
Kaduwa, Karawila or Giraya? Orientation Towards English in 21st Century Sri Lanka.

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ABSTRACT

Orientation to a language, its speakers and the role or roles it is seen as playing in society can differ between speech communities, even if the communities share a first language and a linguistic heritage. This study examines the orientation to English held by two speech communities, at the end of the first decade in 21st century, in Sri Lanka - the traditional habitual English speakers and the non-habitual English speakers who form the majority. The documented ideology of both groups - the former, which regarded (and continue to regard) English as a resource, and the latter who rejected it as an instrument of oppression to be rejected, stem from Sri Lanka's historically deep rooted colonial and post-colonial past. This paper examines the orientation to English at present and traces the changing orientations to English in Sri Lanka over period of little over half a century.

This paper examines the orientation to English held by both speech communities, at present. The views expressed in the written English media authored by English speakers are compared with the opinions and beliefs expressed by the majority i.e. those deemed to 'have an inadequate knowledge of English' by the first group, to find out whether the opinions expressed by the former are indeed reflected in the views of the latter. The views of the majority, i.e. educated non-habitual speakers of English were obtained through a survey questionnaire administered to 2019 adults living across Sri Lanka. The study reveals that while the opinions of the habitual English speakers have undergone certain changes during this period, the socio-psychological views and attitudes held by a majority of educated non-habitual English users have changed considerably in complex ways. Their orientation to the language itself i.e. the accepted 'norm', its speakers and the roles it plays in the current SL socio-economic context have evolved.

Key words: Socio-psychological Attitudes, Kaduwa, Kravila, Giraya, New Englishes, University Students

1. INTRODUCTION

Currently there is much public debate on the advantages conferred upon and enjoyed by those who are 'good' speakers of English in Sri Lanka and the 'privileges' denied to those who do not 'know' the language. Ideas and opinions have been expressed by members of the public among whom are academics, English teachers, teacher trainers, persons representing professional associations, economists, politicians, policy makers, etc., Most of the writers point to declining of standards and attribute it to learner external factors while the learners / users themselves are seen as being disadvantaged as a result of not being able to use English with 'passable fluency' (Jayasuriya, 2011a). In most articles the discourse is framed from the perspective of anglophiles who want to share, what is seen as a valuable resource, with the 'low proficient, disadvantaged and deprived' masses. The 'masses' referred to by most of writers are those presenting themselves for white collar job interviews or persons in administrative or professional employment seeking promotions in the state and private sectors.

The orientation different speech communities have towards a particular language, its speakers and the roles that the language plays in society can differ. Language can be perceived as a resource that confers advantages on speakers or, as a problem - that functions as a barrier to advancement. In Sri Lanka, English has been a problem as well as a resource. Previous research (Kandiah, 1984, 1999) has documented the existence of two speech communities in Sri Lanka - the Anglophone 'elite'(Fernando, 1977) to whom English was a resource, and the national bourgeoisie (Samarakkody, 2001) who considered English as a problem or barrier. In this paper we will refer to the former group as 'habitual English speakers' while a further distinction will be drawn between persons who have a knowledge of English but who are not-habitual speakers and non English speakers. In previous studies, it is the non-habitual English speakers who are documented as displaying antipathy towards English (Kandiah, 1984, 1999, Fernando, 1977).

This paper seeks to examine the orientation exemplified by the popular views expressed in the English media, the beliefs and assumptions underlying these viewpoints and to investigate whether the opinions expressed are indeed reflected in the opinions and beliefs expressed by the 'masses'¹, viz. the orientation of those deemed to 'have an inadequate knowledge of English'. That is, whether there is concurrence on the advantages that can be enjoyed by developing 'a good command' of English. Particularly since it is acknowledged that people, especially adults, learn anything only if they see the need to learn it because *'without sufficient motivation, even individuals with the most remarkable abilities cannot accomplish long term goals, and neither are appropriate*

¹Non-habitual English speakers

curricular and good teaching enough on their own to ensure student achievement" (Dornyei, 2005 : 25). Motivation being the impetus that drives a person to initiate, expend effort and to persist with the learning of a second language.

2. METHODOLOGY

Over 25 features, articles, letters-to-the editor, statements etc., that appeared in different written media (English) from the period of December, 2008 to June, 2011 were examined (list of documents examined given in appendix 1) and some common viewpoints identified. On a) the level of competency in English among Sri Lankans and the way it is labeled b) the characterization of non-habitual speakers c) disadvantages of not being 'proficient' in English and the advantages gained by learning it. We also examined the underlying assumptions and the implications of the comments made.

These 'popular' beliefs were compared with information given by 2019 undergraduate students following LLB, BMS, BSc, BTech and MATE² programmes at the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL) Students who enroll for degrees at OUSL are mature individuals, who are either seeking career advancement through the acquisition of further qualifications relating to their current field or are seeking to change their profession and acquire knowledge in a field other than their own - i.e. accountants, engineers etc., following the LLB or Management degrees etc., Since the Open University offers its programmes across the island through its regional and study centres, the student population is not confined to one area of the country. Therefore, unlike the undergraduates in conventional universities in Sri Lanka, the undergraduate students at OUSL are mature individuals who represent a broad cross section of Sri Lankan society, from varying professions and from different areas of the country. Therefore, their opinions can be thought to mirror those of the 'average' educated adult Sri Lankan.

All students enrolled for degrees at OUSL are mandatorily required to reach a particular level of proficiency in English, (i.e. UGC Benchmark Level 6). Students whose proficiency level is below the required level are enrolled in the English language courses conducted by the Department of Language Studies of the Open University of Sri Lanka (OUSL). Students are assigned to one of three levels, beginner, lower intermediate or higher intermediate, depending on their performance at the proficiency test in English conducted at the time of enrolment to the degree programme.

