

A Linguistic Analysis of Academic Discourse on English in Sri Lanka: a Systemic Functional Approach

Due to the historical ramifications of the colonial past and the capitalist ideals of the neoliberal present, English continues to occupy a complex liminal space in contemporary Sri Lankan society. Academia as the main intellectual construct of a society is given the task of probing and reaffirming the alignment of these liminal spaces and the mavericks that occupy them to any of the meta-narratives that have precedence over their competitors at the moment by means of any twist of logic. Hence, the analysis of academic discourse on English in Sri Lanka stands to reveal the meta-narratives that vie for honor of providing at least a partial explanation of peculiarities of English in Sri Lanka.

This study uses a combination of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) to analyze five selected articles from University of Ceylon Review which one of the oldest academic journals in Sri Lanka. The articles were selected based on the criteria that they deal with various socio-linguistics aspects of English usage in Sri Lanka and contain insights into the reception for English in various strata of the Sri Lankan society. Within the CDA framework professed by Norman Fairclough, SFL tools such as genre analysis, transitivity analysis and register analysis were used for the study. The analysis revealed that the selection of genres, transitivity and registers was in line with meta-narratives which reinforce the rationality of the essentialism of English. Although the logic employed differs to varying degrees between the arguments, postulations inevitably directs to a similar underlying conclusion that endows English with power, prestige and future.

Key Words: English in Sri Lanka, Sri Lankan Academia, Critical Discourse Analysis, Systemic Functional Linguistics

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