

English as a Global Language and Its Impact on Sinhala Language & Vice Versa

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Introduction

Language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols by means of which a social group cooperates¹. As of now, there are nearly 6700 natural languages spoken throughout the world. Humans gradually built a storehouse of language symbols that represented objects and actions in the outside world. As civilization progressed, language changed to reflect new knowledge and a more complex society. Language continued to evolve in due course of time for a variety of reasons.

The purpose of this research paper is to find out the reasons for the growing trend of the use of a large number of English words in different ways and forms by the common Sinhala public. The private sector FM radio and Television anchors excessively use English words in their info-tainment programmes. Teledramas and some other entertainment programmes also play a major role in popularizing this new fashion. The common public beginning to follow the footpath of these trendsetters and many Sinhala urban citizens consider it a vogue to elevate and highlight themselves as more educated and knowledgeable people among others.

This research paper will deal with several key issues such as English as a global language, the impact of English on Sinhala and the impact of Sinhala on English. The conclusion will throw light to the possible reasons for the absorption of more English words into Sinhala as against the lesser Sinhala impact on English.

English Language

English is a West Germanic language that developed in England during the Anglo-Saxon era. It is an offshoot of an Anglo-Frisian (Ingweonic) dialect area, which must have been fairly extensive before migrating to Britain. English is the first language of several countries including the UK, USA, Australia, New Zealand, Canada and Ireland. Only those who hail from England are called English while the others are identified by their country, i.e. Americans, New Zealanders, Canadians, and Irish et al. As a result of the military, economic, scientific, political, and cultural influence of the British Empire during the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries, and of the United States since the mid-20th century, it has become the lingua franca in many parts of the world. It is used extensively as a second language and as an official language in Commonwealth countries and many international organisations.

Historically, English originated from several dialects, now collectively termed Old English, which were brought to Great Britain by Anglo-Saxon settlers beginning in the 5th century. English was further influenced by the Old Norse language of Viking invaders.

At the time of the Norman Conquest, Old English developed into Middle English, borrowing heavily from the Norman (Anglo-French) vocabulary and spelling conventions.

The etymology of the word "English" is a derivation from the 12th century Old English called *Englisc* or *Engle*, plural form *Angles* ("of, relating to, or characteristic of England").

Modern English developed with the Great Vowel Shift that began in the 15th-century England, and continues to adopt foreign words from a variety of languages, as well as coining new words. A significant number of English words, especially technical words, have been constructed based on roots from Latin and ancient Greek. English vocabulary has constantly expanded as a result of the impact made by a multilingual population.

English is spoken by more native speakers than any other language except, presumably, North Chinese; if we count the important factor of foreign speakers, English is the most widespread of languages. Chinese is spoken by more than 1000 million persons in China, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and elsewhere in the South-East Asia. Nevertheless the Chinese is not a contender for an international language status as it is geographically confined to a limited area. The other languages which enjoy international status or have a wide geographical area are French, Spanish, Portuguese, and Arabic². The English language, according to Wickramasinghe³ has many more attributes to be the nearest to an international language that the world has ever had. In justifying his stance, Wickramasinghe⁴ gives a list of 34 countries⁵ where English is used as the only official language apart from 17 bilingual countries⁶ where English is considered an official language. However, Wickramasinghe's lists have spared England, USA and Canada as countries where English has much more closer affinity as the mother tongue while using it as the official language.

Meanwhile, David Crystal⁷ has sighted seven reasons as to why he calls English so special:

1. Historical reasons
2. Internal political reasons
3. External economic reasons
4. Practical reasons
5. Intellectual reasons
6. Entertainment reasons
7. Some wrong reasons

That apart, Wickramasinghe⁸ quotes three interesting reasons, as highlighted by some scholars vis-à-vis the functioning of English:

1. English functioning as an ancillary language in countries where native speakers learn it so that they can participate in international communication.
2. English functioning as an official language in multilingual countries where non-native speakers learn it so that they can communicate with each other and participate in national institutions of education and government.
3. English functioning as the dominant language in countries where non-native speakers learn it so that they can participate broadly in the larger society.

