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Speaking and writing in Lankan English: A study of native and non-native users of English

Abstract.   In this paper I examine the speech and writing of native and non-native speakers of Lankan English using a diglossia (Ferguson 1959) approach. Following Gupta (1994), I see Lankan English as being in a diglossic situation where Standard Lankan English is the H variety, which is not very different from Standard Englishes elsewhere except in lexis and phonology. The L variety is Colloquial Lankan English (CLE). CLE mainly differs from Standard English in terms of syntax. Because of its colonial history, language use among Sri Lankans is extremely complex, with the different varieties of English interacting with each other and with the other languages used in Sri Lanka. Since previous studies on Lankan English have tended to use a deviant approach in analysing speech and writing in Sri Lanka, in this paper, by using a diglossia approach I show how patterns of language use and the degree of standardness is determined by the context and stylistic choice of native and non-native users alike.

Introduction

English in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka is a small island in the Indian Ocean, with a land extent of 65,610 sq. km. Even though the people and culture of Sri Lanka are believed to have originated from India, the people of Sri Lanka inhabiting the country for several centuries have tended to identify themselves as

forming a distinct nation from that of India. Once a British colony, it has been independent since 1948. It has a population of about 20 million people with the Sinhalese constituting the majority (74%). The principal community with a long claim to residence in the country is the Tamil community commonly referred to as Sri Lankan or Ceylon Tamils to distinguish them from people known as Indian Tamils (who were brought to Ceylon by the British to work on tea/coffee plantations). The Sri Lanka Tamils constitute about 12 per cent of the population while the Indian Tamils make up about 6 per cent.

The other communities in Sri Lanka are relatively smaller. The country's Muslims are divided into two separate communities: The Sri Lankan or Ceylon Moors and the Malays. The Sri Lankan Muslims form less than 6 per cent of the population. Arab traders first brought Islam to Ceylon, and the modern Moor community claims an Arabic origin. However, most Muslims in the country speak Tamil as their first language.

The Burghers, who draw their antecedents from the Portuguese and Dutch, constitute only about 2 per cent of the country's population. Although the term Burgher is a product of Dutch rule, it is used to refer to persons with Portuguese as well as Dutch ancestry. The Burghers played a significant role in the country's affairs during the colonial period and for some time predominated in the public service and professions. Today, however, the status of the Burghers has diminished and they are more or less a marginalised group.

Languages in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has three official languages, Sinhala, Tamil and English. Of these, Sinhala and Tamil are the major official languages in the spheres of education, administration and bureaucracy, but English is the most official language in the fields of commerce, economy banking, mass communication, entertainment and higher education. In addition, there are also two creole-based

languages: Sri Lankan Portuguese Creole (Jackson 1990) and Sri Lankan Malay Creole which are estimated to be spoken by about 50,000 people.

Native language

The term native language suggests that one is actually born with a particular language, even though linguists have disproved this theory by establishing that the particular language(s) a person learns is determined by how much exposure they have to the language(s). As with the term mother tongue, the term native language evokes emotional connotations. This could be because the term is tied up with one's origins and parentage. The native language, then, is the language associated with one's community or culture. In Sri Lanka, the native language often coincides with the language of the father's ethnic group. It is seen as the language, which ensures that an individual is clearly marked as belonging to a particular group/community. As Davies and Bentahila (1989:274) remark, 'this type of attachment seems most likely to arise where an individual identifies strongly with a group for which a historically associated language may be a powerful symbol'. They also claim (1989: 275) that other group markers, such as religion or nationality may likewise affect people's views about which is to be considered their native language. The term native language can be interpreted in two main ways:

