

Attitudes towards Sri Lankan English: An Attitudinal Survey in a University Context

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Sri Lankan English makes sense for anyone who had resided in Sri Lanka. In the words of Michael Meyler, "Sri Lankan English is 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." In other words, those are the heavily localized words and phrases used by Sri Lankans when expressing themselves in English. Although there are a significant number of Sri Lankans who use English as their first language, the establishment of Sri Lankan English as a separate variety has not been realized so far. Presumably, part of the problem has always been with reference to the attitudes towards Sri Lankan English (SLE). Hence, this research aims at investigating the attitudes towards Sri Lankan English. Thereby, the researcher anticipates to find some implication regarding the variety status of Sri Lankan English. The population selected for the study was the second year undergraduates of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, those who use English as their second language. Sample selected was 100 undergraduates representing four faculties. It 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 secondary data was gathered using related journals, newspapers, theses and online sources. As the sample has been selected to represent four faculties of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, the undergraduates displayed an attitudinal difference towards Sri Lankan English in accordance with the specific disciplines that are being followed by them. The results of the questionnaire suggested that for most of the undergraduates, the term "Sri Lankan English" carried connotations of 'broken English' or something 'substandard' and 'inferior'. They believed that Sri Lankan English is used by those who are uneducated and are not quite familiar with English. A majority of undergraduates aspired to speak 'British English' and nothing less. Despite their specific disciplines, most of the participants declared that they speak British English or the Queen's English and they are of the perception that Sri Lankans speak British English. Interestingly, although there were few undergraduates who were generally positive in their attitude towards Sri Lankan English, they remained relatively unaware of what exactly it consists of and how it differs from Standard English.

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