

Sources of Sinhala Retroflex Literal Sound /ɻ/ and Its Distribution: A Historical Linguistic Study

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Abstract

Sinhala is an Indo-Aryan Language which is full of historical documents to study its history. Though it is an Indo-Aryan language, the Sinhala Language has been in contact with different languages, notably Tamil. This feature can be illustrated from the phonemic system of the language. The main purpose of this research is to study the historical sources and the distribution of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound /ɻ/. The problem of this research is to investigate whether there are different sources and distributional diversity of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. As for the objectives of the research, it is focused on studying the historical status, identifying the different sources, and investigating the distribution of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. Historical linguistic principles are used in this research and the main focus is on Sinhala Historical Phonology. The internal reconstruction method is used mainly in the research. Literary and inscriptional documents are used in this research and the data is categorized under different methods. In conclusion, it can be stated that the Sinhala retroflex literal sound has multi-sources and a distributional diversity. As such, the Sinhala retroflex literal sound has three sources as it has been borrowed directly from the source language i.e., Sanskrit and Pali, gradually changing from the source languages and originating in the language itself. In the case of borrowing, Sanskrit and Pali Tamil /ɻ/ has been borrowed into the Sinhala language. The Sanskrit and Pali - t^h , t , d^h , d sounds have been gradually changed into the Sinhala. /ɻ/ sound, which occurs in indigenous words, belonging to the Sinhala substratum. Finally, it can be concluded that the Sinhala retroflex literal sound /ɻ/ has multiple sources and a distributional diversity.

Keywords: Distribution, Historical Phonology, Sinhala Retroflex Literal Sound /ɻ/, Sources

1. Introduction

The Sinhala Language is an Indo-Aryan language with a number of literary and inscriptional documents to study its historical development. Though it is highly influenced by Tamil and other several languages, it still shares Indo - Aryan genetic features. Technically, these features are called 'Underline Phonological Rules'. These types of rules are used by linguists to recognize the exact genetic relation of languages. According to W.S. Karunathilake, the significant differences between Sinhala and Tamil are based on underlying phonological rules. Underlying phonological rules of the Sinhala language are vowel-based, whereas those rules are consonant-based in the Tamil language. Hence, it can be stated that these two languages, i.e., Sinhala and Tamil, are genetically unrelated though there is a divergence between them.

The Sinhala language has a lot of evidence that can be used to study its gradual change. There are two main types of evidence that are applicable in historical linguistic studies on the Sinhala language, namely;

1. Documentary evidence
2. Descriptive statements on the phonology and morphophonemics of modern colloquial Sinhala language.⁵⁰

In the case of documentary evidence, there is inscriptional evidence and literary evidence that clearly shows the change of the Sinhala language from the 3rd century B.C. to the contemporary period. Based on this evidence, different kinds of research can be conducted on historical phonology, morphology, syntax, and semantics of the Sinhala language. This research is related to the historical phonology of the Sinhala language.

The Sinhala Language is a diglossic language. There is an evident disparity between the spoken and the written varieties of the language. The difference between these two varieties can be analyzed based on the subsystems of the Sinhala language, i.e., phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic subsystems. Diglossia is an essential concept of this research as this research focuses on the sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound /ɻ/ and its distribution. In the modern Sinhala language, the retroflex literal sound /ɻ/ is only used in the written variety as the contrast between the retroflex literal sound /ɻ/ and the post-alveolar literal sound /ʃ/ has now disappeared from the spoken variety of the Sinhala language. However, historically,

⁵⁰ W.S.Karunathilaka, Historical Phonology of Sinhala(Colombo: Godage and Brothers),1-2.

it has been proven that the contrastive distribution of these two literal sounds was represented in both the colloquial Sinhala language and the written Sinhala language.

In historical linguistics, there are different methods that can be applied to study the prehistorical linguistic information of a language. At times, this prehistoric information does not occur in documents. Therefore, such information is called 'Reconstructed Linguistics Information'. Internal Reconstruction is one of the methods used by historical linguists to analyze the language pre-history. This theory can only be applied to one language. As a result of applying this method, many important details regarding the prehistory of a specific language can be discovered. For example, the sound related to this research, i.e., retroflex literal sound, is only used as a post-alveolar sound. Yet, according to historical linguistic studies, there were two individual phonemes in the Sinhala language such as /l/ and /ɭ/. Inflectional morphological varieties reflect the contrastive distribution of these two sounds. Technically, these varieties are called morphophonemic alternations. In such cases, linguists construct two different phonemes for the two sounds where each phoneme represents a different alternation. For example, in the colloquial Sinhala language, the distinction between the retroflex literal sound and the dental-literal sound is not available, but in the inflection, there is a disparity between these two sounds which can be analyzed as below.

