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A Study on the Awareness of Sri Lankan English among Undergraduates

Savithri Karunanayake

Department of English, Faculty of Arts, University of Colombo
savithrikarunanayake@gmail.com

Michael Meyler (2007) defines Sri Lankan English as “the language spoken and understood by those Sri Lankans who speak English as their first language, and/or who are bilingual in English and Sinhala or Tamil”. Although there are many studies conducted on various topics related to Sri Lankan English (SLE), a study on the awareness of SLE among the undergraduates is an area seldom examined by researchers. Hence, this research is designed with the purpose of studying the awareness of SLE among the undergraduates. Therefore, a structured approach was used where the objective, design, sample and the questions were predetermined. The community selected for the study was the undergraduates of the faculty of Arts, University of Colombo, those who use English as their second language. The sample was drawn using simple random sampling so that each person had the chance of getting selected. A questionnaire was used as the main tool of primary data collection, which was a combination of both closed-ended and open-ended questions. The data collected were presented using pie charts and bar charts. Percentage calculations were used to discuss the findings. When examining the overall responses of the questionnaire, it was apparent that majority (84%) of the undergraduates use the lexicon of SLE. However, when asked what variety of English they speak, almost all the participants responded that it's British English. They were unable to identify a variety between British and American English. Hence, this research has specifically identified that there is lack of awareness of Sri Lankan English as a variety different from British and American English. The statistical analysis proves that colloquialisms have emerged in SLE and that there is a direct impact of the use of direct translations from Sinhala on the lexicon of Sri Lankan English.

Key words: Acquisition, Colloquialism, Dialects, Lexicon, Sri Lankan English