# Let's put it down in writing: Producing written material in SLM

Kloss (1978, p. 25) identifies two factors that help determine if a given dialect merits the term 'language': *Abstandsprache* and *Ausbausprache. Abstandsprache*, is 'language by distance' or language by virtue of structural difference: in order to be considered a separate language, a dialect needs to be considerably different from every other related dialect under which it might be conceivably subsumed. *Ausbausprache* is 'language by development': the dialect in question is considered a 'language' because it has been shaped or reshaped into 'tools for qualified purposes and spheres of application' such as publication and education (Kloss, 1978, p. 25).

Sri Lanka Malay (SLM), the language of the 40,000-strong Malay population of Sri Lanka, shows such marked structural divergence from the Vehicular Malay it traces its origins to that, going by the *abstand* principle, it can be considered a language in its own right. However, SLM lacks *ausbau* in that the community members have not developed publication or education-related material in the language. SLM has not been a written language since the 19th century.

Over the last six months, a group of SL Malays have been working on addressing this by producing a collection of written material in SLM. In order to do so, they have had to overcome the deeply-entrenched ideology that SLM is 'not good enough' compared to Standard Malay which is considered 'more beautiful', 'more proper' and 'more grammatical'.

This paper describes the ideological and practical issues involved in compiling a work of this nature and discusses the importance of similar projects being undertaken in order to increase the prestige of the language and the attitude of the speakers toward the language, something which needs to into serious consideration given that proficiency in SLM is declining, especially in urban areas.