1. Language of ethnic affiliation (= mother tongue 2);

2. Language(s) first learnt (= mother tongue 1).

I define the term *NATIVE LANGUAGE* as *the language(s) first learnt.*

Native speaker

Linked to the term *native language* is the concept of the native speaker. The native speaker occupies a central position in the study of language. However, linguists appear to differ in the way they define and conceive of the concept of the native speaker. The term native speaker

means different things to many different people. As Davies (1991:1) shows, the common sense view of the NS tends to rely heavily on the intuitions of the native speaker to do Standard English. In fact, the term native speaker is commonly used to refer to people who have a special mastery over a language. They are regarded as the models of 'truth about the language', 'stakeholders' who possess a sort of 'insider knowledge.' This view valorises the native speaker as a reference point and cites the native speaker as the arbitrator of the language who has intuitive abilities to distinguish between what is and what is not acceptable; and the grammarian's task, as Coulmas (1981:5) points out, is to provide a description which conforms with the native speakers' intuitions. This view of the importance of intuition in defining the native speaker is also emphasised by Crystal (1997), and Richards, Platt and Weber (1985). Crystal (1997:255) defines native speaker as:

> As a term used in linguistics to refer to someone for whom a particular language is a 'native language' (also called 'first language', 'mother tongue'). The implication is that this language, having been acquired naturally during childhood, *is the one with which a speaker will have the most reliable intuitions, and whose judgements about the language can therefore be trusted* [my emphasis].
> Reliance on this implicit view is questionable, however, since as Parakrama (1995:88)

points out, 'some native speakers are clearly less able to arbitrate than others, and some who are not considered native speakers are able to correct the "mistakes" of native speakers. Yet, despite these limitations the discipline has still to relinquish its reliance on the native speaker as the ultimate judge of linguistic acceptability'. This argument shows that there is no clear reason to rely on the intuitions from a speaker who is from a country where English is traditionally spoken as a native language more than those of somebody else who has picked up English as part of their initial language learning but who is from a place where English is not considered a native language. A speaker who is from a place where English is not a native language may have as good or reliable intuitions about the language as a speaker from traditionally English speaking

countries. The expectation is that the native language is equivalent to the mother tongue. Yet, as many studies have shown, those who are from a place where English is traditionally not a native language may still pick up/learn the language as a native language, and therefore may be considered native speakers.

For the most part Sri Lankans never refer to themselves as 'native speakers' of English. For instance, Parakrama (1995:39), notes that

> Linguists use every other formulation but 'native speaker' to describe the legitimate users of this dialect (Lankan English). They are termed 'native-like' or 'habitual' or 'first language' (L1) users of LE.
> The labels 'native-like', 'habitual' or 'first language' speakers referred to in the above

quotation, though not intentionally condescending, underlines the assumption that native speaker status cannot be achieved in a variety of English that is from a place where English is not the language of ancestry. Thus, a person who has achieved complete mastery of a variety of English that is not from a traditionally English speaking country, such as Britain, Australia, or New Zealand are often referred to as 'native-like' or 'near-native' users of English. Gupta (1999:5) however, attacks this concept and maintains that in traditionally ESL territories it is impossible to distinguish highly proficient speakers of English from L1 speakers of English from the same community'.

In relation to Sri Lanka, de Souza (1977:38-39) has argued that even those who appear to be native speakers do not use English in every aspect of their lives, and that they have no words in English to describe certain experiences, relationships, functions and situations, and therefore cannot be considered *bona fide* native speakers. This is however unacceptable since recent studies on bilingualism have shown that most bilinguals who are native speakers of more than one language are likely to be more proficient in one of their native languages than the other. According to Romaine (Romaine 1989:21) bilinguals invariably have gaps in all the

languages they use. Thus, learning to speak more than one language often involves putting together material from two languages, especially when one language lacks words necessary to express a particular world view.

In Sri Lanka too, the native speaker of English is usually a native speaker of another language. Those who use Standard English usually use it alongside a colloquial variety of Lankan English, depending on context. The statistics provided by the 1981 census of population for the number of people conversant in the different languages provide the only data available at present to estimate the number of native speakers of English in Sri Lanka. The data from the census indicates that out of a total of 11,309,485 speakers in both the urban and rural sectors aged ten or above, 1,295,482 people were conversant in English. This figure only gives us a rough idea of the number of native speakers, as there are also native speakers below the age of 10.