A. C. Gimson⁹ takes up this issue as English has evolved into a world lingua franca. According to him, in any such artificial (or derived) model, there are three obvious prerequisites:

1. The model should be as easy to learn as any natural model, and, if possible easier.

2. It should be readily intelligible to most native speakers of English.
3. The learner of such a model should thereby possess a base for understanding the major natural varieties of English.¹⁰

Significance of English Language

Its spread beyond the British Isles began with the growth of the British Empire, and by the late nineteenth century the reach of English was truly global. Following the British colonisation of North America, it became the dominant language in the United States and in Canada. The growing economic and cultural influence of the United States and its status as a global superpower since World War II have significantly accelerated the language's spread across the planet.

Because Modern English which is so widely spoken and it has often been described as the first global lingua franca, is the dominant language or in some instances even the required international language of communications, science, business, aviation, entertainment, radio and diplomacy.

While English is not an official language in most countries, it is currently the language most often taught as a second language around the world. Some linguists such as David Graddol¹¹ believe that it is no longer the exclusive cultural property of "native English speakers", but is rather a language that is absorbing aspects of cultures worldwide as it continues to grow. It is, by international treaty, the official language for aerial and maritime communications. English is an official language of the United Nations and many other international organisations, including the International Olympic

Committee. Hence, as the official language of the Olympics, English is used internationally in sports besides being used in beauty contests, in transportation (air-lines and ships), and in religious and secular broadcasting. Books, magazines, and newspapers written in English are available in many countries around the world. As the most commonly used language in the sciences, English is globally used in communications, in technical and scientific journals, and in technology. In fact, nearly 80 percent of the information stored in the world's computers is in English.

The number of native speakers of English was estimated in 1920 at about 170 million¹². The English language, as a lingua franca, has evolved into the foremost international language 'used in every continent by approximately 800 million people¹³'. Meanwhile, Bill Bryson cites some interesting factors regarding the supremacy of English as 'the common tongue'. Accordingly, *Webster's Third New International Dictionary* lists 450,000 words, and the revised *Oxford English Dictionary* has 615,000 words, but that is only part of the total. Technical and scientific terms would add millions more. Altogether, about 200,000 English words are in common use, more than in German (184,000) and far more than in French (a mere 100,000). Meanwhile, David Crystal¹⁴ argues, that English has never been a totally homogeneous language, but its history is primarily the story of the way it has become increasingly heterogeneous in its sounds, grammar and vocabulary as it has come to be adopted by different communities around the world, and adapted by them to meet their social needs. As per Bloomfield's record, the resemblance is closest between English and the dialects of the Frisian area, spoken by some 350,000 persons on the coast and coastal islands along the North Sea. This resemblance appears

strikingly in the oldest Frisian texts, which date from the second half of the thirteenth century.

Colonialism and English in Sri Lanka¹⁵

As a site of colonization, first by the Portuguese, then by the Dutch, and finally by the English, Sri Lanka has had successive involvement with three European nations. The English language, however, has had an unparalleled impact on the island because previous colonial powers were uninterested in disseminating their culture beyond proselytization to the native population. Under the Treaty of Amiens, a British civil administration succeeded Dutch control of the island and Ceylon was declared a British Crown colony in 1802. In yoking what had previously been three separate kingdoms together into this colony, the British also established English as a language of high status and rule on the island.

Over 19.4 million people call Sri Lanka home¹⁶, but they do not all do so in the same language. A rich mixture of Moors/Muslims, Burghers/Eurasians, Veddahs¹⁷, and Malays live in the island, in addition to its two main peoples—the Sinhalese majority, who speak Sinhala, and the Tamil minority, who speak Tamil¹⁸. Although both these languages currently hold official status in the country, English has often served as the lingua franca on the island and is typically the language of choice in contemporary governmental policies and practices¹⁹. As is the case for other former British colonial subjects, however, the use of English for Sri Lankans is far from uncomplicated.

