METRICALLY CONDITIONED VOWEL ALTERNATION IN COLLOQUIAL SINHALA

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Vowel alternations in Colloquial Sinhala include both quantitative and qualitative changes and occur in derivational as well as inflectional paradigms. In the first section we present two rules: a rule of final vowel shortening (quantity alternation), and a rule of vowel reduction (quality alternation). In the second section we argue that both rules are sensitive to underlying metrical structures. The third section is a summary of our findings and includes some remarks about the relationship between metrical structure and stress:

1. Two Rules
1.1 Final Vowel Shortening
1.1.1 Monosyllables

In monosyllabic nouns a final vowel is always long:

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\- \( /\text{vi/} /\text{du/} /\text{le/} /\text{ræ/} /\text{to/} /\text{ra/} /\text{paddy/} /\text{daughter/} /\text{blood/} /\text{night/} /\text{you/} /\text{derogatory/} /\text{toddy/} \)

1.1.2 Disyllables

In disyllabic nouns ending in vowels, length is conditioned as follows: if the first syllable is light, the final vowel can be long or short. There is an apparent restriction on the quality of short final vowels in that only /\text{a/} /\text{æ/} /\text{i/} /\text{u/} /\text{are observed to occur,} \) while no such distributional gap exists for final long vowels.

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\- \( /\text{short vowel final/} /\text{kiri/} /\text{bli/} /\text{pori/} /\text{bulu/} /\text{milk/} /\text{a kind of exorcism/} /\text{popped corn/} /\text{a tree/} \)

1. A further complication to this general statement is the h-conditioning effect, whereby a vowel immediately preceding an /h/ often transmits its quality to the vocalic position immediately following. By this rule non-high vowels can occur word finally, as in the words gaha 'tree' and ðæ hæ 'eye'.