1. balu + ā > ballā
mahalu + ā > mahallā
kolu + ā > kollā
2. nalu + ā > naluvā
elu + ā > eluvā
kalu + ā > kaluvā

As shown above, in the first set of examples, the /l/ sound has been reduplicated when the nominative case suffix is added (e.g., l > ll). However, in the second set of examples, the /l/ sound is preserved as an individual sound. It conveys that the same sound behaves as a different sound in the two instances. Based on this information, linguists conclude that though they exist as an individual sound unit in contemporary colloquial speech, they are genetically related to two sources. Therefore, two different phonemes can be reconstructed as /l/ and /ɭ/. If it is the /l/ sound, it can be reduplicated in the nominative case inflection, but this phonological process does not occur in the case of the /ɭ/ sound.

As discussed above, the Sinhala retroflex literal sound has some distributional restrictions. It does not occur in the modern colloquial Sinhala language but in the written Sinhala language. Even though it occurs in the written variety of the language, there is morphophonemic evidence to prove the existence of the sound in the spoken variety. It indicates that the retroflex literal sound occurs in the colloquial variety of Sinhala language as a zero phoneme. Hence, the term, retroflex literal sound, can be used for the sound /l/. This research is focused on investigating the multi-sources of this sound. The present research aims to investigate the following research problem; what are the resources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound / l / ? In order to study the multi-sources of this sound, historical documents can be analyzed, and the words that contain this sound can be compared with their cognates. There are different types of documents that can be utilized to investigate the history of the Sinhala language, such as inscriptional documents, literary documents, and Sigiri graffiti.

The main objective of this research is to study the origin of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound and its historical relation with the source languages. There are three other sub-objectives of this research which are as follows.

1. To study the historical status of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound.
2. To identify the multi-sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound.
3. To analyze the historical distribution of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound.

The main problem of this research is whether there are different sources and distributional diversity of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. The following research questions are focused in this research.

1. What are the sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound?
2. Is it possible to exemplify the multi-sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound?
3. What are the distributional features of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound?

2. Literature review

A number of research has been carried out on the historical phonology of the Sinhala language. These research play a very significant role in understanding the historical development of the Sinhala phonemic inventory. The focus of these investigations lie mainly on the distribution of the Sinhala phonemes and innovations and preservations of the Sinhala phonemic system.

Professor W.S. Karunathilaka, a professor of Linguistics at the Department of Linguistics, University of Kelaniya, has conducted his PhD research work on the topic of '*Historical Phonology of Sinhala*', submitted to the Graduate school of Cornell University, USA, in 1969. This work traces the history of Sinhala language from the 3rd century B.C to the 14th century A.D. The earliest documents of the Sinhala language relate to the 3rd century B.C. and the 14th century A.D. marks the origin of the modern Sinhala language. From the 3rd century B.C to the 14th century A.D., there are several stages in the evolution of the Sinhala language. Karunathilaka's research focuses on those stages, and it attempts to study the growth of Sinhala phonemic system. Though this study aspires to examine the history of the Sinhala phonemic system, it is not individually focused on the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. It only provides general information about the sound.

Professor P.B.F. Wijeratne, a professor of Sinhala at the Department of Sinhala, University of Kelaniya, has conducted his PhD thesis on the topic '*Phonology of Sinhalese Inscriptions Up to the End of the Tenth Century A.D.*'. Wijerathana's research work extensively analyses the historical development of Sinhala phonology, but it does not focus on individual sound changes in the Sinhala language. On a similar note to Karunathilaka's research work, Wijerathana's research also aims to inquire about the historical phonological features of the Sinhala language. Since the present research aims to study the origin of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound (i.e., multi-sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound), the focal point of this research is not fully identified in Wijeratne's thesis.

