

Attitude About Foreign Languages

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I arrived in Sri Lanka at the end of January 2005. By the end of February I was settling in to my new home (a room in a guest house) and was beginning to learn a bit about the people and cultures of the country that would become my new home. I decided that I must learn either Sinhala or Tamil, the two primary indigenous languages of the nation, but ultimately did not. Why not? Thus begins a remarkable adventure into that space that exists at the intersection of linguistics, cultural anthropology, sociology, ethnic and religious relations, the influences of a colonial past, politics (both domestic and international), government educational policies etc...I do not presume to suggest answers to the seemingly endless questions which arise from the considerations above (taken separately or in various combinations) but rather to begin the process of framing the questions which may ultimately lead to a better understanding of what all of this means, not simply in terms of historical causes but also in terms of productive strategies for the future. These issues and the questions that spring from them are of importance not simply to Sri Lanka but to numberless communities, countries and regions around the world that face similar and equally complex and urgent challenges.

Key Words: Language Learning, Sri Lanka, People and the Culture