be a new grammaticalization path which has not yet been found. While further research is needed, a promising hypothesis is the development through an intermediate stage of a resultative marker, as found in other contact languages like Seychelles Creole French. This marker would then lose its resultative reading for predicates of profession and become a semantically void copula, which then spreads to other types of intransitive predication.

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