Besides these two PhD research work by Sinhala Linguists, there are several books in which the content of this research is discussed. Professor Wilhelm Giger is one of the best scholars who has done extensive studies on the Sinhala language. He has mainly focused on the history of the Sinhala language, and he has distinguished the history of the Sinhala language into four stages based on the phonological developments. Giger's grammar, titled '*A Grammar of the Sinhala Language*', provides more information regarding the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. According to Giger, the Sinhala retroflex literal sound, which has different sources, is used in different positions. Nevertheless, this study does not contain any clear source of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound and its historical development.

The second Grammar work was composed by professor S. Paranawithana, under the title of '*Grammar of Sigiri Graffiti*'. Paranawithana has discussed the Sinhala retroflex literal sound in his study within the limited purview of Sigiri Graffiti without any reference made to any other documents. Owing to this limitation, his research does not include a fully detailed discussion about Sinhala retroflex literal sound.

There are other research works in which the Sinhala retroflex literal sound is studied, but they focus more on the orthography than the sound sources. Hence, these works cannot be considered as studies done on the historical phonology of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound.

3. Research Methodology

As this research is a diachronic linguistic study, it mainly focuses on Sinhala historical phonology. The main purpose of this research is to investigate the origin of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound / ʃ /. Since this study is concerned with historical linguistics, research methods that are applied in historical linguistics are employed here to study the origin of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. Specifically, The Internal Reconstruction Method is applied to identify the historical status of the sound. Based on this method, this study will determine whether there was a contrastive distribution between the retroflex literal sound and the post-alveolar literal sound in the Sinhala language. It will further determine whether the retroflex literal sound is a phoneme or an allophone.

The data is collected by observing different documents in the Sinhala language in which the occurrence of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound in various stages of the development of the Sinhala phonological system can be recognized, i.e., inscriptional documents, literary documents, and Sigiri graffiti. In collecting data, the environments in which the sound occurs, i.e., word-initial position, word-middle position, inter-vocalic position, and word-final position are also considered.

The collected data set was separated into different categories based on the position in which the sound occurs. Following the classification, the words with the retroflex literal sound were thoroughly analyzed in the purpose of perceiving the sources of the sound. Subsequently, the data set was further divided into four categories based on the analysis. Finally, the result is presented in accordance to linguistic bases.

4. Findings and Discussion

This research is carried out for the purposes of investigating the different sources of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. As a result of this research, it can be stated that there are three evident sources for the Sinhala retroflex literal sound / ʃ /, namely.

1. The / ʃ / sound which was derived from the gradual sound change.
2. The / ʃ / sound which was borrowed from the source languages.
3. The / ʃ / sound which was originated in the Sinhala language.

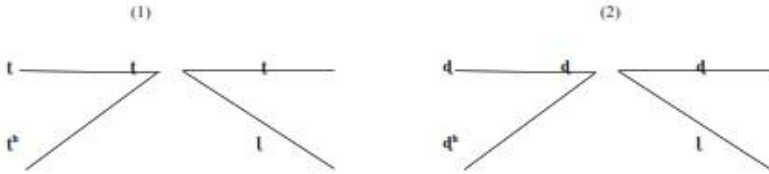
These three sources can be analyzed with historical documents of Sinhala language that reveal the historical phonological status of the sound.

1. The / ʈ / Sound which was derived from the gradual sound change.

As for the first source of the retroflex literal sound / ʈ /, it is evident that the sound has originated because of the gradual change of the retroflex plosive sounds. Those sounds can be named as follows.

- I. Retroflex aspirated plosive voiceless sound - / ʈ^h /
- II. Retroflex non-aspirated plosive voiceless sound - / ʈ /
- III. Retroflex aspirated plosive voiced sound - / ɖ^h /
- IV. Retroflex non-aspirated plosive voiced sound - / ɖ /

In the historical stage of the Sinhala language, the following sound changes have occurred in the development of the Sinhala phonemic inventory.



These two diagrams show the gradual change of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound. According to this, retroflex plosive sounds in Sanskrit and Pali languages have been changed and adapted into the Sinhala language as / ʈ / even though they are sometimes represented as plosive sounds in the Sinhala language. The following words illustrate this phonological change.

