

Studying contemporary usage of and attitudes to the SLM language: a preliminary discussion

Although there has been a general consensus that the Sri Lanka Malay (SLM) language is facing a degree of endangerment, the members of the community are divided as to what measures should be taken to arrest the issue of language loss. While some segments of the community are of the opinion that the SLM language must be encouraged, taught and thus strengthened, others are of the opinion that Malaysian or Indonesian Malay should be taught as a means of revitalising SL Malay by converging it with a more 'standard' variety.

As part of the fieldwork for my doctoral thesis, I administered 193 questionnaires and interviewed 45 members of the SLM community regarding their attitudes to their language and its vitality. My participants were from four provinces of Sri Lanka and represent a cross-section of the SLM community. Using the data from the questionnaires, I provide statistical evidence of the language range of the contemporary SLM community and examine the community's views regarding which variety of Malay should be used. As the views of the participants reflect their notions of language and identity, I explore the construction of identity through language among the larger SLM community.