

SPEECH STYLES AND THEIR USE

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The purpose of this article is to present a general discussion of slow and rapid speech: their nature, contexts and the main differences between slow and rapid styles of Sinhalese.

Crystal and Davy say:

" A particular social situation makes us respond with an appropriate variety of language, and as we move through the day, so the type of language we are using changes fairly instinctively with the situation. We use one variety of English at home, another with our friends, a third at work and so on. We usually take this ability for granted; but what are the implications of doing this, how far does the ability extend, and how can we begin to study it" ¹.

The quotation given above clearly indicates that a language whether it is English, Sinhalese, Tamil or any other is not such a unitary one: it has many varieties, such as regional and social. The fact that language in use is a strikingly more complex phenomenon than the variety of language traditionally singled out for description is clearly shown in the work of Labov² in his study of sociolinguistic variation. In fact, in present day sociolinguistic research, there is no place for the idea of " ideal speaker hearer" to be found in a completely homogeneous speech-community. In the study of languages one has to focus attention not only on social stratification and geographical spread but also on the various physiological, psychological, emotional and other effects that are classed as matter of performance.

As the purpose of this article is to study speech styles the discussion given below will be mainly limited to slow and rapid styles on which the literature is relatively very small. Most of the scholars interested in language styles, as for instance, Ramsaran ³ and Barry ⁴ consider Labov as the pioneer in this field. After Labov's research was published, work in this field has been increasing.

However, it is true that linguists were aware of these styles even before the Labov's work. For example, Henderson recognizes three types of style: isolative, combinative and rapid combinative. Of the first, she says:

" I have called this style of speech 'the isolative style.' It is that commonly used for monosyllabic words and for the slow deliberate pronunciation of polysyllables, and is that shown in dictionaries. The structure of the syllable, which is also that of the monosyllabic word, is determined by reference to" the