

Abstract 04

The Discrepancy between the Orthography and the Phonetic Representation of the Sinhalese Inscriptions: A Historical Linguistic Study

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Sinhalese is a language which has a number of inscriptions helpful in studying its evolution. Its first inscriptions, as already known belong to the 3rd century B.C. Early inscriptions are known as Brahmi Inscriptions. Attempts have been made to identify the pronunciation of those inscriptions and the scholars who studied Sinhalese inscriptions hold the standpoint that they were read as they existed. However, accordingly historical linguistic observations, this notion can not be considered accurate. This can be studied in a scientific manner. Historical linguistic theory is the basic framework of this study which is based on the pronunciation of the Sinhalese inscriptions. It is revealed that reading inscriptions of the Brahmi period was different from their writings. For an example, (Sanskrit) satva > (Pali) satta > (Sinhalese) sata is the treatment of the word 'sata' in early Brahmi inscriptions. Views based on historical phonology of Sinhalese show that the intervocalic 't' sound changes into 'y' in later period of the Sinhalese language. (gata > giya, mata > miya etc.) Nevertheless the word 'sata' can be seen as 'sat' in later inscriptions too. It indicates that the word was not read as it was written. The way it is read should be 'satta' with the conjunct consonants. It is the reason for the preservation of 't' sound throughout the periods although it is written with a single consonant. There are much more examples to prove this point of view. In conclusion, this investigation shows that the pronunciation of the Sinhalese inscriptions was not as same as their writings.

Key words: historical linguistics, reading, Sinhalese inscriptions, treatment, writing