Postcolonial English(es)

The globalization of commerce and culture along with the competing assertions of political rights by the country's ethnic communities increasingly insist English—along with Sinhala and Tamil—play a prominent role in the country. Exactly what role English—and indeed what English—will play, however, remains under debate. J. B. Disanayaka, for instance, has classified four linguistic varieties currently in use: Standard English, Sri Lankan English, Sinenglish, and Singirisi. Jennifer Jenkins makes a passing reference to one of these, Sri Lankan English, as playing a “wide range of local functions both public and private,” but concedes that the government has recently been promoting English in its standard form as a neutral link language between the island's ethnic groups²⁰. Michael Meyler²¹ presented his intentions to codify Sri Lankan English in a dictionary. The most thorough study of Sinenglish—*Sinenglish: A De-Hegemonized variety of English in Sri Lanka* by Wimal Wickramasinghe—is a self-published work.

While efforts move forward to establish, legitimize, and codify various Englishes in the country, the socio-political and economic opportunities that Standard English provides are not lost to the Sinhalese or Tamils. In fact, the target English appears to remain its standard form for a majority of the country's residents. With the private sector economy expanding exponentially since opening to foreign investment in 1977, English superseded university degrees to become the prime qualification for financially attractive positions. Consequently, first language speakers of English and those who received private English education secured privileged positions in multinational corporations and banks, for instance. For all its users and uses, then, English in Sri Lanka

is incredibly politically charged. Unable to remove its colonial past, present domestic political tensions, or international pressures, the use of English in Sri Lanka is far from straightforward.

Advantages of Colonial English for Sri Lankans

Sri Lankans had great incentive to use English. Prior to the colonial period, one's occupation was determined by his caste and changing social position was tremendously difficult. But the economy changed with the opening up of plantations, and non-traditional employment became more common with the “establishment of a modern bureaucracy together with the expansion of secular education²²”. Along with these changes, English became the language of government administration, law, advanced secular education, and commerce. The use of Sinhala or Tamil in these domains was frowned upon, even if it occurred between native speakers of the language.

The study of English, therefore, offered considerable material advantages for Sri Lankans. Since speaking it allowed them to move away from hereditary caste-based systems and to establish themselves in more prestigious occupations based on education, non-Europeans of the island's multiracial population began adopting it in addition to their first languages. English was a passport to high paying, privileged careers, and soon a localized professional class emerged through the English education system. For a relatively small, anglicized upper class, English was used from infancy onward for most purposes. For them, Sinhala and Tamil were reserved for communicating with elders, servants, monks, and others whose language learning and use was restricted to a vernacular. In contrast, lower-middle to lower class Sri Lankans would not learn English until later, if at all,

and most commonly used a vernacular. Speakers of either Sinhala or Tamil exclusively found themselves excluded from social mobility.

Moreover, it proved difficult to dislodge English as the language of commerce, higher education, technology, science, and so on, and so it continued to hold social, cultural, and economic value throughout the period of these language policy enactments. "In this sense," A. Suresh Canagarajah²³ argues, "English was still the official working language in many institutional domains".

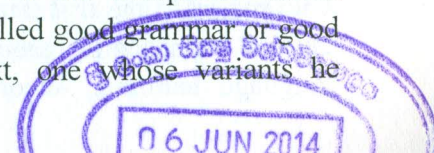
Re-evaluating English

Vernaculars, then, have not always been equitably adopted in the country as the Sinhalese and Tamils wage competing claims to nationalist identity. At the same time, notions of an autonomous, homogeneous nation-state are more and more difficult to sustain. Along with competing assertions of political rights by the country's ethnic communities, Sri Lankans find themselves facing the communicative demands of commerce and culture in an age of globalization²⁴. Cultural values have shifted on the island, Chitra Fernando asserts, from paradigms of religion and metaphysics to those of science and technology. This switch, she says, is most patent in the value Sri Lankans now ascribed to English. According to Fernando²⁵, the majority of Sri Lankans believe that the status of English "as a world language makes it the best vehicle for access to knowledge, as well as the most suitable medium for contributing to international research".

