

A Study to Identify Sri Lankan Dialects of English- A Linguistic Exploration: Based on Tertiary level Students in SLIATE- Sri Lanka

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Abstract- This study aims at studying whether the concept of regional dialectal variations had the effect on English Language users in Sri Lanka and to which extent they differ from region to region when speaking and writing in English as a second language. In order to identify this phenomenon, 125 (hundred and twenty five) students (five groups) of Sri Lanka Advanced Technological Education were randomly chosen from six regions and surveyed with twenty five structured questionnaire and an interview. Questionnaires tested formal written expressions while the interview tested formal oral expressions. Thereby the researcher examined to which extent the participants deviated from standard Sri Lankan dialect. The researcher conducted a methodical analysis of the collected data linguistically. It enabled the researcher to identify how and why each group differs from the other dialectically. They are logically treated after thorough analysis under particular linguistic categories. The combinations of the findings of the study and the knowledge gained in the process of study are used to draw conclusions of the factors that contributed to those dialectal variations. Finally the researcher has made some suggestions to go for Identical Sri Lankan Dialect rather than trying to promote regional dialectal variations since the researcher could not elucidate substantial variations among the participants of the study

Index Terms- Sri Lankan Dialect, second language, dialectical variation, first language, language interference

I. INTRODUCTION

Learning English has become an integral part of many Sri Lankans with the arrival of Englishmen to Sri Lanka in 1796. They were the third colonizers who were able to establish their administration in Sri Lanka. Though Englishmen left Sri Lanka officially they left their language behind us. Therefore, Sri Lankans happened to study English willingly or unwillingly for economic, social, political and economic purposes. Thus English was spread all over the country and many had to learn English from local English teachers who had their education in their mother tongue either in Sinhala or Tamil. Depending on the nationality of the teacher the way of speaking in English underwent a lot of phonological and morphological changes.

That is the first language interference. Moreover, the regional dialectal variations also influenced their English

speaking a lot. Though there existed a standard variety of English many English speakers tend to use English in a way that goes with their regional social identity. Some distinctions could be seen especially in speaking from region to region. The researcher attempts to examine some of those dialectal differences having a sample of five different groups of tertiary students from five different Advanced Technological Institutes in Sri Lanka. So far a lot of researches are done on dialectal variations in English in Sri Lanka which failed to find out the exact reasons for these variations.

Of the four micro skills, speaking has become the second which is a little bit flexible and very hard and fast rules are not applied when it comes to Sri Lankan dialectal variations. Dr. Arjune Parackrama, Shiromi Fernando, Prof. Menique Gunasekara and Thiru Kandiah have contributed a lot in promoting the Sri Lankan variety of English along with other standard varieties used by elite class in Sri Lanka. What they advocate is the Sri Lankan variety and not the particular regional varieties. Menique Gunasekara in her “Post Colonial Identity” defines Sri Lankan English as the variety of English used by Sri Lankans whose first language is English or those who are bilingual in English and Sinhala or Tamil. But the researcher found out that many Sri Lankans tend to use English on their own way due to the influence of their colloquial languages that have their regional accent, sentence patterns. For example, Poyadaya, nelekadala (ground nut) sambol. Other than that they use broken English such as “you no there no”, “you come go”, “take money to eat”, “we eating rotti”, “you not born near school” “I like to eat samba rice” etc..