For me, a NATIVE SPEAKER of English is someone for whom a language which they call English has been picked as a language of their initial learning and who continues to use it in adult life, as the first language in all major spheres of life including the more personal and intimate domains.

In educational contexts too, the complexity of the concept of native speaker appears to equate a native speaker of English with speakers from traditionally English-speaking countries. For instance, in discussing the importance of the concept of the native speaker in education, linguists appear to consider only the particular environments with which they are most familiar and do not pay attention to the complexity of the concept of the native speaker. Halliday (1978:199-200), for instance, does not use the term *native speaker* but refers to the mother tongue in the context of education, and points out that 'no language ever replaces the mother

tongue and that 'certain types of ability seem to be particularly difficult to acquire in a second language'. Halliday concludes that it is possible but difficult for a second language learner to become a native speaker of the target language'. As Gupta (1999:7) notes, although the concept of native speaker is important, in teaching in the real world it is necessary to distinguish native speaker status from issues of proficiency. Proficiency, as educationally and societally recognised is the ability to speak and especially write Standard English within the consensual norms of the English-using world (Gupta 1999:7). Both native and non-native speakers alike need to be taught the standard norms. Once the standard norms have been mastered, it is difficult to recognise the background of a writer on the basis of his/her writing.

The concept of Standard English

From the preceding discussion it can be seen that a person does not have to be a native speaker in order to be skilled in Standard English. A person who is highly proficient in English but who is not a native speaker may have as good an ability as a native speaker to do Standard English. Although there is a concept of Standard English in speech, it is albeit an elitist standard rather than an authoritarian one, so that the concept of Standard English only becomes meaningful in written English. The ability to speak and especially write Standard English is a highly valued skill in the English-speaking world. The remarkable thing about Standard English, especially the Standard English found in edited, printed documents, is its uniformity across the world, and this without any central authority (Gupta 2000:5) For example, newspapers give large groups of people access to the same information in the same standardised form on a daily basis; by participating in the reading of newspapers people develop a sense of shared community and language and other cultural forms with countless others whom they would never meet. For instance, in Sri Lanka, the language policy of standardising agencies such as Government

newspapers could be seen as having an impact on people's notions of what Standard English should be like. The usage and style manuals used by government newspapers, advocate a conservative model of Standard English, usually British, which is held up as the ideal and correct form of the language. From her findings from a survey on the use of English in newspapers, Gunasekera (1991:393) claims that about 90% of Lankan editorial personnel interviewed recommended a British model as the standard for written English. She further reveals that since 'correct' English is considered to be a British model, the indigenous variety is only 'tolerated' in direct quotations and genres of a personal nature. The recommendation for a British model could be seen as unrealistic, since however formal a genre may be, certain distinctive concepts (especially religious concepts) are invariably defined in Pali[1] or Sinhala. As the level of formality increases expectations increasingly - though unrealistically - centre on a Standard British model of English.

Apart from newspapers, most people in Sri Lanka also have access to some variety of Lankan English through *baila*[2], (popular music). Baila is the country's most ubiquitous popular music for dancing and singalongs. This genre which is mainly written in a mixture of Sinhala and English, has earned a notoriety for taking positions on popular topics bringing under scrutiny stereotypic identities and values of people in Sri Lanka. And as such uses language in such a way as to create a sense of fun, mischief and humour. Access to English through these forms can be seen as uniting different people who have never met, by developing within them an affinity with each other. Even though newspapers and popular music may be consumed in many different ways, the wide dissemination of these media can weave together a varied group of people and define them in times of crisis. The idea that non-standard printed materials such as

popular music can be seen as a unifying element even if people consume these materials very differently.

As we have seen, the spread of a homogenised standard is made possible through various institutional means, most notably, the printed media and centralised control of the educational system including teacher training and provision of educational materials. However, social pressures also play a key role by discriminating against those who do not master the ability to do Standard English conferring prestige and social advancement to those who do.

