

Sri Lankan English in the classroom: Teacher educators' views of Sri Lankan English as a local model

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ABSTRACT

Sri Lankan English (SLE) was adopted as the model for teaching and learning English by a state programme of teacher training and ELT development in the country, the English as a Life Skill (ELS) project, in 2009. With the slogan “speak English our way”, the programme aimed to develop a team of skilled teacher trainers selected from among the non-elite speakers of English, and to train teachers to teach the much-neglected speaking skills to all school children in Sri Lanka (Kahandawaarachchi 2009). In this project, Standard SLE was identified as the linguistically and ideologically most appropriate model for the classroom, a decision that was lauded and criticised in almost equal measure in the country. Despite its acceptance as a valid variety of English in Sri Lanka by researchers (Mendis & Rambukwella, 2010) and its promotion by many local academics as the most appropriate pedagogical model for English education in Sri Lankan schools (Gunsekera, Parakrama, & Ratwatte, 2001), teachers of English are generally uncertain about the ‘correctness’ of SLE in the classroom. A decade after the launch of the programme, little is known about its outcome in the local schools. In particular, no study has attempted to find out if the views of teachers and trainers with regard to SLE since the programme was launched, reflecting what David Hayes (2005) calls the silence of non-native English educators’ voices in ELT research. This paper thus explores the views and experiences of three trainers from the ELS project on SLE as a pedagogical model for the Sri Lankan classroom through semi-structured interviews. The accounts of the participants reveal their training experiences, their own development as teacher trainers and as speakers of SLE, as well as their views on adopting SLE as a model for teaching. The participants’ views suggest possibilities as well as challenges faced when a local variety is promoted as a pedagogical norm within the current context of English education in a multilingual country like Sri Lanka. The paper concludes with some implications of promoting a World English as a pedagogical model. (341 words)

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