However, it is noteworthy to agree to the view that some researchers have done studies on Sri Lankan English but they are insufficient for the learners of English to meet their academic and social demands. Sri Lankan English still has no distinctive identity in the international forum like the other Englishes have. Though Sri Lanka is geographically small, dialects of native people differ from area to area. For example, southern Sinhala dialect is different from upcountry Sinhala dialect. In the same way, Batticaloa Tamil differs from Jaffna Tamil. This dialectal variation can be seen in English they speak along with the influence of their first language. Thus the identification of those dialectal variations will pave the way for the learners, researchers and the scholars to get to know the typical socio-cultural and socio-linguistic features of English that they use in their locality. Therefore, the researcher in this study will find socio-linguistic

factors for those dialectal variations separately though English links all nationalities together. This is the point where the researcher hopes to find the answers for the following questions. Do Sri Lankans really have a language called Sri Lankan English? Have they adhered to British model? Is it possible them to line up with one alley? For sure, solid answers for the above questions are not to be found within the existing English dialects framework in Sri Lanka. Thus it is significant for the researcher to examine the existing English dialects in Sri Lanka and find out valid and justifiable solutions for these unanswered problems. Therefore, the researcher in this study attempts to find new knowledge to bridge the gaps left by earlier researchers to date.

A lot of researches have been done on "Sri Lankan English" but there is no universally accepted definition for it. It means that it demands a lot of research. This study will revive the existing knowledge in the area that is still under investigation. Therefore, this empirical study is based on the hypothesis that the Sri Lankan speakers of English use different dialectal variations of English in different locations. To test the above hypothesis the researcher frames two questions. 'How does non-standard Sri Lankan English differ from Standard Sri Lankan English?', 'What are the distinctive socio linguistic features of those dialects that are used in the multi-national and multi-cultural Sri Lankan English speaking community?' A face to face interview using a questionnaire is conducted with a sample of students who speak English as a second language in Sri Lanka institute of Advances Technological Education to collect the data for the study. The analysis of the recorded data is done using auditory systems in order to examine the various pronunciation of each participant of the study separately. This study is mainly based on linguistic theories incorporating ethnographic information of the participants. Further, the phonological variations of the dialects used by the participants will be given the priority in the analytical discussion. The researches done on this field to date reveal the fact that there is no single form of English universally accepted to be adopted standard. But there are a lot of English dialects and they are correct and accepted by their respective communities. None can deny this phenomenon and speakers/learners of English should be promoted to learn the most suitable and appropriate dialectal form for them which finally upgrades their English language proficiency in speech and writing. Some scholars have done researches in this field to test how dialectal variations influence in Sri Lankan speakers of English. Rajiva Wijesinghe stated (1998) that the writers who have made their mark, like their predecessors tend to use standard English. They did not purposely represent English as a second language or foreign language but used local flavour and materials to define Sri Lankan English. Hypothesis based on Lardo's suggestions reveal that, "comparison between native and foreign language lies the key to all difficulties in foreign language learning" Lardo (1957) In fact, it is the first language knowledge that makes it difficult to acquire the structure of the second language. Manique Gunasekara (2005) stated that the dialect used by the Sri Lankan elites for whatever the purpose in Sri Lanka is recognized as Sri Lankan standard English. It is a sociolinguistic term used to refer to a prestige variety of language used within a prestige community. It clearly shows that the Sri Lankans have two dialectical variations of English. They are non-standard and standard Sri Lankan English. However, Mayler(2005) says that Sri Lankan English is the language used

by Sri Lankans who speak English as their first language or second language.