Observed interactions reveals that language is the basis of judgement of status even though the individuals involved may be unaware of this association and may deny it. On a more institutional level, people may or may not get certain jobs based on their language, even if the requirement of proficiency in a specific language variant is never made explicit. Particularly significant are the choices of media spokespeople whose language reflects and propagates the implicit acceptance of a given language form as the standard.

As Gupta (2000:6) notes, we often idealise Standard English to such an extent that we forget that the concept of standard is very weak in lexis and phonology and that there is no standard accent although there are prestige accents. Banjo (2000:32) reminds us of the presence of a uniform Standard English which cuts across all the different varieties of English:

Since it is not expected that the syntax of any national standard of English will differ markedly from that of 'world English; generally, attention has been turned to the phonological and lexical descriptions of these local standards.

This becomes clearer when we look at descriptions of what has been called 'Lankan English'. There is agreement to a great extent among scholars as to the phonological features that characterise this variety. For instance, Passé (1948), Fernando (1976) and Kandiah (1981)

describe the same sort of phonological features as being characteristic of Lankan English. The same is, however, not true of Lankan English syntax. While a few features are common to all descriptions, there are many others which are not.

Patterns of language use in Sri Lanka

The official variety of English used in Sri Lanka is of course educated Standard English. Standard English in Sri Lanka is not very different from Standard Englishes elsewhere except in terms of minor geographical variations, such as the use of culture-specific lexical items for religious terms, food, kinship terms, systems of address, clothing and so on. The language situation in Sri Lanka is, however, somewhat complicated by the use of a contact variety of English, which is often seen as 'deviant Standard English'. This variety is sometimes also referred to as 'Singlish' – a mixture of Sinhala and English (Fernando 1976:354). Following Gupta (1994) I see this variety as the L form in a diglossic (Ferguson 1959) English where Standard Lankan English is the high variety. The L variety or Colloquial Lankan English mainly differs from Standard English in terms of syntax. In the next section I give some examples of the diglossia analysis using data from both spoken and written contexts. The context does not strictly determine the variety that is used and illustrates the way in which varieties seep into each other in a diglossic English.

Spoken discourse

Some of the common features of Colloquial Lankan English can be seen in the following excerpts, one taken from a spontaneous conversation between 4 native speakers of English and one apparently non-native speaker, a tailor (Parakrama 1995:91ff). The speakers are said to be three men and one woman in their late twenties to early thirties, but they are not indicated by name or by any other means in the original extract. The second extract is taken from a radio broadcast between two proficient speakers who appear to be native speakers of English relayed

over the National Service of the Sri Lanka Broadcasting Corporation in August 1994

(Dissanayake 1995:68ff).

Extract 1 – Informal conversation

The immediate topic of the discussion is a beauty contest on the previous night that was

organised and judged by the speakers. The discussion highlights the ways in which native

speakers of English in Sri Lanka move with ease between the different varieties of English and

the other languages they control. In this conversation CLE shows the use of the tag *no* in lines

(1), (8), (14), (23) and 24) and optional use of zero copula in line (6); the use of Sinhala loan

words in lines (6), (9); the use of the expletive *men* in line (24); and code switching. Kandiah

(1979:95) claims that the term *men* in Lankan English is used by speakers to address non-

initiatorily one or more people of either sex but of not higher than equal rank in such a way as to

establish some kind of 'friendly rapport.' The tag *no* although used by native and non-native

speakers alike is often seen as a non-standard feature that is 'unacceptable' (Kandiah 1979) to

educated users of Lankan English. I however see *no* as a feature of Standard Lankan English as

well as CLE, since it is part of the linguistic repertoire of most Lankan English speakers.

1. a natural girl, no?
2. That real, that Kandyan, that Udarata   talk. Appachchi Dannawada?
                                   up country   Father   know
                                   up county talk.   You know like father?

