

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:

vi:	'paddy'
du:	'daughter'
le:	'blood'
ræ:	'night'
to:	'you' (derogatory)
ra:	'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 /a/ (→[ə]), /i/, and /u/ are observed to occur,¹ while no such distributional gap exists for final long vowels.

short vowel final

kiri	'milk'
bli	'a kind of exorcism'
pori	'popped corn'
bulu	'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 æhæ 'eye'.