Morphological Characteristics of Sri Lankan English: Some New Observations

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This paper demonstrates how Sri Lankan English (SLE) has a unique lexical repertoire from distinct from other varieties of English used in the Asian subcontinent. It examines the contribution of morphology in developing a lexical database specific to this variety. It focuses on five morphological processes namely borrowing, compounding, abbreviation, affixation and reduplication, which, according to Halliday (2009), are the most significant ones operational in developing the vocabulary of a national variety of a language. The model of morphological analysis adapted in this paper is based on Seneratne (2009) who analysed the morphology of Sinhalese and English code-mixing. This paper includes a process of intense validation and justification of previous claims in the light of a fresh set of exhaustive data collected through a relatively novel means. Whereas Seneratne's (2009) data was from a Sinhala-English corpus, the present work uses the online database of the English newspapers published in Sri Lanka. The search engines inbuilt within the websites of the online newspaper archives act almost like a standard corpus and allow the researchers to find appropriate data relevant for research. Lexical data collected through these search engines used for morphological analysis is optimally reliable since they all come from authentic texts written in Sri Lankan English. The representative words collected this way were categorised across morphological processes and registers that they belong to. It is observed that Borrowing in SLE takes place mainly in five domains as the corresponding registers would attest: Educational, Administrative, Industrial, Religious and Cultural. Compounding, on the other hand, is restricted to Industrial, Religious and Cultural domains. Compared to that, Abbreviations abound in the Administrative domain. Affixation and Reduplication are found in almost all domains illustrating the uniqueness of SLE as a distinct variety of English.

Key words: abbreviation, affixation, borrowing, compounding, reduplication