Against this position is Parakrama's own. In *De-hegemonizing Language Standards: Learning from (Post) Colonial Englishes, about 'English,'* he estimates that less than one percent of Sri Lanka's inhabitants speak only

English. The majority of users (approximately 12%), then, is bilingual and uses variant forms of English influenced by its native languages and social circumstances. Consequently, Parakrama²⁶ aims to create a broader standard for Lankan English that accounts for these variants, particularly among its non-educated native users. Such variations, he argues, are proactive misuses that creatively engage with and open up Standard English. Thiru Kandiah²⁷ has argued that deletion in Lankan English, though not a unique language feature, has particular implications because the specific truncated utterances in it reveal an "explicit or implicit assumption of some kind of abstract underlying structure for each actual 'reduced' utterance". Michael Meyler presented his intentions to codify Sri Lankan English in a dictionary at the Sri Lanka English Language Teachers' Association in 2002. All of these instances attempt to promote varieties on the island as legitimate, de-hegemonized Englishes. At the International Conference on Sri Lanka Studies in 2003, E. A. Gamini Fonseka, dismissed these positions as validations of substandard Englishes and argued instead that the country should adopt a programme of Standard English education. As these positions suggest, the standards and models of English in Sri Lanka remain under debate.

Terms such as Sri Lankan English and Sinenglish, for instance, are recent constructs that must be established before their norms can be codified in dictionaries or grammars. Wickramasinghe²⁸ explains this process in the introduction to his self-published study. His goal, firstly, is to define Sinenglish. The study is not a grammar or dictionary but rather an attempt at describing some of the acceptable norms governing what has come to be called good grammar or good English in a Sri Lankan context, one whose variants he



qualifies, like de Souza, as chiefly spoken. While he explores the colloquialisms, idioms, various switches, and calques that inflect this variety of English, and thereby de-hegemonize Standard English, he is insistent that his study is original, that nothing has been codified as of yet.

Fonseka offers the following brief summary of Sri Lankan English's norms as presented to him at the university²⁹: the use of "no" instead of the question tag; misconceptions such as "bungalow" for a two- or three-storied villa and "hotel" for a restaurant; Sinhala botanical names such as bandakka and wætəkolu; Sinhala traditional food names such as pæniwaləlu and kæwum; Sinhala agricultural and geographical names such as deniyə and pælə; Sinhala cultural names such as perəhærə and dāgæbə; peculiarities in pronouncing words such as "garage," "auntie," and "school"; peculiarities in producing sounds such as /p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, /ð/, and /θ/; and the use of hackneyed idioms such as "it is raining cats and dogs" or "once in a blue moon."

Far from describing the English use of the average Sri Lankan, Fonseka³⁰ contends, the list serves the political purpose of legitimizing deviations from Standard English as part of a decolonizing process. Such examples, he argues, signal a lack of proficiency more than an active resistance to a colonial language. Furthermore, the goal of legitimizing such variations undermines the empowerment (access to professional standing, trade, government and diplomacy, and so on) that accompanies the acquisition of Standard English domestically and internationally.

Dr. N.C. Premawardhena³¹ has done a very useful research with regard to the first language interference as a whole and cultural influence in particular when it comes to the second language learning. According to Premawardhena³², "The

culture and traditions, lifestyle, way of thinking, social norms and beliefs of a speech community are reflected in its language. An analysis of language brings out unique features of socio-cultural aspects of the native speakers". Meanwhile Dissanayake³³ is of the view that culture in its simplest sense, may be viewed as a composite consisting of two distinctive elements:

- i. The system of values
- ii. The way they are expressed in material terms.

Every language has different degrees of respect, politeness and diplomacy. Similarly, the social/educational status, relationship between the addressee and speaker, background (rural/urban), age, sex, profession, emotional status are also reflected in the language. If a learner does not grasp these nuances, he will not be able to communicate effectively with different speech communities³⁴.

The following example shows the change of emotional status of the speaker and attitude towards the referent:

Ex.

1. "Man gihin sirta kiyannam". (I will tell the boss about the matter.)
2. "Man gihin kiyannam."
3. "Man gihin undeta kiyannam."
4. "Man gihin okata kiyannam."

In these examples, the degree of respect towards the third person referent varies according to the use of reference.

1. is with an honorific 'Sir'.
2. carries zero anaphora referring to both the accusative object and the dative object. This depicts a neutral tone.

3. and 4. refer to the third person using reference devices that are not particularly well meaning towards the referent. The change of third person reference devices denotes the change of the degree of respect of the speaker towards the referent. Also note the heavy use of zero anaphora (omitting of the third person reference) when speaking to elders, teachers and others as a mark of respect. Parents, for example, are never addressed with second person pronouns. The kinship term is used instead³⁵.