- I. kevul⁵¹ (fisherman) < kevattṭa (pali) < kevarṭa (Sanskrit)
- II. atuḷa⁵² (spread) < atthṣṭa (pali) < a:stṛṭa (Sanskrit)
- III. taḷa⁵³ (pool) < aḷa:ga (pali /Sanskrit)

⁵¹ S.S. Shabdakoshaya, 1999. p.293

⁵² Ebid.p.5

⁵³ Sumangala Shabdakoshaya, 1999.p.397

2. The / ʃ / sound which was borrowed or similar to the source languages.

There is plenty of evidence to prove the existence of the retroflex literal sound in source languages of the Sinhala language. Even though the retroflex literal sound is not available in the classical Sanskrit language, it appears in the Vedic Sanskrit language. There was even a unique character for the retroflex literal sound in Vedic Sanskrit. In the middle Indo-Aryan stage of Indic languages, i.e., Prakrit languages including Pali, Ashoka, etc., the retroflex literal was used. In addition to this there are words that are directly borrowed from the Pali language which contain the retroflex literal sound. For example, the word 'kaʃu' ('kalu' in colloquial Sinhala) includes the above-mentioned retroflex sound. This word is borrowed from the Pali word 'kāḷa' (Black). Therefore, the Retroflex literal sound was preserved in the word 'kaʃu' in Sinhala. The word 'uʃunka' (spoon) in Pali has changed into Sinhala as 'ʃu'.

āʃavaka > aʃav (a name of a devil)

āʃaka > aʃu (a prop, support)

There are words borrowed from the Tamil language containing the retroflex literal sound in Sinhala as exemplified below.

agaʃa < ahaʃi⁵⁴

āḍapaʃi < aḍappaʃi⁵⁵

ānamāʃu < āneivāʃei⁵⁶

iʃavva < iʃau⁵⁷

The Retroflex literal sound of these borrowed words is etymologically related to the Tamil Language.

3. The / ʃ / sound which was originated in the Sinhala Language.

The third evident origin of the Sinhala retroflex literal sound points towards the Sinhala language itself, as some words that contain the Sinhala sound / ʃ / have originated within the Sinhala language itself. Professor J.B. Disanayaka distinguishes such words as 'indigenous words'.

⁵⁴ Coparahewa, S., Arunachalam, S., A Dictionary of Tamil Word in Sinhala, 2011. P.27

⁵⁵ ibid. p.31

⁵⁶ ibid. p.32

⁵⁷ ibid. p.34

The remainder of words in the Sinhala language, excluding loan words and cognates, are considered indigenous words.⁵⁸ As professor J.B. Disanayaka indicates, the following words are indigenous words in the Sinhala language, containing the retroflex literal sound /ɭ/.

1. mā|u (fish)
2. ri|ā (monkey)
3. o|uva (head)
4. su|aɳ (wind)⁵⁹

In addition to these words, professor W.S. Karunathilake shows the word 'ka|ava' as an indigenous word in Sinhala containing the /ɭ / sound. 'Sidathsangarawa' also includes two noun bases containing the /ɭ / sound, which are considered indigenous words.

Eg: ko|aā (a place)

kara|u (new cloths)⁶⁰

Based on these words, it can be stated that there is an indigenous /ɭ / sound in the Sinhala language. However, this study will not focus on a comprehensive discussion on the historical information related to these indigenous words.

5. Conclusion

The retroflex sound /ɭ / in the Sinhala language is a historically important sound since it represents the development of the Sinhala language as a unique language. This sound is a character used in the written Sinhala language though it has disappeared in the colloquial Sinhala language except in some phonetic environments. According to historical linguistic studies, the retroflex literal Sound /ɭ / was used in the spoken variety of the Sinhala language until the 16th century.

Based on the historical evidence, it can be established that the retroflex literal sound /ɭ / in Sinhala has three major sources.

1. The /ɭ / sound which was derived from the gradual sound change.
2. The /ɭ / sound which was borrowed from the source languages.
3. The /ɭ / sound which was originated in the Sinhala Language.

⁵⁸ Disanayaka, J.B., Encyclopedia of Sinhala Language and Culture, 2012. P.308

⁵⁹ ibid. P.309

⁶⁰ Ven.Dhammarama, Rathmalane., Sidath Snagara Wisthara Sannaya, 2013. P.17-18

The sound is not only originally derived from the Sanskrit and Pali languages, but is also from the Sinhala language itself. Therefore, the retroflex literal sound in the Sinhala language has three sources, as exemplified in this study.

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