Manique Gunasekara (2005) further stated that the kind of English used by Sri Lankans is not the English used by the colonizers. It is a mixer of colonizers' English and local borrowings from Sinhala and Tamil. Many Sri Lankans prefer to use this mixed variety of English which is inferior to standard British English. But it is distinctive to Sri Lankans according to her. Siromi Fernando (2008) distinguished Sri Lankan dialects on the basis of phonology, morphology, syntax and orthography. According to Passe(1948) different dialectical versions emerged due to mother tongue translations in Sri Lankan English since Sri Lankans preferred it. Thiru Kandiah(1981) distinguished different dialects in relation to vocabulary usage. The same phenomenon could be seen in morphology. Even standard Sri Lankan English speakers tend to pluralize nouns which is not done in standard British English. Chithra Fernando(1977) stated that there are a lot of dialectal differences in pronunciations among Sri Lankan sub-varieties since Sinhala and Tamil dialects differ from area to area. Other than the two varieties identified by Manique Gunasekara and Mayler, Chithra Fernando states that there is another variety called Not-pot which is used by speakers who are less exposed to English. It is noted that the same affluent English speaking community changes their attitudes to dialectal variety they use, while particular ethnic varieties remain unchanged. The post Bloomfieldians stated that the same phone functions differently at different positions in standard British English which is called allophonic variation. This phenomenon is not found in Sri Lankan variety, It justifies that Sri Lankan English differs from British standard English. Moreover, Dr.Dushanthy states "...it is important to recognize that affluence speaker of the Sri Lankan English is the switch between Sri Lankan mode and international mode when the context demands it". What it suggests is that Sri Lankan speakers of English have their own two-fold Englishes, standard and non-standard. Gamini Fonseka in one of his research papers (2003) stated that there is a particular style of writing and speaking which is subjected to its ethnocentricity. It is applicable to Sri Lankan speakers/writers as well since the community to which the individual belongs determines his/her dialectical form.

Thus the researcher in his study found it very difficult to apply internationally accepted theoretical perspectives since the participants' first language is either Tamil and Sinhala. The influence of the first language cannot be measured quantitatively because of these two languages. Moreover the participants of the research is very limited and it is very difficult to validate the findings to all dialectical variations prevailing in Sri Lanka. The study is an experimental research which is analytical and deductive. To get it done the researcher has used five different groups of tertiary level students whose first language is not English for the sample to collect data for the research.

Thus the findings of this study will benefit learners at least to minimize the linguistic, cultural and first language barriers when speaking or writing in English deviating from regional dialectical influences. Besides, the academics, researchers, curriculum developers, teachers and speakers will be able to identify the dialectical variations along with the causes behind them and to find practical solutions for the problems speakers of English face when speaking and writing in English in Sri Lanka.

II. METHODOLOGY

The empirical study was conducted at five ATIs (Badulla [Group A], Rathnapura [Group B], Ampara [Group C] , Kandy [Group D and Trincomalee [Group E]) in Sri Lanka with the sample 125 students (Sinhala and Tamil/ male and female.) The researcher as a participant conducted two types of tests.

- a. Personal interview (same questionnaire for all individual participants)
- b. Written test. (same test paper for all participants)

Students were free to express using their own English dialects while the researcher recorded each individual's interview with the researcher and to do a quantities analysis of their interview paying attention to the dialectical variation from one locality to another. And thereby the researcher expects to observe how target language (Tamil or Sinhala) influenced their expressions morphologically , syntactically , semantically etc.. Especially , to check how standard language features like consonant clusters and diphthong are replaced by their own language components. This is to be done by comparing and contrasting the participants of the same institute and participants of different institutes in order to see how their dialects differ from one region to another. The finding will help the researcher to examine to which extent their first language interferes with their second language speaking which marks their dialectical variation.

The same process is to be applied to the writing activity as well. In here the researcher expects to analyze the answers written(objective) logically to determine the facts how each participant forms sentence structures with the influence of their first language on one hand how the same or different language in the same or different region influences their dialects.

Thus the same individual is tested twice in speech and writing which will help the researcher to test his hypothesis based on the facts found in the research. Besides, the main aim of this study is to identify the dialectical variations of spoken and written language in English that determines all Sri Lankans do not use the same variety of English throughout Sri Lanka.

This is a need of hour since there are controversies over the concept of Sri Lankan English for the last couple of decades.