3 :Ammai Appachchii aawane.
  mother father   came
  mother and father came

4. Amuthu vidiyata kathakaranne anee, not like us
  funny   way   talking   anee
  Talking in a funny way

5. that's the thing. Mr. Saleem who did you think would win?

6. She was a bothal alright, uncle
          bottle

7. She's pretty, ah, very pretty

8. She also a very nice girl no?

9. She wore a wig for her reddai hette
                           cloth   jacket
   She wore a wig for her cloth and jacket

11. No!

12. Hairpiece

13. Kohomada eeka   demme?
   How   that one put?
   How did you put that?

14. Ai ithing. Special people only dressed her no?

15. Mrs. Dissanayake eyata dresskaranna hitiye.
   Mrs. Dissanayake her   dress do   going
   Mrs. Dissanayake was going to dress her

16. Mrs. Dissanayake hitiya nisaa thama mang aawe neththe
   Mrs. Dissanayake there because   I came not
    I didn't come because Mrs. Dissanayake was there

17. Mrs.Dissanayake stage eken baagayak gaththa. Ara   keeli   daala thiyanawaane
   Mrs. Dissanayake stage from half   took   those pieces put   have
   stage eke
   stage one
   Mrs. Dissanayake took half the stage. Those things they have on stage.

18. How many times that came down.

19. Yes, she used to like hit against those things.

20. Those things used to collapse

21. Those are hung by some ropes no, so it used to balance either that way or this
   way.

22. She goes and knocks against it or she's fidgeting there.

23. I haven't seen this Mrs. Dissanayake, no?

24. Who's that girl, men, at the back? Here, we must put this in the papers, no?

25. It must be splashed in the papers

Extract 2 – Formal discussion on the radio

This extract is particularly important in indicating that no one language variety is sustained even within formal contexts. The extract which is close to Standard English in all respects except in lexis not only illustrates the way in which the Lankan Standard differs from other standard varieties but also shows how proficient speakers of English move within the varietal range they control in a socially and pragmatically meaningful way.

For instance, in this extract the discussion is based on the applicability of Buddhist doctrine to modern life. Both speakers make use of numerous religion-based Pali loan words, such as *thanha* (lines 8, 9, 16), *panchaseela* (line 33), *upekkha* (lines 21 and 22). As the conversation progresses we see speaker B shifting to the structure of the low variety by using ellipsis and object fronting in *they go pindapatha very early. Sunrise they are out* (line 31). The speakers' inclination on occasion to translate certain loan words, such as m*adyasthabhawaya* in line (30) suggests that the imagined audience may be predominantly L1 speakers of English. Dissanayake (1995:71) describes the use of *the time is clicking fast* in line 45 as showing 'the inability of some upper middle class English-Sinhala bilinguals to successfully imitate the Standard (British) English idiom'. I, however, prefer to see this more as a shift to the L variety of English in which the Standard English expression 'the clock is ticking' is rendered as *the time is clicking fast*.

1. A. Just imagine the conflicts and disharmony in the modern world.

2. Today the world is in the brink of total destruction, with high powered nuclear designs.

3. For the first time in human history, man has begun to be alarmed by the possibility that world and humanity might come to an end.

4. In their greed, human beings are upset, have upset the equilibrium of nature.

5. Has Buddhism an answer to bring about solace and peace for all these conflicts and disharmony prevalent today.

6. What have you to say Mr.

7. B: Yes, if we answer this question in brief we have to say that conflicts and disharmony prevailing in the world today is due to the unended desire in man for possessions, that is uh

8. A: thanha

9. B: Thanha. Buddha in explaining desire has said that uh if you were to take the mighty mahmeru mountain as the pen, the ocean as the ink pot and the sky as the paper, you'll not succeed in writing at least the word desire.

