

Empowerment and Disempowerment: Sri Lankan English and British English. Attitudes of the Speakers of English as a Second Language in Sri Lanka Regarding Their English Accent

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English was never just a language for Sri Lankans as it was for Indians, Japanese and Chinese and to a lot of other Asian nations. In Sri Lanka, it presented a far more significant social connotation than a mere linguistic connotation. Even the early teaching of English was targeted at creating British type individuals, who could even speak in British accent. However, the movement of “Speak English Our Way” initiated by the guidance of the previous government intended for a radical shift from the failures of the past and an indigenization, or a Sri Lankanization of English. The program intended the legitimization of ‘Sri Lankan English’, and the social disempowerment of ‘British English’, while giving due social recognition for speaking English in Sri Lankan way with Sri Lankan accent and pronunciation. This particular study intends to identify the attitudes of the speakers of English as a second language in Sri Lanka regarding the accent and to assess whether idolizing the British accent has been disempowered. Fifty speakers of English as a second language have been chosen from the Faculty of Humanities to participate in for a questionnaire, which recorded their perception of their accent and British accent, meanwhile five individuals was informally interviewed to gather their perspectives regarding speaking English our way and British accent. The results indicated that 64% are aware of the difference between Sri Lankan and British accents. Meanwhile, 76% are satisfied about their accent, whereas 24% are not. In addition, a vast majority of 84% are watching programs that contain British accent and similarly, a vast majority of 90% admire British accent. Moreover, it was identified that the majority of the individuals who are not satisfied about their accent are the ones who admire and imitate the British accent. However, a minority of the individuals who are satisfied about their accent also admire British accent for its beauty. As far as the comments are concerned, some individuals admire British accent as it represents “class”, and several participants prefer to practice British accent because English is originally the language of Great Britain. On the contrary, some individuals are on the firm belief that Sri Lankans should have their own version of English and do not admire British accent due to its sophistication. Thus, it can be concluded that idolizing British accent is still rooted in the society to a considerable extent; however, an attitudinal change of preferring a Sri Lankan identity in English is being developed among the scholars.

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