

Sri Lankan English (SLE) over the years: Evolution of the SLE vocabulary over two generations of SLE speakers

¹Nandula Perera & ²Tharindu Weerasooriya

¹Department of English, University of Kelaniya

²Department of Statistics and Computer Science, University of Kelaniya

mcnandula@gmail.com, cyrilcw@gmail.com

Sri Lankan English (SLE) has unique phonological, morphological, lexical and syntactic features which have gradually developed since the introduction of English in Sri Lanka. Vocabulary is one of the first features to be developed in SLE. Although the SLE vocabulary has been studied and recorded by researchers such as Gunsekera and Meyler, its generational difference has not been researched into. The research question of the study was: ‘Can the generational change’ observable in the selected SLE vocabulary be termed an evolution?’ This was done through a qualitative, comparative analysis of selected SLE vocabulary used in the decade 1955 – 1965 and 2005 – 2015. The primary data was taken from the *Ceylon Observer* of 1955 – 1965 (36 words) and the *Sunday Observer* of the decade 2005 – 2015 (111 words). 19 words were used in a questionnaire survey among 60 participants of which 30 were of the ages 15 – 25 and 30 were between the ages 65- 75. The results of the survey were then analyzed in detail through 10 interviews. The survey and the interviews were conducted to prove / disprove the age-gradedness of the selected SLE vocabulary and to prove / disprove the apparent time hypothesis in relation to the selected SLE vocabulary. Most of the vocabulary used disproved age-gradedness as they had specific meanings in relation to the two generations. A lexical change in the vocabulary was also observed. The usage of these terms were generation specific, which supported that the selected SLE vocabulary is not age-graded. The interviews supported the apparent time hypotheses as the older generation showed that their vocabulary has not changed significantly over the years. From these observations, it could be concluded that the generational difference observable in the selected SLE vocabulary over 60 years could be termed an evolution.

Keywords: Sri Lankan English, Generational change, Evolution, Age-gradedness, Apparent Time Hypothesis