

Verbal Stress (accent) in Sinhala Language

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The Objective of this study is to examine whether the concept of verbal stress is found in Sinhala and the function of stressed and unstressed vowels in speech. Analyzing the perception of short and of long vowels groups, it is possible to note, that long vowels in all positions of a multisyllable word are perceived better, than corresponding short. Monophthongs (short and long) are perceived better, than diphthongs. Short vowel /a/ as /a/; it was identified by the auditors in the absolute beginning of a word in 53.33 % of all presentations, in the middle of a word this vowel was perceived as /æ/, in 60 % of presentations, in the absolute end of a word this vowel was more often perceived as a central one.

The concept of a verbal stress as it is understood in Indo-European languages is not relevant for the Sinhala language. *(In Russian, for example, the stress is fundamental for word-building, as it determines the meaning of the word (ç à i i êl zamakl (castle) – ç à i i êl zamók (pad-lock), i eà-òlplacù (I cry) – i eà-òlplacù (I pay), à ù à dómàl (at home) – à ù à dàmàl (houses) etc. The distinction here is not only in the stress). The stressed vowel in those languages is pronounced more tensely and longer, than unstressed. The recognized vowel duration means that the given vowel is stressed. The unstressed vowel sounds short and less tensely. The concept of a long/short vowel is incorporated in the system of phonemes of the Sinhala language. There is a question, whether it is possible to state, that long and short vowels phonemes in the Sinhala language function in speech as stressed and unstressed vowels in Russian, for example. According to the Shcherba School, unstressed vowels are not special phonemes, but position allophones of stressed vowels, therefore in the phonemic transcription stressed and unstressed vowels are designated by the same symbol. Existing distinctions between long and short vowels in the Sinhala language are marked differently: two different letters are used in writing; two different symbols are used in transcription.*