²LLB - Bachelor of Laws Degree, BMS - Bachelor of Mangaments, BSc - Bachelor of Science and MATE - Masters in Teacher Education

A questionnaire was administered to students in the ESP programmes offered by the Department of Language Studies of the OUSL. The questionnaire was in Sinhala or Tamil. Student responses to six statements, which reflect the popularly held beliefs as to why English is necessary were elicited through the questionnaire³. The informants were requested to rank order the statement according to what they thought was the most important to the least important. The statements are as follows:

- a) Knowledge of English is necessary to obtain employment
- b) Knowledge of English is necessary to get promotions at work
- c) Knowledge of English is necessary for my undergraduate / graduate studies at the university
- d) Knowledge of English is necessary to continue with higher studies, obtain scholarships
- e) Knowledge of English is necessary for social prestige and social advancement (*samajaye piliganeemak labaganna*)
- f) Knowledge of English is necessary to pursue other (wider) areas of knowledge (*venath dae pilibanda bahushruta denuma labaganna*)

These statements can also be tied up with the factors identified by Brown (2000) as forces that drive people to learn something. The need for manipulation or effecting a change in the environment - (the practical / utilitarian dimension) can be linked with statements (a) and (b) above, the need for exploration - for gaining knowledge and internalizing knowledge with statement (c), the need for knowledge, i.e. to process and expand the results of exploration with statement (d), Ego enhancement, acceptance with (e) - this can also be tied up with Maslow's (1970) need for self-esteem i.e. belonging and social status and statement (f) with the need for stimulation, to be stimulated by ideas, thoughts and feelings, by others.

The responses were examined in terms of age of informants, sex, region they live in and the degree programme enrolled in.

In addition to the 25 Media articles, extracts from four official documents are presented and analyzed in support of the conclusions.

Limitations of the study - the study was limited to the central, western and southern provinces. Due to the fact that the OUSL did not have English classes for the said programmes in the Northern centres, information could not be gathered from this area of

³Administered as a part of a larger study.

the country. A very large number of informants ranked 'for undergraduate studies' as the second highest or even the highest reason as to why they require a knowledge of English - this opinion could be a consequence of the medium of instruction in these degree programmes. A similar questionnaire has to be administered to undergraduates following degree programmes where the medium of instruction is not English to see whether this opinion is held by the majority engaged in higher education.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 'Popular' Opinion as expressed in the written media

We examined the views expressed in the texts and identified common view points.

Table 1 presents a common view on the level of competency in English among Sri Lankans today, selected statements to exemplify the view and the assumption underlying the view as seen by the researcher.

Table 1: The level of competency in English among Sri Lankans today and the way it is labeled

| View | Example statement | No of articles idea expressed in | Underlying assumption |
|--|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Deterioration of overall proficiency | - 'the sad and deplorable state of English in Sri Lanka' needs upgrading. (1) "Speaking in English with <i>passable fluency</i> (after 13 years of learning it at school) has become an almost <i>unattainable goal for most people</i> " (6) The problem of <i>inadequate English language communicative skills</i> (8) | 6 (24%) | overall proficiency in English has deteriorated in comparison to the past and needs to be upgraded |
| | ".....those who had offered English as a subject in the OL examination and obtained even credit or distinction passes on multiple question exams did not have the needed" (16) | | That the standards of the national examinations have deteriorated – O/L no longer a measure of competency. National standards have deteriorated |
| Characterization of / labels given to the type of English that is used by the 'masses' | <i>inadequate</i> , 'sub-standard', 'broken English' 'not being able to speak a word of English'... 'underprivileged classes' | | Writers see / position themselves as 'proficient', 'having adequate knowledge' having a 'high-standard'. As a 'privileged class' |

The view that something has 'deteriorated' or 'declined' presupposes that it was of a higher standard in the past (see Table 1), the past being the colonial era and the period immediately following the end of colonialism. An examination of the spread of and competency in English during the 150 years of British rule, when English was introduced to Sri Lanka shows that English medium instruction was available only in 5% of schools and only 6% of the population acquired even an elementary knowledge of the language. Post independence, it is noted, "*the state language in Ceylon continues to be English despite the fact that barely 7% of the inhabitants have any knowledge of this language. Practically the entire remaining 93% speak only Sinhala and Tamil.*" (Declaration by the General Secretary, LSSP 1955 cited in Muthiah & Wanasinghe, 2005:19).

The assumption that English competency and national standards have declined needs to be viewed in this backdrop - in the past only a small percentage of the population were taught the language and the standard by which a person was judged a 'competent user' (i.e. having 'adequate' knowledge) was externally imposed, (i.e. through British examinations or Ceylonese examinations prepared according to British guidelines). Today, more than 6 decades after independence, the knowledge of English is more widespread (for example, in 2010, 341,278 candidates sat for the O/L English language paper⁴) and, as in the past, the knowledge of the language ranges from 'elementary' to competent users. The present contrasts from the past in two ways - in the past the knowledge of English was limited to a few and of those, only persons who had achieved an externally imposed standard were acknowledged and visible. In contrast, at present, about 94.5% of the population have an understanding of the language (Parakrama 2010:80) and persons from this cohort have obtained professional and/or academic qualifications, hold administrative posts etc., and therefore are visible.

It is unrealistic to imagine that all of these users require or want to achieve a particular 'standard'⁵. The questions that arise are what level of proficiency is thought to be acceptable (i.e. 'adequate') by the majority of these English users to consider themselves competent users, and, by extension, the 'standard' for which they should strive. Do the majority ('masses') who use English view their language as being 'substandard'?

We will next examine how the learners and speakers of 'substandard' English are viewed by the writers to the English media and the advantages denied to them because of their lack of knowledge

Table 2: Characterization of speakers / learners

⁴Statistics obtained from the Dept. of Examinations, Sri Lanka - through a letter.

⁵The ideological debate on what is accepted as 'standard' in SL will not be dealt with in this paper as it would entail a discussion on Standard British English, Standard Sri Lankan English etc., and will affect the focus of the paper. The 'popular' writers themselves will undoubtedly conceptualize the 'norm' in different ways.

