

Puswedilla's Arsetolk: A study of the extra-linguistic values of the Hierarchized Sri Lankan English

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A close textual reading of Feroze Kamardeen's political comedy, which rapturously catered/caters to an audience of bourgeois taste, sheds light on a pertinent issue related to Sri Lankan English; namely, the disenfranchisement of the English spoken by a socio-economically and politically disadvantaged group of people as "not pot" or "non-standard". In these plays, the President of Arsikland, Chaminda Puswedilla claims that the government has *invented* a language called *Arsetolk*—a "new, hybrid language created using the local native language and the English alphabet [...] which the government realized it was a people's language" for the purpose of communication. *Arsetolk* deliberately employs mispronunciation, misspelling and ungrammatical structures in speech and sometimes in writing, which resonate the structural "deviations" of "non-standard" Sri Lankan English, in order to evoke humor in the plays. It is my conviction that through the use of *Arsetolk*, Chaminda Puswedilla attempts to establish it as the language of the "common"—the disenfranchised majority, thereby disempowering the so-called non-standard variety from that of the anglicized, urban upper class. This paper emphasizes that the use of *arsetolk* reflects the "extra linguistic values conferred on hierarchies of English" (24, Parakrama), especially in the context of post-colonial Sri Lanka. Using Prof. Arjuna Parakrama's article "Extra-Linguistic Value (of English in Sri Lanka) = *Z u g z w a n g* (for Non-Elite Users)" as the theoretical basis, this paper attempts to study the socio-political, economic and cultural implications of "standard" and "non-standard" forms of Sri Lankan English, through a qualitative textual analysis of Feroze Kamardeen's plays available on Youtube and Facebook.

Keywords: Extra Linguistic Values, Sri Lanka English, Standards