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The Extending of Sinhala Diglossia under English Influence

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Diglossia, or the use of two varieties, namely High (H) and Low (L) of a language in a single speech community is widespread. The difference between the two varieties is that the non-standard L variety is used for everyday conversations, while that standard H variety is used for writing. This difference often occurs in phonology as well as in morphology and syntax. Most children from diglossic communities are usually exposed to the colloquial non-standard L variety during conversations at home and day-to-day activities, as the social setting determines that the children follow the language of their parents. Sinhala has been a diglossic language historically since the tenth century, under the influence of Sanskrit language at Polonnaruwa era. Since then differences between the non-standard form and the standard form have increased under influence of contact languages both from the East and West, up to today. This research paper examines the present condition of the Sinhala Diglossia and discusses how the gap between the two varieties has extended under the influence of English. This problem is examined under the sociolinguistic and basic linguistic theories of phonology as well as morphology and syntax. English became the sole official language in Sri Lanka from 1815 up to 1956, and a second language subsequently. Moreover, in 1987, under the present Constitution of Sri Lanka English was accepted as an official language under the name “Link Language” and it is a medium of instruction in education sectors as well. Alternatively, bilingual situation increases among Sinhala speakers. This shows repercussions in the structure of phonology, morphology and syntax of L variety as well as the H variety and it affects the Sinhala diglossic condition as well. It has significantly affected the quality of the writing skills of children as well as the adults and has also caused social problems between bilingual (Sinhala - English) speakers and monolingual (Sinhala) speakers.

Key words: diglossia, morphology, phonology, sociolinguistics, syntax