



Dialectal variation in Sri Lankan English Pronunciation

By

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Abstract

This thesis examines dialectal variation in Sri Lankan English (SLE) pronunciation through deviations in lexical elicitations. Within the parameters of relativization Other Varieties of Sri Lankan English (OVSLE) are granted more investigative scope and exactitude than Standard Sri Lankan English (SSLE). The heuristics of 'Tamil English' (Gunsekera, 2005) is investigated through the construction of a working definition and empirical validation is procured for its recognition as a separate entity in the taxonomy of SLE pronunciation. Comparative analysis of the % rate of occurrence of 10 pronunciation characteristics identified in literature as unique in users of 'Tamil English' (T/OVSLE bilinguals) against the elicitations of OVSLE user populations with Sinhala as their first language (S/OVSLE bilinguals) is one source of validation. From an initial population of 486 bilinguals 95 S/OVSLE and 189 T/OVSLE participants are shortlisted through stratified random sampling measures. They provide data across an instrument of 50 word tokens during pronunciation elicitations. The word tokens represent 17 areas (7 common across S/OVSLE and T/OVSLE populations and 10 unique to T/OVSLE bilinguals) of pronunciation investigation and were randomly shortlisted from literature on SLE and learner English pronunciation of bilinguals with Tamil as their first language (L1). Analyzed data evidences a 0% occurrence of the 10 features unique to T/OVSLE bilinguals in lexical elicitations of the S/OVSLE populations. Further evidence for nonconformities in the 17 areas of pronunciation investigation is compiled through acoustic documentation by this thesis. Acoustic files document spectral and waveform dynamics of segmental/phonotactic deviations in 22 word tokens selected from the 50 word instrument across 15 case study subjects selected through purposive sampling procedures. Elicitations provide annotated documentation for pronunciation deviations across representatives for SSLE, S/OVSLE and T/OVSLE populations. Identifying causal factors for dialectal variation in SLE pronunciation the cross linguistic dynamics between the parity/disparity in the markedness constraint rankings of the phonological grammars of Sinhala, Tamil and British English in the contact setting within Sri Lanka come under scrutiny. The transference of the language specific rules governing grapheme to phoneme conversions, the rise of the Sinhala and Tamil colloquial spoken registers within functional domains and the resultant ascendance in exposure to assimilated loan phonology are examined as catalysts for dialectal variation in SLE pronunciation. Compilation of evidence ranges from historical linguistic records to current print media. Two other causal factors for dialectal variation in SLE pronunciation: L1 dominance and Proficiency in English and their uni pronged influence on the % rate of occurrence of deviations from SSLE pronunciation are examined across 284 participants. Findings ascertain that a significant amount of variation in SLE pronunciation is explained through these two variables. In essence based on segmental and phonotactic deviations in lexical enunciation this thesis examines dialectal variation in SLE pronunciation and appends T/OVSLE populations to its existing taxonomy through the provision of empirical and acoustic evidence.

Keywords: Sri Lankan English, dialectal variation, influence of the L1 on L2, L1 dominance, Proficiency in English