III. DATA ANALYSIS

Having used single group and individual method in this study the researcher attempted to facilitate the validation and the triangulation of the data collected. The recordings and the written sentences of each participant categorized and labeled under different headings. They are further sub- divided depending on the Sri Lankan and RP productivity. The researcher expects the categorization of those data collected will help him find the typical expressions and their variation that reflect the particular regional identity of the dialect they use due to the influence the first language. Further the researcher expects that the categorization of the data will help him test the hypothesis logically influence them a lot. When the researcher compares Dialectical Variations are analyzed according to Manique Gunasekara (2005) and Shiromi Fernando (2008) in this study since they have emphasized the facts that the Sri Lankan dialectical variations are mainly influenced by phonology, morphology syntax and orthography. In this study, this researcher found out that the variations occur due to many factors.. Among them, the influence of the first language is vital since almost all (except a few) learnt and learning English from books through local teachers and not from native speakers. Those local teachers come from different parts of Sri Lanka who have their own first languages. They have their own dialectical variations based on their regions, especially in speaking. Other than variations common linguistic features such as lack of clusters, altered consonants, syntactical constructions etc. and contrasts those linguistic dialectical variations of each group, it shows some similarities in some linguistic areas. Besides, the percentages of dialectical variations of the five groups do not show a vast distinction among one another. It justifies that the dialectical differences play a very minor role while Sri Lankan English is compared with other Englishes. However, the researcher attempts to pay his attention to those minute differences to see how those variations occur within this small island country.

Table 01: Dialectal differences of five sample groups(spoken & written)											
Linguistic category	Group A	%	Group B	%	Group C	%	Group D	%	Group E	%	Dialectical category
Morphology	21	81	22	88	16	64	15	60	14	56	Use L1 affixes
Spelling	9	36	11	44	16	64	13	52	13	52	Replace consonants
First Language construction	18	72	16	64	17	68	16	64	12	48	Use L1 sentence patterns
Alternative syntax	17	68	17	68	14	56	15	60	16	64	Double adjectives/wrong tags
Alternative vowel sound	15	60	18	72	13	52	12	48	13	52	Repeat vowels not sounds
Non-RP additions	12	48	21	84	16	64	15	60	14	56	Adding extra prepositions
Replacement of English words	17	68	16	64	15	60	16	64	15	60	Use synonyms
Altered consonants	14	56	11	44	08	32	07	28	08	32	Neglect voice quality
Words pronounced differently	13	52	14	56	18	72	16	64	14	56	Go by the spellings
Group wise total	136	60.1	146	67.1	133	59.9	125	55.6	119	53	