Table 2: Characterization of speakers / learners

| View | Example statement | No of articles idea expressed in | Underlying assumption |
|------------------------------|--|----------------------------------|---|
| Speakers | - 'underprivileged classes'(5) 'dispossessed masses'(8) | 6 (24%) | those who do not know English are deprived, less privileged, dispossessed |
| Characterization of learners | deprived, disempowered and excluded by powerful learner external forces which have prevented "thousands of students, who, for no fault of theirs, have been thrust to the margins and beyond of the so-called English speaking world" (4). " widen the gap between the underprivileged and privileged (know English) sections of our society.' (5) | 10 (29%) | disempowered, deprived, underprivileged, excluded because English has been 'denied' to them . |

Table 3: Advantages conferred through proficiency in English vis-à-vis Employment & Education

| View | Example statement | No of articles idea expressed in | Underlying assumption |
|-------------------|---|----------------------------------|---|
| (a) Employment | (6)"This is indeed a tragic situation that makes our younger generation full of inhibitions vis-à-vis the job market that holds the potential for their success in life fluency in English being a vital factor that holds the key to s success... " (16) 'a proliferation of comments and opinions expressed by educationalists, political and economic theorists concerning the need for students to study English in order to be assimilated into the ever diminishing demand of the labour market' (9)"... essential life skill for ...employment"" | 10 (29%) | English is necessary for employment. English enables people to obtain 'better' (decent) employment |

English, education and professionalism emerged with the development of commerce and the new economic order when European firms needed Ceylonese with a modern education (Ruberu, op.cit). Colebrook education policy further strengthened the association between English and elitism where '*education was to serve two purposes; as a preparation of candidates for public employment, and as an aid to natives to cultivate European attainments*' (de Silva, 1965:143). Thus English which was initially required for manipulation (i.e. obtaining employment) subsequently expanded and became the channel for exploration, knowledge and ego enhancement. It becomes apparent then why English was and is seen as a 'privilege' - a means to education, knowledge, employment and social advancement.

Even though the Sinhala only Act brought in in 1956 purported to do away with English in the State sector, as pointed out by Raheem and Ratwatte (2004), it continued to be used in the private sector and at higher levels of state administration and the judiciary.

The limitation of these privileges to a minority (a bare 7% of the population) coupled with the ideologies associated with nationality resulted in the post-independence back lash against English. Its characterization as the 'Kaduva' that excludes the masses is well documented (Kandiah 1984).

The attitude towards English in Sri Lanka began changing with the open economic policies adopted by successive governments since 1977 which reinforced the need to use English in the workplace. The advent of foreign investors and the establishment of commercial links with the outside world further contributed to this gradual attitudinal shift. One attitudinal change noted is in the orientation of the employers to the use of English by their employees. Although English continued to be a requirement to secure employment in the private sector (Raheem and Gunasekera 1996) by the turn of the century (i.e. 2000), the level of proficiency and quantity of English required began to vary vis-à-vis different industries and job status (Raheem and Ratwatte, 2004). On the part of the learners (and employees) the development of modern communication and technological advances further contributed towards a grudging acceptance of English - that English was a beneficial but bitter field of study - i.e. the 'Karavila⁶', (a bitter vegetable with acknowledged medicinal properties). The complex change in orientation towards English (from something to be rejected to resentful acceptance) is reflected in the statements made by informants in a study carried out by Samarakkody during this period. e.g. "...those days (referring to the past) we cursed English. We thought we can do without English. But in the mid of our career we came to know that we don't have any way, like, without English" (a Human Resource Manager in a semi-government organization) (2001:42)

⁶Karawila - (Momordica charantia) is also known as Bitter Gourd. Although very bitter in taste it has acknowledged medicinal value (stimulates the pancreas to increase the secretion of Insulin) and is used in the system of Ayurveda for many ailments.

Almost all of the previous studies (except Samarakkody, op.cit) are based on information elicited from employers. How do employees view the same issue? What are the opinions and beliefs held by employees and prospective employees, at the end of the first decade of the 21st century regarding the proficiency level required to enter and to function effectively in the world of work? It is timely and necessary to investigate whether views have changed in the ensuing decade and if so, what the current views are.

English and Education - Since English is the language most widely used in academic publications and research worldwide (Graddol, 2000) it is logical to assume that a knowledge of the language will enable users access to more current and a wider range of knowledge. The availability of a wealth of knowledge on the internet in English is a fact which further supports this belief. The questions however are, do the majority perceive themselves as being deprived of 'quality' education and opportunities to obtain higher education due to their low proficiency in English? do they see themselves making use of English to exploit opportunities and avenues available to further their knowledge? Do they too perceive themselves as having being denied English, a valuable resource, by external forces and circumstance, as popularly believed, and thereby dispossessed, disempowered and deprived illustrated by the following view points (Table 5)

In Table 04 we present some of the popularly expressed views on English and social status and in Table 05, the way the speakers are described, their aspirations perceived and the reasons attributed to the failure of the majority to become competent in English.

Table 4: English as a Social Status Marker

| View | Example statement | No of articles idea expressed in | Underlying assumption |
|---|--|----------------------------------|--|
| Knowledge of English confers social acceptance and facilitates social advancement | (2) <i>'knowing English is prestigious' "...persons who speak English are considered in our society to be more rational, intelligent and knowledgeable than those who don't. And for better or worse if you can speak English you win respect as a person having knowledge of the world outside.</i> | 15 (60%) | English as a class marker |
| English is empowering | (12) <i>"... English as a privilege of the elites..."</i> | | English and elitism - assumes that there is a link between the two |