Unlike in European languages, a transcript of a dialogue in Spoken Sinhala will often give hints to the gender of the speaker, i.e. male or female, by the use of certain expressions which are typical of each gender³⁶.

e.g.:

Females:

Use of particles with long vowels or consonants

Anee (please), ayyo (exclamation), pavuu (to express sympathy)

Adjectives: cuuttak (very little), podii udavvak (very small help), lasssana potak (very beautiful book)

Reference: oyaa (you – familiar)

Imperative: use of –ko with a verb:

Enna-ko (please come), yan-ko (Let's go)

Males:

Reference: umba, macan, uu, eeka

Imperative: considered derogatory when used by women –varen vs. enna (come) palayan vs. yanna (go), kaapan vs. kanna (eat)

When men use terms typical to women, they are often laughed at for talking like women. Similarly, women using terms typical to men are not welcome by the native speakers. It is also noteworthy that the diplomacy, politeness and courtesy shown in Sinhala is transferred to Sri Lankan English, too, when analyzing the phrased used in everyday life.

e.g.:

Taking leave: I will go and come.

Opening a conversation: I just came/ I just called (without a particular reason)

Collective thinking: our child, our house

Imperative: Go: Go-ko, Come-ko, Come, will you?

Third person reference: him, her: that one, that woman, this one, this woman

Greetings: So how? After a long time, no? Long time no see

Came to buy books? Why, late today?

You've gone down, Why?

Politeness/ respect – Use of honorifics: Sir, Madam: Are you going now, Sir?

Code switching: Can you do this for me, anee? Puluwanda?

Politeness and distance are also inherent factors in the Sri Lankan speech community and they have their own unique expressions in this regard. In Premawardhena's³⁷ words, if the addressee is placed higher in the social hierarchy as in the case of Buddhist monks, parents, teachers and elders in the Sinhala speech community, honorific terms, kinship terms and zero anaphora are used to address them. Among peers the second

person pronoun 'oyaa' is used and males use 'umba', 'macan' etc. the politeness tag -anee (please) is often used by female speakers.

e.g.: Can you do this? anee? Or meekakaraladennaanee.

It would seem socially unacceptable if the person above were reversed.

As Premawardhena³⁸ observes, religion plays an important role in the Sri Lankan culture. Associations with Buddhism including the temple are placed at the highest level in the social hierarchy. Thus the first major demarcation of distance is found among the monk and the layman. The parents and teachers are placed next in the social hierarchy at one level followed by elders and professionals. Premawardhena agrees with Dissanayake³⁹ in this regard as the latter says, "Respect for elders is expressed in two ways, by means of social behavior and by means of linguistic etiquette".

The use of honorifics even for objects in the temple and different terms to refer to Buddha, Buddhist monks, Bodhi tree, the stupa, Buddha statue, sacred relics of Buddha and the shrine room in a temple depict the distance between the layman and the associations with the religion. Similarly, the heavy use of zero anaphora, kinship terms and honorifics such as Madam, Sir, Miss for parents, elders, teachers and superiors respectively, show the distance between different social hierarchies in the Sinhala speech community⁴⁰.

The close bond that exists in the speech community is also reflected by the use of kinship terms for non-related referents, too. From the childhood, the speakers are trained in this linguistic and social etiquette by the elders. Thus any referent is referred appropriately as follows:

e.g.: ācci (grand mother), sīyā (grand father), ayyā (elder brother), akkā (elder sister), malli (younger brother), nangi (younger sister), māmā (uncle), nændā (aunt). While monolinguals use the kinship terms māmā and nændā, the bilinguals use the English loan words <uncle> and <aunt> or /ānti/, some also using /ænti/ instead of /ānti/⁴¹.

Premawardhena⁴² sights the following examples to highlight the influence of Pali language in Sri Lankan language:

English	SLE
Eat breakfast (with reference to monks)	Partake hīldāna ⁴³
Eat lunch (with reference to monks)	Partake dāna
Offering of breakfast / lunch (with reference to monks)	dāna / alms giving
Drink (with reference to monks)	gilanpasa ⁴⁴
Keep flowers on the altar	Offer flowers
Water the Bodhi tree	Holding a bodhipūjā ⁴⁵ ceremony
Full moon day	Poya ⁴⁶ day
Observe the five precepts	Observe pansil ⁴⁷
Sermon	dhamma sermon / dhamma desanā
Chant Buddhist stanzas	Chant pirith ⁴⁸
Offer a gift (with reference to monks)	Offer pirikāra ⁴⁹

The impact of Sinhala on English:

Meanwhile Wimal Wickramasinghe⁵⁰ provides a list of Sinhala words that are currently in dictionaries of international repute.

