

## **Understanding the Relevance and Implications of the “English-Only Policy” in ELT/L in Tertiary Level Education in Sri Lanka**

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Researchers such as Phillipson claim that the ELT/L pedagogy promoted by inner-circle English-speaking countries in the postcolonial age was founded on five fallacies: the monolingual fallacy, the native speaker fallacy, the early start fallacy, the maximum exposure fallacy, and the subtractive fallacy. Based on these arguments made by Phillipson on the linguistic imperialism of English, others like Canagarajah point out that the “English-only policy” has become part and stock of many ELT practices of periphery countries where English is not considered “native”. The current study attempts to contextualize these theories by investigating how educators and learners negotiate between the “English-only policy” and the use of the vernacular in teaching/ learning ESL in tertiary level education in Sri Lanka. The study was analytical in nature and both quantitative and qualitative data were collected. 100 questionnaires were distributed among second year undergraduates of University of Peradeniya using the purposive sampling method to collect data from students belonging to all levels of competence in English. Also, data was gathered through formal interviews (18) and casual conversations (07) with ESL educators from the ELTUs of University of Peradeniya, SLIIT (Malabe) and ACBT (Kandy). The quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive/ inferential analysis while the qualitative data was analyzed using discourse/ thematic analysis methods. The analysis of data collected from questionnaires distributed among students revealed that there is a correlation between high competence in English with preference towards “English-only policy” and conversely, low competence in English with preference towards the use of the vernacular in learning ESL. The data from formal interviews and casual conversations revealed that 19 out of 25 educators subscribed to the “English-only policy” due to institutional standards/ requirements, certain (sub) conscious reasons of socio-economico-educational nature. The study highlights on the paradox/ discrepancy between student/ teacher attitudes towards “English-only policy” and complex dynamics that resist the use of the vernacular in teaching/ learning which could potentially shed light into student militancy against ELT/L in tertiary education in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: ESL; ELT/L; L1; “English-Only Policy”; Linguistic Imperialism

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