Table 5: Description of Speakers, their Aspirations and Reasons for 'Failure'

| View | Example statement | No of articles idea expressed in | Underlying assumption |
|--|---|----------------------------------|--|
| Characterization of Speakers | - 'underprivileged classes' (5) 'dispossessed masses' (8) (5) "widen the gap between the underprivileged and privileged (know English) sections of our society." | 6 (24%) | those who do not know English are deprived, less privileged, dispossessed writers see themselves as a 'privileged class' due to their knowledge of English |
| | (4). Powerful learner external forces which have prevented "thousands of students, who, for no fault of theirs, have been thrust to the margins and beyond of the so-called English speaking world" | 10 (29%) | disempowered, deprived, underprivileged, excluded because English has been 'denied' to them due to the failure of interventions by successive governments, teaching methods, teacher training, lack of exposure etc. |
| Learner Aspirations A) Learn / aspire to improve OR | (2) "Many students from state schools attend classes with <u>the pressing need to learn 'spoken English'</u> even after finishing a course of study in private institutes and equipped with certain amount of 'knowledge' of literature etc.", (6) "... speak sub-standard Sri Lankan English ...- indeed <u>aspire to improve their English to the level of Standard Sri Lankan English</u> " (2). (12) This also shows their (learners who have learnt English at school) keen enthusiasm in improving the English Language. (25) There is a renewed interest among many SL to acquire a better knowledge of English. | 15 (60%) | that learners / 'substandard' speakers are <u>aware</u> that their knowledge is inadequate and, therefore seek to enhance their knowledge / they are aware that there is a standard and that they should strive towards it - wish to improve in 'spoken' English |
| B) Reject | OR (b) 'the dispossessed masses chose to <u>reject it altogether</u> (8) as the 'kaduva' (12) To (effect) a vast attitudinal change towards English by removing the common concept of 'Kaduwa' among students and the general public | | the perception that the general public still view it as the 'kaduva' a weapon The rejection of English as something not essential to live in Sri Lanka. |

| | | | |
|---|--|-----------------|---|
| <p>Attributing Failure to external factors</p> | | <p>18 (72%)</p> | <p>Ignores learner internal factors/ societal norms</p> |
| <p>A) the lack of opportunities to get exposure to the language</p> | <p>(7) <i>'lack of chances of <u>hearing the spoken word in English</u>'</i> (9) <i>the average student who considers English as <u>nothing but a completely alien phenomenon</u>,</i> (16) <i>"..... to students struggling to learn an <u>unfamiliar tongue</u>"</i></p> | | <p>No opportunities to hear this 'Alien' language -</p> |
| <p>B) failure of teaching methods, inadequate teacher training, etc.. etc</p> | <p><i>failure of successive teaching methods, curricula, inadequate teacher training, etc., (9) English as a life skill' hailed as an unprecedented success many previous attempts failed to achieve the desired results</i> (12) <i>the second fundamental reason for the failure of English is the teaching method. It is by using grammar in schools that a fear is generated among students.</i></p> | | <p>previous interventions were failures</p> |
| <p>C) Fear caused by oppressive forces / elites / foreign powers</p> | <p>(9)<i>there is so much English within us, but it does not come out due to this fear psychosis created by an elite minority"</i> (12) <i>There is a huge attitudinal obstacle that has been generated by a small English speaking upper layer of the society.</i> 11) <i>that English was the possession of an exploitative minority which oppressed the masses is too well known to need reiteration. Some sought English as a mark of privilege and status...</i> (12)".... that still the <u>upper classes</u> in the country,..... want to <u>keep the monopoly of English towards themselves.</u> ... They discourage students by <u>ridiculing them over small pronunciation mistakes.</u></p> | | <p>The 'elites' , a minority, as oppressors creating 'fear' in minds of the hapless majority English speakers are the upper layers of society Upper classes i.e. elites ridiculing the learners, Wanting to 'guard' English as their sole monopoly - unwilling to share Used as a means of exploiting the majority</p> |

| | | |
|--|---|--|
| | <p>(12). “Some NGOs tried their best to prevent the conclusion of war and keep the country in a turmoil. In the same manner, elocution industry tries to reserve English to those whom it is limited now.</p> | <p>Viewed in terms of a 'war' war / conflict metaphors, outside world trying to prevent SL from learning English = developing</p> <p>Foreign powers / local elites - a 'force' to be defeated - like defeating the LTTE?</p> |
|--|---|--|

Those who do not know English are characterized as being deprived, less privileged, dispossessed by writers who see themselves as a 'privileged class' due to their knowledge of English and thus a part of the 'English-speaking world' of SL. An English speaking world is perceived as being better educated, more knowledgeable and socially more accepted, as the one which has access to desirable employment. Those who are on the margins or outside of this world are seen as yearning to learn English and that their desires have been thwarted by poor teaching methodologies and texts, lack of adequate teacher training, the lack of opportunities to hear the language and even powerful social forces that ridicule their tentative attempts. All of these can be characterized as learner external forces. The minority of writers who lament the fact that the 'learners' and speakers of 'substandard' English do not learn / 'improve', attribute it to one single learner internal factor - the rejection of English⁷, as a *kaduva* that is unattainable. The existence of other learner internal factors such as lack of need or desire to attain a level upheld as desirable by these writers is not entertained.

One of the learner external factors a large number of writers refer to is the lack of opportunity to 'hear' the language. The writers seem impervious to the invisible spread of English - is it as 'alien' a tongue as it was previously? A large number of popular shows (reality shows such as 'Dancing Star', cookery shows and even documentaries and advertisements) on TV and Radio use a great many English words, even when the Sinhala / Tamil word exists and is familiar⁸. Furthermore, many music and chat shows on TV and Radio use a bilingual code. At present, Sri Lanka has 12 English radio stations, 05 English TV stations 06 English weekly news papers and 04 dailies. Given that TV penetrates 90% of households and radio covers 82.8%, while ubiquitous bill boards and popular rap songs with code-switching is familiar even in less urban areas, 21st century Sri Lankans have more opportunities to 'see' and 'hear' English and even use English words than previously (*e.g. youngsters asking for 'reloads', 'sms send'*). Thus, these writers seem to be ignoring the extent to which English, code-switching and code-mixing have become almost the norm in the daily lives of Sri Lankans, especially the younger persons.