10. It's so vast and confusing to many this uh word desire.

11. So the Buddha has always given importance to the eradication of this desire.

12. According to his teachings it is this desire that makes Buddhists cling to sansara and this bhavaya

13. So long as desire exists man has no emancipation

14. A: So what is the remedy?

15. B: Yes, to eradicate desire he must first of all make up his mind to uh gradually give up this uh uh quality of possession

16. A: So don't you think the recipe to uh eradicate thanha or desire is the Sathara brahma viharana in practice?

17. B: yes, in practice, generally we're bound to

18. A: There won't be disharmony among, within you uh with

19. B: the outside world

20. A: the outside world. Will you elaborate these sathara brahma viharana, which will be very useful for the listeners

21. B: That is Meththa, Karuna, Muditha and Upekha

22. A: and upekha

23. B: Meththa as you all know is loving kindness

24. yes

25. B: and uh it's a thing that the Buddhists must practice
.
26. B: If every Buddhist can practice at least ten minutes of meththa bhavanawa daily, your mind will uh be calm and tranquil.

27. A: then karuna?

28. B: karuna is compassion towards another then uh

29. A: muditha

30. B: muditha is madyasthabhawaya that is uh sorry equanimity

31. A: altruistic joy?

32. B: yes

33. A: That is a thing which is very difficult to cultivate panchaseela, because you needn't be a Buddhist to practice panchaseela.

34. A: It is a code of ethics which can be practiced by everybody there was disharmony even at the time of the Buddha.

35. A: So at the time I think there was a Buddha to preach the, the people who have got into difficulty.

36. A: But today there is the dhamma, so if you follow the dhamma I think conflicts and disharmony will disappear

37. B: Apart from this uh every Buddhist more or less uh in uh in Burma do meditating in their homes.

38. B: Even for a short period [pause] females became nuns uh before marriage.

39. B: That is of course not compulsory but rather optional

40. A: so getting into robes is a qualification to a marriage?
41. B: and they go pindapatha very early Sunrise they are out

42. A: Do you like to elaborate whether these duthangas can be practiced in present day context.

43. A: Let it be very brief considering the time at our disposal

44. B: yes

45. A: in a word or two because the time is clicking fast

Written Discourse

Searching for a partner

The L variety of Lankan English is also often used in personal genres such as ads for marriage proposals and pop music. Here are two marriage proposals taken from the classified section of the Infolanka homepage. Both the ads have been placed on the Internet by Sri Lankans living in the USA. The first uses language of the sort that can be found in personal genres anywhere. The first ad appears to be produced by a non-native speaker of English whereas the second ad appears to have been written by someone who uses English mainly as an L2.

In written language, Standard English is the norm, although there may be variations in the degree of standardness depending on contexts, such as the use of culture-specific lexical items and variations in spelling (for instance program for programme, color for colour etc). Unlike other personal genres, the emphasis in ads for marriage proposals is on providing information relevant to finding a suitable partner. Of the two ads given below the first provides very culture specific information such as caste, ethnicity, religion as well as occupation, age, personal interests, and so on, whereas the second ad mainly focuses on the personal characteristics of the girl (her looks, her personality, age occupation etc.) and requirements the intended partner should possess.

Searching for my life partner

Description: I am a Govi/Buddhist Sri Lankan female. I live in the east coast of the USA. Art, music, poetry and literature constantly make me tick. I enjoy my frequent visits to world's largest and perhaps the best museum complex for art shows, exhibitions, book talks, film festivals, musicals, poetry readings, etc. I received my college education in the US. I sit in front of a computer during weekdays and earn a decent income. I am 5' and fair (looks cute). Haven't said "I do" or stand on the "poruwa[3]" yet. Seriously looking for a matured Sri Lankan male for marriage. You should be in his mid or upper 30s. Are you a child at heart and like to laugh? Do you like to share my interests and be a serious friend to me? Perhaps we might find something special that would lead to a marriage. Spring will be here pretty soon. Want to take a long drive and walk around cherry trees? Let me know.

