

SPOKEN SINHALA VOCALISM

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0. The purpose of this article is to make a brief structural classification of the vowels in Spoken Sinhala (= SS.)
1. The inventory of vowels* in SS. is as follows:

i, i:, e, e:, æ, æ:, ə, (ə:), a, a:, u, u:, o, o: .

- 1.1 Of these, the vowel ' ə: ' is of very limited occurrence and is restricted only to loan words from English. As far as the adopted forms are concerned ' ə: ' usually occurs in monosyllabic words, either in the absolute initial position or medially.

ə:t 'earth-wires', š ə:t 'shirts',

p ə:s 'purses' are some examples.

This vowel does not enter into any phonological alternation with any of the other vowels and its seeming quantitative contrast with ' ə ' is only a surface feature. Considering the highly restricted stock of items containing ' ə: ' and its non-contrastive distribution in relation to ' ə ', one may be tempted to group them together as allophones of a single phoneme / ə / This is however phonologically unrealistic since they do not show up with any underlying relationship as to be expected in morphophonemic alternations. Hence it can be excluded from the central phonological system of SS.

- 1.2 The vowel ' ə ' occurs in the following environments:

1. in open syllables, (a) initially, in the forms k ə r ə - 'do' and k ə l ə 'done', and after consonant clusters with a sonorant / spirant as the last member.

* The consonants of SS. are : p, b, ^hb, m, t, d, ^hd, n, t, d, ^hd, c, j, ñ, k, g, ^hg, y, r, l, v, s, š, h, (f)