⁷The orientation of English as a problem and its speakers as oppressors.

⁸"mey vidiyata salt tikak add keranna. Kemathi nam black pepper tikak daannath puluwan' (Cookery show on the TV channel Swarnavahini)

To summarize, the writers who could be characterized as 'habitual' English users view English as a valuable resource which plays multiple roles in society and its speakers as being privileged. Thus, persons who are less competent are seen as being deprived and denied the privileges attendant with English. The view that the knowledge of a 'standard' version of English will bring about social and economic advantage is not limited to the anglophone speech community of Sri Lanka. As noted by Pennycook, (2001), it is an opinion held globally.

In the following section we will look at the opinions expressed by the 'majority' regarding English, its uses, users and standards.

3.2 Opinions of the 'Masses'

As mentioned previously, the information for this study was provided by 2019 adults following different degree and higher degree programmes at the Open University of Sri Lanka. They comprised students enrolled for the B.Sc - 945, (46.8%), LLB 392, (19.4%), BMS 268, (13.3%), BTech 114, (5.6%) and MATE 17 (0.8%) programmes and 283 (14.1%) informants who had not indicated the degree they had enrolled for.

Of the informants 80.09% were between the ages of 20-30 years, 12.53% between 31-40, 3.17% between 41-50 and 0.05% between 61-70 years. 51.8% were female, 44.7% male with 3.06% who had not stated their sex. Informants were following programmes at the Colombo (70.5%), Kandy (18.2%) and Matara (8.2%) centres. (3.07% had not stated their centre).

Prior to enrolling for the mandatory English language programmes, students are required to sit for a placement test, on the basis of which they are grouped according to proficiency; those who obtain between 0-19 (Very Low) marks are assigned to the Beginner Group, between 20 - 49 (Low) marks to Part I and 50 - 69 (Average) to Part II. The informants for this study comprised 499, (24.72%) Beginners, 760, (37.64%) Part_1 and 761 (37.69) Part_2 students. The students themselves, who were aware of the basis on which they were grouped, were asked to evaluate their own proficiency in English i.e. whether they thought it was poor, weak, adequate, good or excellent. The objective of this was to find out how informants, who are aware of the score they obtained at a standardized test, assessed their own proficiency.

Table 6: Self-rating of Proficiency in English

| Group | Poor | Weak | Adequate | Good | Excellent | Not stated |
|------------------------------------|-------|--------|----------|--------|-----------|------------|
| Beginner (very low proficiency) | 2.01% | 10.44% | 63.65% | 19.48% | 1.41% | 3.01% |
| Part_1 (low proficiency) | 1.98% | 9.62% | 59.16% | 25.96% | 1.05% | 2.24% |
| Part_2 (average proficiency) | 0.53% | 5.12% | 54.27% | 35.74% | 2.37% | 1.97% |
| Total | 1.44% | 8.13% | 58.42% | 28.05% | 1.64% | 2.33% |

In all three Groups, the majority believe that their current level of proficiency is either adequate or better than adequate. This belief is held even by persons in the weakest group (Beginner). Thus a very large majority of Sri Lankans, whose current level of proficiency in English either poor or weak, believe that their knowledge is adequate (85.52%). As pointed out by Dornyei (2005), people, especially adults, who believe that their current knowledge of a subject is adequate, would not want to pursue that subject further. Therefore, these adult informants, who are aware of their competence score as measured by a test but still perceive their current knowledge of English as being adequate are not likely to want to pursue further learning. Therefore, the popular assumption that a large number of 'low-proficient' learners aspire to enhance their knowledge does not seem to be supported. Furthermore, it is unlikely that they would see themselves as being 'disadvantaged and deprived individuals' due to having a low proficiency in English since they do not think of their proficiency as being 'low'. This seems to be the view held by the 'outsiders' or the 'anglophile other'.

In the public discourse it was stated that 'there is near unanimity locally on the need for widespread use of English in Sri Lanka'. The responses to the question 'Is English is necessary to live and work in Sri Lanka' indicates 90.38% agreement. Only 6.59% say 'No'- thus dispelling the notion that SL learners reject English as being a non-essential skill.

If English is necessary for Sri Lankans, for what purposes is it necessary for? Table 7 below presents the rank ordering given by students.

Table 7: The overall importance given by informants to the stated benefits of knowing English.

| Requirement for English | Driving Force | Percentage | Rank |
|---|----------------------------|------------|-----------------|
| To obtain employment | (<i>manipulation</i>) | 38 | 1 st |
| For current undergrad/postgraduate studies | (<i>exploration</i>) | 36 | 2 nd |
| To gain social acceptance/ prestige | (<i>ego enhancement</i>) | 11.3 | 3 rd |
| To obtain promotions | (<i>manipulation</i>) | 7.5 | 4 th |
| To continue with higher education subsequent to the current degree, obtain scholarships | (<i>knowledge</i>) | 3.8 | 5 th |
| To gain wider knowledge in other areas | (<i>stimulation</i>) | 2.7 | 6 th |

It can be seen from Table 7 that informants have ranked 'To secure employment' the highest, thus concurring with the popularly expressed belief that the lack of English is preventing educated persons from obtaining employment. This is also the key factor underlying the current national initiatives to upgrade English language capacities of undergraduates, through the HETC project and of school children through the 'The English Our Way' project.

A large number also believe that English is most necessary for their current studies at OUSL. Since the medium of instruction in most of the degree programmes at the university is English, this view could perhaps be an outcome of this policy.

Ranking the necessity of English 'to secure employment' highest and 'for tertiary education' the second highest, concurs with the popularly expressed belief. Thus manipulation and exploration are perceived as the primary purposes for which Sri Lankans require English, purposes which has its origins in the time of the colonizers and continues to date.

Less than one eighth of total population believe that English is necessary for - ego enhancement (Social acceptance) , knowledge (Post graduate studies/scholarships) or for stimulation (to expand their wider knowledge). Thus the belief of the majority seems to be different from the views of the habitual English speakers.

