

**Exploring phonological variations in regional varieties of Sri Lankan
Muslim Tamil using elicited speech**

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The study focuses on *Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil (SLMT)*, a spoken dialect of *Sri Lankan Tamil (SLT)* used by the Muslim community. The major aim of the study is to explore the regional varieties of *SLMT* that can be largely categorized into what scholars identify as *South Western Muslim Tamil (SWMT)* and *North Eastern Muslim Tamil (NEMT)*, based on the hypothesis that it is possible to observe distinct phonological variations between the two categories. For this purpose, the study utilized plosives as the linguistic variable; and the ethnic composition of all 9 provinces as the social variable. Data for the study comes from Tamil speaking Muslim undergraduates of University of Colombo. 27 undergraduates, 3 students representing each province were interviewed and provided with a questionnaire to collect background information. Data was gathered as elicited speech samples where participants were asked to construct sentences using the provided images to discern the pronunciation of a selected set of words. The collected data were analyzed to look at phonological variations. The results show that speakers of SWMT are heavily inclined towards the use of voiced plosives whereas speakers of NEMT pronounce the same words with voiceless plosives except in one category. According to the findings, it is possible to interpret that NEMT is heavily influenced by Tamil language and SWMT by Sinhala language. This is possibly due to the ethnic composition of the provinces that falls under the two varieties. The medium of study and the native province of parents could also be factors affecting the use of the variety.

Keywords: *phonological variation, social dialect, Sri Lankan Muslim Tamil*