This ad has been posted by a young female who appears to be in her early thirties. Her style of writing suggests that she may be a habitual speaker of CLE but may not be completely proficient in writing Standard English. The absence of inflection in *make me tick* in *Art, music, poetry and literature constantly make me tick* when she probably meant interests me and the use of zero subject and present perfect in *Haven't said "I do" or stand on the poruwa yet* suggests that the writer's aim may be to achieve an informal spoken style. This effect is further highlighted by the use of forms such as *I do* and *poruwa* which implies two distinct cultural traditions of marriage. Also *be a serious friend to me* which uses the structure and word order of Sinhala suggests that the writer may be someone whose dominant language is Sinhala. However, she uses a very personal and friendly style using expressions normally found in electronic mail and personal correspondence such as:

I am 5' and fair (looks cute)

Spring will be here pretty soon.

Want to take a long drive and walk around cherry trees?

Are you a child at heart and like to laugh?

Let me know.

The following ad placed by a Sri Lankan man living in the USA suggests that unlike the author of the earlier ad, he is someone who uses English mainly as an L2. For instance, he uses a zero preposition in two instances.

Brother in USA looking a partner for sister

I am looking a very good partner for my Sister

His use of English throughout the ad suggests that the writer is not very secure in English morphology (*sign for marriage but not got the wedding, Breif misunderstanding, Profesional, contact Shiranthie my Sister Directly*[sic]) all indicate that the writer is not a proficient user of Standard English. Nevertheless, the use of the full form of the copula, use of articles and certain standard expressions such as *looking for a simple Professional partner with sober habits* etc. indicate that the writer is aiming at Standard English.

> Description: I am looking a very good partner for my Sister, who is a Company Secretary, 30 years of age, 02 nd Child in the family. Sign for marriage but not got the wedding & separated after a Breif misunderstanding. She is very pretty, very social, looking for a simple Profesional partner with sober habits willing to reside in USA or UK. Please contact Shiranthie my Sister Directly.

Baila

In the baila lyrics given below, the variety of Lankan English used is close to L but appears to be aimed at Standard English. Parakrama (1995:140) notes that the lyrics of pop songs can be considered analogous to writing since they appear in a fixed form. In this song, the most noticeable L feature is code switching, which can be seen in lines (1), (8) and (10). When English is used, it is aimed as far as possible towards Standard English but in innovative ways, as one might expect, for purposes of characterisation, fun and humour. This baila song brings to crisis the troubled relationship between a husband and wife, who significantly are named Michael and Isabel both English names rather than Sri Lankan names. In this song we hear the

voices of four characters, i.e. that of the narrator, that of the husband and wife, Isabel and Michael, as well as the voice of a neighbour.

The innovative ways in which English is used can be seen in lines (2 &3) *no more freedom, petticoat government*, which effectively highlights Michael's plight as being under his wife's thumb. In line (5) Isabel is humorously characterised as a battle-axe threatening to hit Michael with a coconut scraper . In line (7) we see the use of some CLE features such as zero article and zero copula use. The zero elements are indicated by the use of angle brackets.

<The>next door people <are> laughing at you and I

Although colloquial forms such as these are used it is clear that they are a stylistic choice to achieve the effect of spontaneous conversation.

Since the use of code-switching in lines (8), (11) and (13) are particularly interesting, here, I will look at the use of code-switching using Myers-Scotton's matrix frame model. Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame Model (1993) uses a theory of code switching based on grammatical theory involving system morphemes and content morphemes. It is based on the premise that in a code-switched utterance one of the two languages plays the dominant role. This dominant language is called the matrix language and the other language is called the embedded one. According to the MLF model any CS utterance may be made up of one of three configurations:

1. ML+EL constituents in combination showing morphemes from the two languages;
2. ML islands which show morphemes from only the matrix language;
3. EL islands which show morphemes from only the embedded language.

In the first type of constituent, that is the ML constituent, the ML builds the frame. Whether a morpheme from the ML and EL is selected to appear in this ML+EL constituent depends on the status of the morpheme as system or content morpheme.