We next investigated whether these perceptions were held by all age groups or whether the rank order differed according to the age of informant.

Table 8: Purposes for which English is required according to age of informant.

| | 20-30 yrs | | 31-40 yrs | | 41-50 yrs | | 51-60 yrs | |
|----------------------------------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|-----------|------|
| | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank |
| Obtain employment | 40.59 | 1 | 28.30 | 2 | 31.11 | 2 | 17.65 | 3 |
| Obtain promotions | 6.72 | 4 | 12.26 | 4 | 11.11 | 3 | 5.88 | 4 |
| For current U'grad/Grad studies | 35.62 | 2 | 34.43 | 1 | 44.44 | 1 | 52.94 | 1 |
| To continue HEd. Schools | 3.57 | 5 | 7.55 | 5 | 0.00 | 5 | 0.00 | 6 |
| For social acceptance/prestige | 10.57 | 3 | 15.57 | 3 | 11.11 | 3 | 23.53 | 2 |
| To gain knowledge in other areas | 2.94 | 6 | 1.89 | 6 | 2.22 | 4 | 0 | 6 |

The importance assigned to the purposes for which English is required differs from age group to age group (Table 8). The beliefs held by the youngest group coincide with the popular belief - that English is most necessary to obtain employment, while the older groups rank it as being less important than it is for scholastic purposes. The oldest group does not believe that English opens doors to employment. This pattern is reasonable given the profile of the OUSL student where the majority of older students are in employment - hence the question of entry to employment does not arise.

The link between English and career advancement is diametrically opposed to the popular beliefs - all groups rank it as either the third or fourth most important reason and even that rank is assigned by less than 15% of all the informants. This is interesting given the profile of the OUSL student - they are employed but do not perceive English as a requisite for career advancement. This view could perhaps be fostered and encouraged by the English used by people who hold senior posts in the State sector in academia, and administration as well persons in the private sector. (Please see appendix 2 for examples of written English). If the language produced by senior colleagues is used as a model or the 'norm', that could also be a contributory factor to perceiving their own proficiency in the language as being adequate.

Although English is considered necessary for scholastic purposes, none of the groups believe that it is necessary for higher education or to obtain a wider knowledge of the world. English is a requirement only to attain current technical or subject knowledge. The popular view that English 'empowers' a person by facilitating career advancement and giving access to a wider body of knowledge, are not shared by the 'masses'. Furthermore, given the perceived lack importance of English for promotions, higher education and expanding knowledge, which are future events, it could be surmised that these students do not see a need for English in their future lives either.

The association of English with social acceptability seems age related - it is not endorsed by younger persons while the oldest group rank it as the second most important reason. The point of view held by the younger persons is echoed by an informant in a study carried out in 2000 ".... some thinking that if a person speaks English that speaker That person is I mean recognized... in that way they understand in ... that's not standard I don't accept that That is a silly understanding" (Samarakkody, 2001:43) . While another informant in the same study says " ... The people use to think if a person can speak English that means she's highly respectable and that type of thing... still society maintains that" (2001:44). With time, the socio-political attitude exemplified by the first statement appears to have become the view of the majority. It is also possible that the perceptions of the younger people have changed over time whereas the perceptions of the older people have not.

Since research in sociolinguistics has shown that the two sexes have different views regarding languages and social prestige (Labov 1990) we examined the rank orders assigned by males and females. There is no difference in the rank orders assigned to Social prestige, Career advancement and Obtaining wider knowledge which are ranked a low 3, 4 and 6 respectively. The responses to 'obtaining employment' and 'to pursue undergraduate studies' shows a slight difference in opinion between the sexes - 43.72% Females rank 'obtain employment' as one and to 'pursue undergraduate studies' as second (29.70%). Males rank these two in the reverse order with 44.11% ranking 'to pursue undergraduate studies' as one and 'obtaining employment' as the second (31.94%).

In order to see if there were regional variations in the opinions we looked at the data in terms of region. However, as can be seen from Table 9 below, perceptions do not seem to differ much from region to region either.

Table 9: Purposes for which English is required according to Region

| | Colombo | | Matara | | Kandy | |
|-----------------------------|---------|------|--------|------|-------|------|
| | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank |
| Employment | 39.75 | 1 | 35 | 1 | 36.92 | 2 |
| Promotions | 7.73 | 4 | 11.88 | 4 | 5.54 | 4 |
| Current U'grad/Grad studies | 34.71 | 2 | 33.75 | 2 | 40 | 1 |
| Continue HEd,Schols | 3.95 | 5 | 4.38 | 5 | 4.00 | 5 |
| Social Acceptance/ prestige | 11.26 | 3 | 15.00 | 3 | 10.15 | 3 |
| Wider knowledge | 2.61 | 6 | 0 | 6 | 3.38 | 6 |

Table 9 shows that more students from Kandy (40%) think English is most necessary for undergraduate studies. Students from the other two regions rank employment as the most important reason. A questionnaire survey study carried out in 2004 (Gunasekera, 2006) found regional variation in the use of English at work - Colombo 82%, Kandy 83% and Matara 15% . When this is taken in conjunction with the data from the present study it could be inferred that even if there is regional variation in the actual use of English at the work place, there is not much difference between regions on the perceived need for English as a means to *obtaining employment* .

Lastly we sought to check whether the need for English differed based on the course of study.

