

Does Sri Lankan English (SLE) have dialects, and can one be identified as standard SLE?

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This paper will focus on different dialects of Sri Lankan English (SLE) currently in existence in Sri Lanka, identifying the speakers of the dialects with respect to:

- a. the geo-socio-cultural context they belong to;
- b. the type of English they use (*ie.* English as a First Language/Co-First Language/Second Language/Co-Second Language/Third Language/Occasionally used language);
- c. and the Domains in which they use English (*ie.* Domains of Family/Friendship/Religion/Education/Employment/Public Life)

The paper will first outline briefly how English was transplanted in Sri Lanka and then developed into a distinct, rule-governed variety of SLE. Other sub-varieties or dialects also developed and will be described as well. The term 'standard language' will next be defined, and the concept of 'Standard SLE' (Std SLE) will be discussed in opposition to other dialects of SLE.

The objectives of the paper are to discover whether there are dialects of SLE, and whether one can be considered as Std SLE. The scope of the problem will be as follows: whether there are different dialects of SLE; whether a dialect 'Std SLE' can be identified; and if so, how the dialects can be distinguished from each other. In the analysis, the issues considered will be prestige, power, and class competition over status, in relation to the identification of the dialects. Reference will be made to vocabulary, morphology and discourse patterns, but the main focus will be on the phonology of SLE, specifically the distribution of the back vowels [o] and [ʊ].

The conclusions are that four main dialect or sub-varieties can be distinguished with two varieties that can presently be identified as Std SLE. However SLE has been undergoing rapid change, with features of one dialect beginning to occur in other dialects as well, hence constantly giving rise to confused patterns in the dialects.

Key words: Sri Lankan English, Dialects, Standard Sri Lankan English, Status, Power

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