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The Sidath Sangara: A Diachrony - Embedded - Synchronic Grammar

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The Sidath Sangara (SS.) is the earliest existing Sinhala grammatical treatise. Scholars attribute it to the thirteenth century. Monastics schools (Pirivena) and other indigenous education traditions have been using it as the sole authority to teach traditional Sinhala grammar. The treatise provides an analysis of an earlier phase of the Sinhala language. Consensus of opinion is that it represents the language of verse or the poetic language. This derives from the fact that the mediaeval poetry makes use of the same linguistics variety as described in the SS. By the time it was composed, this variety had limited itself to verse writing and prose writing employed a more developed form of language with elaborated vocabulary rich of Sanskrit loan words. However, this paper argues that the SS. describes not a stylistic variety of the mediaeval Sinhala, but the language that derives from old and middle Indic stages. The SS. itself mentions it as Siyabasa (Own-language) and Wilhem Geiger (1931) refers to it as Proto-Sinhala, the earliest phase of the language which shows independent, autonomous characteristics. It appears that the Proto-Sinhala had reduced itself to a variety of literary register by the time the SS. was composed. A question arises whether the SS. is a synchronic or a diachronic grammar. This paper points out that it is mainly a synchronic grammar, but the author of the treatise was well aware of the historical evolution of the language. The diachronic aspect of it will be highlighted in the light of the historical linguistic studies during the last century.

Key words: diachronic grammar, historical evolution, Sidath Sangara, Sinhala language, synchronic grammar