Table: 10. Purposes for which English is required according to degree programme enrolled for

| | BSc | | LLB | | BMs | | MATE | | BTech | | Not stated | |
|-----------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|------|------|------|-------|------|------------|------|
| | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank | % | Rank |
| Employment | 36.43 | 2 | 40.8 | 1 | 49.33 | 1 | 37.5 | 1 | 27.55 | 2 | 36.71 | 2 |
| Promotions | 7.87 | 4 | 10.43 | 5 | 11.11 | 3 | 0 | 6 | 1.02 | 5 | 1.45 | 5 |
| U'grad/Grad studies | 37.6 | 1 | 25.15 | 2 | 20.89 | 2 | 37.5 | 1 | 62.24 | 1 | 50.72 | 1 |
| Continue HEd. | 3.64 | 5 | 6.13 | 4 | 5.33 | 5 | 0 | 6 | 1.02 | 5 | 1.45 | 5 |
| Social acceptance/ prestige | 11.28 | 3 | 15.95 | 3 | 10.67 | 4 | 12.5 | 2 | 5.1 | 3 | 7.73 | 3 |
| Wider knowledge | 3.17 | 6 | 1.53 | 6 | 2.67 | 6 | 12.5 | 2 | 3.06 | 4 | 1.93 | 4 |

Although English as a status marker is ranked 03 by all groups (other than Management Degree students), the view that speaking English is prestigious or garners additional respect is not held by 75% of persons following different professional courses (Table 10). The highest percentage of informants who believe that English confers social prestige are those enrolled for the Law Degree (aprox. 16%) while only 5.1% of the students enrolled for the Bachelor of Technology degree share this view. This could be a manifestation of the different perceptions held in the different professional fields. However an even higher percentage of students in these two disciplines believe that English is more necessary to obtain employment. This could be a reflection of the different professional beliefs, since the ability to be articulate, whatever the language is, is valued in professions such as Law and Management. The others believe English is of primary importance for tertiary education. Thus, to make a blanket assumption that all Sri Lankans believe that a knowledge of English confers social prestige is incorrect. As shown by the data it would appear that more persons engaged in particular professions such as Law and Business Management are likely to subscribe to this view than persons in the fields

of Sciences and Engineering, who are more likely to view English from a utilitarian i.e. economic and academic (to a limited extent) perspective.

To summarize, English is viewed by this group too as a resource but one which plays a limited number of specific roles in the community - a resource that is useful for economic and academic advancement to some extent but so much for social advancement. A further difference in perception between the two speech communities is in the type of 'English' that is deemed acceptable for these purposes.

4. CONCLUSION

There is agreement as well as mismatch between the opinions expressed by 'the masses'-average educated adults and the 'popular' opinions in the English media a) on the spheres in which a knowledge of English confers advantages and b) the level of competency deemed acceptable. The 'masses' agree that English is necessary to obtain employment and for education (first degree level) while it is not seen as being very necessary for any other popularly stated purposes. With regard to the level of competency, the popular assumption that persons with a less competency have a great desire or even a need to attain the level favored by these writers is not borne out. In fact, it would appear that the two groups conceptualize 'knowledge of English' differently. On the other hand, the previously held view that competency in English is not necessary to live in Sri Lanka is no longer the 'mass' opinion at the end of the first decade of the 21st century either. Similar views have been expressed by informants in another study carried out in 2011 (Ranasinghe, forthcoming, this volume).

With regard to the advantages to be gained through the knowledge of English, this study has shown up interesting variation in the perception of English as a means of obtaining social prestige. The association of English with prestige seems to be stronger with older Sri Lankans than with the younger. Although it is not ranked very high by any of the groups examined, there seems to be a distinct difference between the different professional groups - more students hoping to enter the legal profession see English as a means of obtaining social acceptance while only a small minority of students hoping to enter the field of Engineering technology see it as such. Students hoping to enter the fields of management, science and teacher training fall between these two groups. Furthermore, the fact that English enables one to become 'learned' and seek knowledge beyond basic needs is not upheld, contrary to the popularly expressed opinions. It would appear that to a majority of Sri Lankans English is not the only barrier to seeking knowledge beyond utilitarian needs, i.e. for stimulation (Brown, 2000).

There are different ways in which a subject or an area of knowledge can be recognized as being 'necessary': one, a 'top down' imposition - where the knowledge or 'acceptance' of a subject by a more dominant group is imposed upon the less dominant - 'you learn it because it is good for you' attitude, the other, too is an imposition, but where the subject gains acceptance because the 'learner's' society is convinced that it will lead to advantages. In this case it appears that the learner's society accepts English as being relevant for employment and tertiary education, but the relevance it has in other spheres seems to be one largely held by the 'English-fluent' segment of society. It could be surmised that the influence exerted by the learners' society is much stronger.

As noted previously, there is a mismatch in the way 'knowledge' of English or proficiency in the language is conceptualized. There is a disparity between what educators, policy makers and those who give voice to 'popular' opinion believe to be 'adequate' and what the 'masses' (average educated adults) and even teacher trainers (MATE students) believe to be 'adequate'. This was corroborated independently in the written language of persons holding responsible positions - the 'models' to which a majority of junior employees and undergraduates are exposed to. This leads us to the issue of 'norms' or 'standards' deemed acceptable - it is evident that the different speech communities conceptualize the 'norm' in different ways. It would appear that a majority of educated Sri Lankans have no issues with using or accepting an English whose norms have been or are being fashioned by similar users.

Could what is perceived of or characterized as a 'deterioration' or 'decline' in standards be interpreted instead as an ecological change in the language in accordance with the change in usage, the purposes for which it is used and the status accorded to the speakers and the language in 21st century Sri Lanka? This study has shown the need for a follow up qualitative study which would reveal a more nuanced picture of socio-psychological attitudinal changes.

A further observation - the 'inadequacy' of the level of proficiency in English after 13 years of teaching may not be exclusively due to learner external factors such as weaknesses in teaching methods, curriculum, in teacher training, lack of exposure to the language etc., as popularly believed. Although these are contributory, the problems seems to be within the learner too - an indifference towards English coupled with a firm belief that the knowledge they have at present is adequate for the purposes for which English is needed in Sri Lanka - to secure employment and for tertiary education. Ryan and Deci (2000a) use the term Amotivation to refer to the unwillingness to learn something, (in this case to learn beyond a certain point), when that activity is not valued by the learner, when the learner cannot see the usefulness of the task or the relevance to his life as the case appears to be with a large number of informants. It has also to be borne in mind that 94%

of the population have some knowledge of English as opposed to only 7% in the past.