- Anaconda - the largest snake, a non-venomous constrictor (a snake that kills by compressing), native to tropical South America (<Sinhala *henakanda(ya)*, a kind of snake equivalent to *hena* 'lightning' + *kanda* 'stem' + *-ya* (suffix).
- Asvaddumization - preparation of the paddy field (i.e., ploughing the field thereafter, etc.) for the purpose of sowing seeds.
- Bhikku⁵¹ - Buddhist monk; also from Pali
- Bo-tree - sacred pipal tree; the tree regarded by Buddhists as sacred because Lord Buddha's enlightenment is said to have happened under one of these trees.
- Beriberi - nervous disease, most widespread in the tropics, caused by the lack of thiamine (Vitamin B), which results in inflammation of the nerves, paralysis of the limbs, oedema (an abnormal and excessive accumulation of fluid within body tissues or body cavities, causing generalized or local swelling) and heart failure (reduplication of Sinhala word *beri* 'inability', 'weakness'.)
- Chena - forest clearing made for temporary cultivation.
- Dagaba - Buddhist shrine; dome-shaped memorial alleged to contain relics of Buddha or a Buddhist saint; stūpa; chaitya (<Sinhala *dāgæba* <Pali *dhātugabbha*

<Sanskrit *dhātugarbha* equivalent to *dhātu* 'relics' + *garbha* 'womb', 'inside'.

- Disāwā⁵² - (historically) governor of a district of Sri Lanka.
- Kapurāla - a temple priest in Sri Lanka.
- Kitul - jaggery palm.
- Kurakkan - a kind of food grain.
- Lewāya - lagoon; saltpan.
- Tic polongā - Russell's viper.
- Patanā - grasslands.
- Perəhæra - religious procession
- Taləgoyā - monitor lizard.
- Vedəralā - village doctor; ayurvedic physician.
- Vesak/Wesak - the most widely celebrated Buddhist festival held in the month of May in order to commemorate the birth, enlightenment and death of Buddha.
- Villu - lake; swamp.
- Wanduroo - Sri Lankan grey long-tailed monkey.

Besides, *pirit chanting*, *dhamma talk*, *yours in the dhamma*, *yours in metta* etc. can also be called as Sinhala influence on English though they are not extensively familiar with the communities other than Buddhists. Some even suggest that

- *It is pothering these days* (it is drizzling these days)
- *I am ulling my pencil* (I am sharpening my pencil)
- *Rastiyadufying etc.* (wandering about like a vagabond)

as gradually occupying space in the Sri Lankan English despite their authenticity and acceptance are still a matter of debate among scholars. However, as any living language would do, Sinhala and English will continue to be nourished and developed both mutually and monolingually in the course of time in their own capacity. While the latter as a well spread universal type language will naturally have much more impact on Sinhala but the former will also influence in its own way slowly but steadily.

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40. Premawardhena, N.C, Foundations in Language Learning, Dehiwala: Pelican Printers, 2009, 100.
41. Ibid.
42. Ibid, 101
43. *Dāna* is a Pali term but it is now also used as a Sinhala word. *Hīlis* definitely a Sinhala word.
44. This Sinhala word has been derived from the Pali word *gilānapaccaya*.
45. These two words are also used in Sinhala though they are originally Pali/ Sanskrit words.
46. This is a Sinhala word derived from the Pali term *Uposathā*.
47. This Sinhala word has been derived from the Pali term *Pañcasīlā*.
48. This is a Sinhala word derived from the Pali term *Parittā*.
49. This Sinhala word has been derived from the Pali term *Parikkhār*
50. Wickrmasinghe, W., Sinenglish: A De-hedgemonised Variety of English in Sri Lanka, Author Publication, 2000, 240.
51. Bhikkhu should be the correct form here.
52. Disāwə would be a better transliteration here.