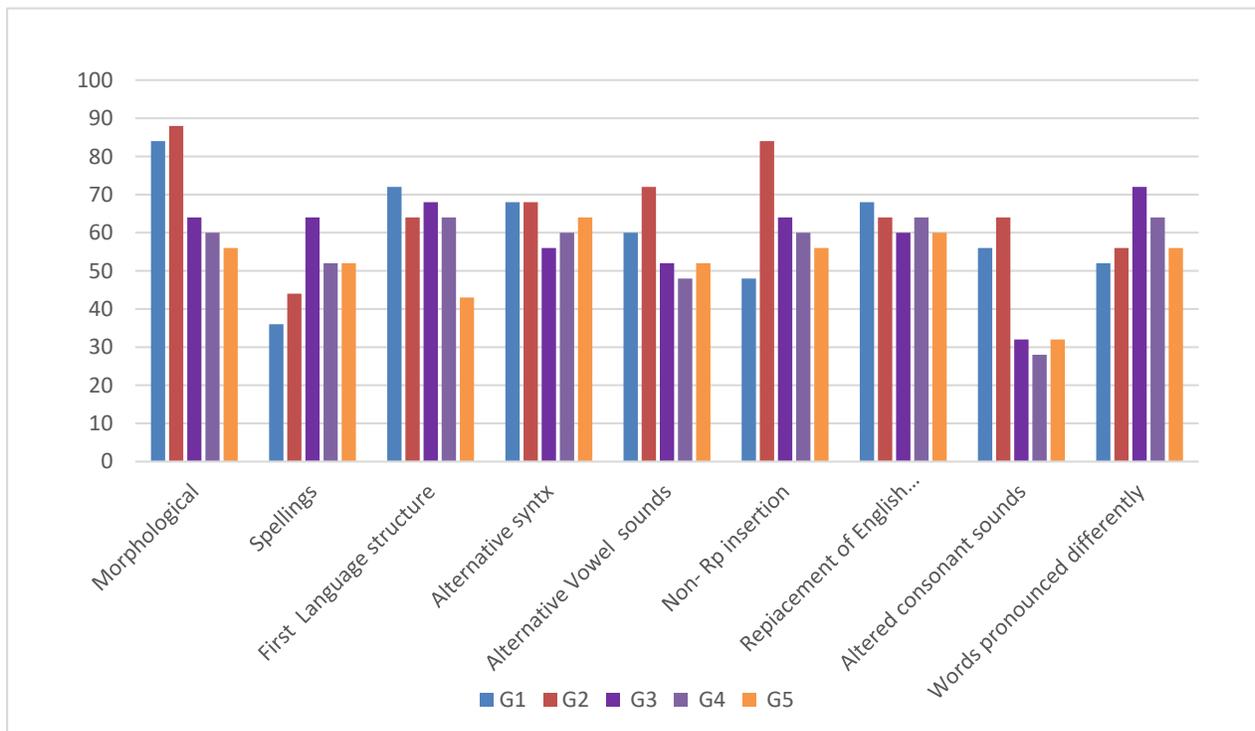


Figure 1: Percentage of dialectal variations of linguistic categories of each group

The analysis of the data collected in this study mostly influenced by the researches done on Sri Lankan English and its extension of regional dialects by Sri Lankan researchers. The selection of the corpus of dialectical variations was done and different variations and similarities of regional expressions and writings were recognized. Those data are tabled under different linguistic categories and quantified where the researcher could trace how each group responded to the same set of questionnaire in different ways both in speaking and writing. Further, the researcher calculated the percentage of the correct utterance and sentences of each group separately. Thereby the researcher expects to see the correlation of five groups of the sample in line with the analysis James Taxonomy and categorized them into different linguistic parts studying the frequency of the variations. The above chart very clearly shows the frequencies occurred in speaking and writing of all five groups. When compared the speaking and writing of the above five groups, it shows that the differences from region to region is very little. For example, the group wise total dialectical differences both in speaking and writing between Group A and group B is ten. It marks the percentage difference as 07. The dialectical variation between group C and Group D marks as 08 while the percentage appears roughly 07. In the same way, the dialectical difference between group A and Group E shows a marked distinction. It is 17 while overall percentage difference is 07. These minute dialectical differences shows the fact that the participants who are close to urban areas (group C and D) uses little variations which are closer to Sri Lankan Standard English variety. The reason that the researcher finds is that they are more exposed to English educated community who uses English more fluently than less urban community. For example participants from Kandy and Ampara show a little difference in dialectical variation.

The main reason the researcher finds here is that the university of Peradeniya in Kandy and Hardy Institute at Ampara and other universities in the Eastern province influenced the speaking community. The other factor is more than ninety percent of government officers in Eastern province are from Colombo and Kandy who are fluent in English. Even the Muslim community does matter since they are more fluent in English than local Sinhalese. But the participants from Badulla and Trincomalee are different since they are less exposed to English speaking community and less urbanized. It affects their second language fluency. They tend to use more colloquial or regional ways of speaking and writing of their first language. Therefore the standard Sri Lankan variety of English is low while in other areas it is higher. What is evident here is that the less exposure to urban community means their English is localized.

