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The influence of Sinhala in Sinhala-English code mixing

This paper investigates the dominant influence of Sinhala in Sinhala-English code-mixing (hereafter CM). The objective of the study is to describe the mixing strategies revealed in CM as a result of the influence of Sinhala. It primarily focuses on Sri Lankan bilinguals whose first language (L1) is Sinhala. The paper describes Sinhala as the dominant language in Sinhala-English CM.

Using Muysken's (2000) typology of CM, this study analyses the influence of Sinhala when mixing languages in 5 respondents, selected (using a sociolinguistic questionnaire) from a group of 20 to determine if there are differences in the manner of mixing: i.e. whether speakers switch languages at sentence boundaries (alternation) or mix within sentences (insertion), and whether this is facilitated by the dominant influence of Sinhala in mixed utterances.

The speakers were selected on the basis of their L1 (from self-assessments). The speakers acknowledged the use of both Sinhala and English in their daily discourse. The study contains samples of spontaneous conversations in the public domain, which were recorded and transcribed for analysis.

The findings of the study reveal Sinhala as the dominant language in mixed utterances. The findings also reveal that the dominant influence of Sinhala has provided the Sinhala-English bilingual with a variety of mixing strategies involving insertion, alternation, and congruent lexicalization

Keywords: Code-mixing, insertion, alternation, congruent lexicalization, Sinhala-English bilinguals