This study has thrown up an interesting question vis-à-vis English - are we witnessing a movement from a strong rejection of English as a weapon in the 1970's to a reluctant and resented acceptance of it in the 1990's to an acceptance of a self-chosen form that is used for limited purposes in 2010/11? From 'kaduva' to 'karawila' to 'giraya'⁹ - from a rejected weapon, to a bitter medicine 'good-for-one', to a commonly encountered indigenized form useful in specific occasions?

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⁹Giraya - The Sinhala word for the areca nut or betal nut cutter, a common place instrument used in local homes to slice and peel shavings from the areca nut which is chewed with the betal leaf. In its basic form it is a tool indigenous to Sri Lanka but found in many ornate shapes across South Asia. In Sri Lanka, in addition to being used regularly to shave areca nuts for 'paan', it is also used on special occasions such as weddings, funerals, and pirith ceremonies

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'Popular' Opinion expressed in the written English media - Sources

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| 1. | <i>The Island</i> | A Retired Teacher. 2010/06/23 Letter-to-the-Editor |
| 2. | <i>Daily News</i> | Cooray, M . 2010/07/ 1 & 2010/07/ 2. Standard Sri Lankan English and English teaching in the context of Standard International English. |
| 3. | <i>The Island.</i> | Ekanayake, S.B. 2008/12/1 Teaching Learning tragedies: Avoid the Blame game. |
| 4. | <i>Colombo Page News Desk, Sri Lanka.</i> | 2010/07/19 The Spoken English Initiative. http://www.colombopage.com/archive_10B/Jul19_1279564412CH.php . Retrieved on 20/4/2011 |
| 5 | <i>The Island</i> | Goonetilleke, D.C.R.A. 2011/02/20. Speak English Our Way'? |
| 6 | <i>The Island</i> | Jayasuriya, V. 2011/04/13. English : slide from SL to FL. |
| 7 | <i>The Island</i> | Jayasuriya, V. 2011/01/15. Why cant our students speak English' |
| 8 | <i>The Island</i> | Wasala, R. 2011/ 03/18. A break with the past though the Hyderabad approach'. |
| 9 | <i>Daily News</i> | Somaratne, R.2010/12/14. Success due to bottom up planning |
| 10 | <i>The Island</i> | Kariyawasam, T. 07 & 08/09/2010 The need for a well conceived National Policy on Education. |
| 11 | <i>The Island</i> | 10/03/2011. Is the Spoken English initiative a failure? |
| 12 | <i>Daily News</i> | Mudalige, D. 2010/10/14. Speak English Our Way |
| 13 | <i>The Daily News</i> | Liyanage, M.P (correspondent) 08/04/2011. Teachers should widen their horizons |
| 14 | <i>The Daily News</i> | Illeperuma, U. 10/05/2011. Standardizing English |
| 15 | <i>The Daily News</i> | Perera, A. 11/03/2011. Erroneous English publications – a crime. |
| 16 | <i>Daily Mirror</i> | Abhayaratna, M. 2010/08/10. Matters that Matter |
| 17 | <i>The Island</i> | Hewa, S. 23/02/2011. Conflicting views on promoting English |
| 18 | <i>The Island</i> | Pinikahana, J. 01 & 02/03/2011 Unemployment among graduates and the responsibility of our universities |
| 19 | <i>The Island</i> | De Silva, 08/02/2011. N. The importance of learning English & Mathematics |
| 20 | <i>The Daily Mirror</i> | 04/01/2010 . 2009 – Year of ICT and English |
| 21 | <i>Lanka Gazette</i> | 2010/03/09. Pragmatism in English medium education. http://lankagazette.com/topstories/pragmatism-in-english-medium-education . Retrieved on 20/4/2011 |

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| 23 | <i>The Daily News</i> | De Silva, S.K.H. 20/02/2011. In defence of Sunimal Fernando |
| 24 | <i>The Sunday Observer</i> | Fernando, S. 06/02/2011. Trilingual Sri Lanka necessary for better reconciliation |
| 25 | <i>Sunday Observer</i> | Scott, A. 25/04/2010. English as a life skill. |

APPENDIX 1

Extracts from official documents written by senior persons in the academic and administration fields. This type of writing is common at higher levels and could perhaps function as the 'model' or 'norm' to be achieved by more junior employees.

| Document | Text |
|--|--|
| A document written by a Senior University academic who teaches in the English medium (holder of PhD from a US university) | <i>“It has suggested to cut down the sabbatical leave, which we have earned by served to the University for seven years. This is only the opportunity we may have to interact with international community to update our knowledge time by time.”</i> |
| Memo submitted to University Senate a Head of Department. (holder of PhD from a Indian university) | <i>“Sri Lanka is faced with an acute shortage of Xs* in the public and private sector. Currently, there are n government Schools of XXX affiliated to XXX with the Ministry of XXX in Sri Lanka. Students obtaining diploma from these schools are able to obtain registration to practice as certified Xs in a government institutions, and has opportunities for career progression and higher education”. (* X inserted to protect the identity of the writer and the department)</i> |
| Minutes of Meeting of a high level body at a national university written by a Senior Assistant Registrar. | <i>“Chairman informed the Board that the X granted approval to pay Rs. 20,000 annually as membership fees. He also informed X also granted approval to pay the said amount before confirm the minutes”</i> |
| Letter sent by Ministry of Higher Education (HE/PR/DPC/2012) | <i>“This is inform you that the DPC and PPC appointed for your institution for the year 2011 expire on 31.12.2011 and the new appointment of DPC and PPC for the year 2012 is in the offing. It is also highlighted that most of the procurement activities of major projects are commenced during the last quarter of the year and find immense difficulties to complete in time, subsequently, is advised that the new and on-going procurement activities of your organization are expedited to complete in time”.</i> |

'X' has been inserted by the present author to protect the identity of the writers of the original documents.