IV. DISCUSSION

The interview method and test based data collection method enhanced the researcher to identify the dialectical variations of English speaking and writing communities of different regions in Sri Lanka. Though there is a form called Sri Lankan English, it differs from region to region due to socio-economic, cultural and educational factors that influence them along with the linguistic factors. The main reason behind this phenomenon is the influence of the first language, both Sinhala and Tamil. Thus the main purpose of the researcher in this chapter is to examine how the

above mentioned factors contribute to their identical dialectical variations. They are discussed under different linguistic categories paying attention to how far those factors affect their individual regional dialects in English

4.1. Morphological factors

The analysis of the data collected in this study shows the manipulation of different first language affixes to form new words that deviate from Sri Lankan English variety. But the researcher sees very little difference from region to region. Almost all participants had a uniformity of using Lankanized spellings in their writings. They go by the pronunciation and not by English spellings since Sinhala and Tamil languages do not have any difference in writing and pronunciation, they pronounce what they write. Eg. Blakbod., lisen etc..

The participants never thought twice to replace English words by Sinhala or Tamil words. This is a special characteristic of Sri Lankan English. It is further extended in regional dialects. They use Sinhala and Tamil loanwords which differ from region to region according to their first language. For example, Kithul tree (farm tree), Amma (mother), Appa (father)

Kadalas (grams). Some of the features mentioned above could be seen among all the participants who came from different regions in Sri Lanka.

4.2. Phonological factors

This is a very distinctive language area which is locally Sinhalized or Tamilized English without paying any attention to Sri Lankan Standard form. The participants of the sample groups consisted three nationalities: Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims of whom the first language of Tamils and Muslims is Tamil. There were a lot of deviations from region to region in pronunciation, replacement of English diphthongs, consonant clusters and individual consonants as well. In Sinhala and Tamil languages, what is written is pronounced in the same way but in English. Excepts six participants from Badulla and Kandy regions, almost all never pronounced diphthongs. They straight away replaced them by their Sinhala or Tamil equivalent long vowel sound/s. For example, ,go - /au/ replaced by - /go:/ Sinhala and Tamil do not have the diphthong so they use long /o:/. Instead of /ei/ they used long /e:/. Some pronounced women /wimen/ as /women/ etc. etc. In the same way many participants (except a few) were not worried about /f/, they replaced it by /p/ eg. photo – poto etc. . At times they used the total Sinhala or Tamil word in their English speaking. For example, nelakadala for groundnut, poosari for priest, maulavi for muslim priest etc. The analysis of those phonological constructions depicts the facts that they are very flexible in using regionalized vocabulary on one hand and using common Sri Lankan characteristics of speaking and writing tools in English on the other hand. These linguistic features could not be seen among the English educated few. Further some Tamil participants pronounced some words in a total different way that could be understood only by the participants of that region. It is another evidence to support the regional dialectical variations.

4.3. Syntactic factors

In here the researcher could trace a lot of grammatical constructions. At times the participants totally deviated from Standard Sri Lankan variety. Many participants were confident

and relaxed to use their regional constructions directly in English mainly due to first language interference.

For example; 'You know who I?', 'Come and sit here' 'You can write to this address.' etc..

These constructions mainly depend on their first language either on Tamil or Sinhala. Another feature is the repetition of the adjectives and nouns. This feature could be seen both in speaking and writing. Eg. 'We visited different different places.', 'You are very very good.' 'Think not small small things.' Also some used the question form in their indirect questions too. Eg. 'She asked me why did I come?' These constructions are syntactically wrong when compared with Standard English. But regionally they are accepted and the message is well communicated. It clearly shows that Sri Lankan variety has regional dialectal variations to some extent.

Another feature is the wrong use of tags. It is found in every region equally. It clearly indicates our Sri Lankan identity rather than dialectal identity eg. 'You are going home no'

'You understand, are you?', 'You did it, no?' etc. However the writings of all participants had somewhat similar patterns with minor deviations It shows that writing very rarely differs from region to region except some expressions that are relevant only to that area.

V. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of this study was to identify the dialectal variations of tertiary level students in their speaking and writing in Sri Lanka. Though there are a lot of arguments about the identity of Sri Lankan English, many scholars Prof. Menique Gunaseka, Michael Meylor, Shiromi Fernando, Dr. Arjuna Prakrama Prof. Thiru Kandiah etc strongly believe that Sri Lankans use English language deviating from standard British Model like other commonwealth countries in the world that are greatly influenced by their first languages. According to them, there is no argument on Sri Lankan variety of English. In this study the researcher attempted to see the further deviation from that language category by selecting a sample of 125 students from five different regions, each group consisting 25 students (both male and female) The data collection method was giving a questionnaire and conducting an interview. The collected data (spoken and written) were analyzed under different linguistic categories. The frequency of data under each linguistic category is tabled and the percentage is worked out. The discussions of analysis was done by comparing and contrasting among the groups. The researcher's main purpose was to find out solutions that arose from the research problem.

- a. How do these dialectal variations occur?
- b. How can they be minimized?
- c. How does the first language influences the regional dialects?

The researcher was able to form some hypotheses to test the validation of the research set above.

a. The students are book- based learners and they are exposed to many local teachers who learnt English as a second language from local teachers.

b. By levelling the unequal facilities and resources for all students in Sri Lanka, the existing little dialectal variations can also be minimized.

c. When learning a second language, the influence of the first language is unavoidable unless they are exposed to a native community fully.

The main purpose further extended to investigate the significance of the dialectical variations when using a second language to express the needs and feelings of the speaker on one hand and the use of that particular language for academic purposes and professional careers. Paying attention to all above mentioned characteristics the researcher attempted to find out the facts as to why the tertiary level students knowingly or unknowingly adhered to a kind of English dialect with minor deviations from the existing Sri Lankan variety of English.

VI. FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The analysis of data collected in this study helped the researcher recognize the typical characteristics of regional dialectal variations in Sri Lanka to some extent. Based on the findings, the researcher wishes to suggest some recommendations to preserve the Sri Lankan dialects on one hand and to go for a world recognition of Sri Lankan English on the other hand. According to Manique Gunasekara, Sri Lankan English is the language used by Sri Lankans who choose to use English for whatever purpose in Sri Lanka. Regional dialect is the further deviation of it who use English as their second language who are generally bilinguals. Their first language is either Sinhala or Tamil. The researcher found that they who use English as second language are influenced by their first language in every aspect of speaking and writing. Therefore, their dialects are a little different from Sri Lankan English from region to region. The main reason behind it is the local flavour of the communities. They use a lot of loanwords, phonological and morphological structures in both writing and speaking. These features were visible when analysed their writing and speaking. According to David Crystal a prestige variety of language used within a speech community is a dialect and those who deviate from it is a sub-dialect. Among the regional dialects these evidences could be traced but a total deviation from the main dialect could not be traced. In general, most of the minute dialectal variations can be ignored since the researcher found a lot of similarities among the regional dialects. The researcher feels honest to suggest the respective authorities to take initiatives to promote Sri Lankan variety rather than going for regional dialectal variations. This would definitely pave the way for Sri Lankan identity like our sister country India has already earned its identity though she is one year older to Sri Lanka's freedom from British empire.

In conclusion, the researcher aimed at recognizing the regional dialectal variations in Sri Lankan English selecting a sample group of 125 students from five different ATIs from different regions of Sri Lanka and analysed them under different linguistic features. But the researcher could not find vast variations of language use except a few dialectal differences depending on the first language (Tamil or Sinhala) of their locality. What it shows is that many Sri Lankan communities who speak English as their first language or second language have similar linguistic features in pronunciation, such as, breaking clusters, replacing diphthongs by Sri Lankan long vowels, using loanwords etc. etc. Those who use English as the first language have exposure to language while others do not have. Therefore

they have very little variations. Little bit of culture and religion have influenced them a little as well. The researcher accounts them as good signs since they may pave the way for Sri Lankan identity. Thus the researcher suggests to promote a variety of Sri Lankan English instead of promoting regional dialectical variations since Sri Lankans have their own first language dialectical variation depending on their localities

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