The morpheme order principle

   According to the morpheme order principle whenever there is a clash between morpheme order in ML + EL constituents, the ML's morpheme order prevails. This principle appears to be valid in the following examples. In line (8), since the ML is English, the morpheme order followed is that of English, whereas in line (14) where Sinhala is the ML, the morpheme order is that of Sinhala.

   I will hit you hiramanen
                     coconut scraper with
   I will hit you with the coconut scraper

   Isabel bande   *love karalama* needa?

   Isabel married for love no?

Use of Sinhala EL islands in mixed constituents

   When there is a lack of congruence between the two languages the necessary elements are accessed through Sinhala EL islands such as the following.

   Oh you devil woman mokada goori boori ei?
                        why   fighting why
                        why are you fighting?

   Michael Isabel

   1. Bandala   hari   trouble
       Marriage   lots of

   2. No more freedom

   3. Petticoat government

   4. Shut up donkey

   5. I will hit you hiramanen
                       coconut scraper with

   6. Kiyanawa Isabel, geheneva Michael
        Saying   shivering

   7. Next door people laughing at you and I

8. Oh you devil woman mokada goori boori ei?
                    Why   fighting   why
                    Why are you fighting?

9. My god Isabel your husband will die

10. Michael shouting 'what man budimathai'
                              Sleepy

11. Pera   bawayaka umba gerandiyek maruvada?
    Previous life   you snake   killed?
    Did you kill a snake in a previous birth?
                              why fighting why?
                              why are you fighting?

Michael Isabel

12. Bandala   hari   trouble
    Marriage   lots of

13. No more freedom

14. Petticoat government

15. Shut up donkey

16. I will hit you hiramanen
                    coconut scraper with

17. Kiyanawa Isabel, geheneva Michael
     Saying   shivering

18. Next door people laughing at you and I
19.
20. Oh you devil woman mokada goori boori ei?
                    Why   fighting   why
                    Why are you fighting?

20. My god Isabel your husband will die

21. Michael shouting 'what man budimathai'
                              Sleepy

22. Pera   bawayaka umba gerandiyeki maruvada
    Previous life   you snake   killed?
    Did you kill a snake in a previous birth

23. Karumeta geenu apayeenma wetunada?
    Bad luck   women   hell   fell
    Is it our for bad luck that women fell from hell?

24. Isabel bande   love karalama needa?
    Isabel married   love doing   no?
    Isabel married for love no?

25. Michael umba juudo dannema nedda?
    Michael you   judo   know   not
    Michael don't you know judo at all?

Conclusion

I have shown that in writing there is a uniform standard variety that is accessed, although stylistic choice and context determines the degree of standardness. However, the deviance-based approach that is still in use continues to see any differences from British Standard English except in lexis as 'mistakes' or 'deviances.' Even Parakrama (1995:122) who calls for 'an active broadening of the standard to include the greatest variety possible,' appears to be less flexible when it comes to variation in written English, seeing these features as 'errors' or 'deviances':

> When examples [of so-called errors/deviations] are found in print they are
> invariably *unselfconscious in that the writers are not aware that the rules of*
> *grammar and good taste have been broken* [my emphasis].

This statement indicates that even 'experts' in Standard English see *rules of grammar* as inextricably linked to notions of *good taste*. The tradition of seeing differences as 'deviant' means there are processes of judgement at work about what is and what is not acceptable as Standard English. Thus, as we have seen, in order to understand the kind of variation that can be found in language use in speech and writing, it is necessary to take into consideration the range of Lankan Englishes as well as the other languages that interact with English and which are used by native and non-native speakers.

Notes

[1] Pali – the language in which Buddhism was originally disseminated.

[2] In Sinhala the poruwa is a decorated platform symbolic of a doorway to the future when the bride and groom set out on their life's journey. Rice is sprinkled on the floor of the poruwa to signify fertility and the 'punkalas' on either side of the poruwa signify prosperity.

[3] Baila – an originally African-Portuguese musical genre. In Sinhalese nationalist discourse 'baila' is often considered to be 'thuppahi', an essential contamination of racial hybridity.

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