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Rejuvenating and Restructuring the Discipline of English Studies in Sri Lanka: A Concept Paper⁶

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Introduction

Since its inception as a discipline in the country, the various strands of English Studies⁷ in Sri Lankan universities have reflected, rejected, complemented and contradicted the historical needs and events of the nation as a whole. Above all, it has engaged with and is a significant aspect of the hybrid (Bhaba 1994), if not multibrid⁸ history and culture of Sri Lanka. As a teacher, scholar and practitioner of English, it is due to an extreme sense of frustration about the state of English Studies in the country today (discussed later on) that I have felt compelled to write this paper on restructuring the discipline. This is because I view the discipline as a living, evolving entity (as it can never be an end-product), that need to be constantly revised -- if it is to have meaning, relevance and validity to those who are part of it and those who pursue it. Consequently, my attempts at consciously re-conceptualizing English Studies have to be located not only in the internal developments, cross-fertilizations and advances within the discipline globally but also in the socio-political, cultural and economic currents of the ground situation in Sri Lanka. It is from this standpoint that this paper aims to take stock of the contemporary trends and triumphs of the discipline of English within the universities as well as to conceptualize its challenges and possibilities for the future.

The research methodology for the paper included a selective literary review of material related to English Studies in Sri Lanka (and globally); the analysis of responses to email interview schedules by nineteen academics employed (or who were employed) at the English Departments and the English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) of the universities of Batticaloa, Colombo, Jaffna, Sri Jayawardenapura, Kelaniya, Peradeniya, and the Open University; and references to experiential evidence of working at the English Departments of the universities of Peradeniya and Kelaniya during the last nineteen years. My respondents were assured of confidentiality *vis-à-vis* their responses so as to encourage frankness in airing their opinions. They have therefore been anonymized and all identifying markers erased in this paper.

Given my grounding in the research methodologies of both the Humanities and the Social Sciences, I have subscribed to a degree of reflexivity in writing the paper. This is because of my epistemological understanding of knowledge generation as requiring the explicit articulation of a scholar's subjectivity and standpoint as a means of providing validity; as opposed to striving for scientific objectivity that is ontologically arguable.

This paper highlights what has been identified by academics of English (including myself) as some of the salient characteristics of contemporary disciplinary practice, the

⁶ This paper originates in a speech made by me in honour of Professor Ashley Halpe at the launch of *Arbiters of a National Imaginary: Essays on Sri Lanka - Festschrift for Professor Ashley Halpe* (edited by Chelva Kanaganayakam) by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo) on the 9th of December 2008 at the Lakshman Kadiragamar Memorial Centre. I am grateful for the support and the research leads and resources provided by Prof. Ashley Halpé, Prof. Ryhana Raheem, Prof. Walter Perera, Dr. Lakshmi de Silva, Dr. Carmen Wickramagamage, Eisha Hewabowala, Dinali Fernando and Marianne Abeysekere.

⁷ The term 'English Studies' is not the official term used by departments of English; rather, it is used by me to signify the expanding epistemological, interdisciplinary and theoretical reaches of English today.

⁸ I use the term *multibrid* to imply the multiple influences defining culture and history in the country – of being simultaneously informed of the indigenous, as well as the global (Western, Indian, Middle Eastern, Eastern and other cultures), knowledge traditions - though not necessarily uniformly.

challenges to the departments of English as well as possible ways of restructuring the discipline to suit future needs. However, it makes no pretence of providing an all-inclusive understanding of the issues pertaining to the practice of English Studies. Rather, the knowledge that it produces / constructs is, as all knowledge is, partial in that it is subjective and incomplete, as well as located in time and place.

The Origins of English as a Discipline

Though tracing origins is a questionable venture from a post-modern understanding of the world, I have undertaken the project to contextualize the proposals contained in this paper. Furthermore, the different motivations for the establishment of English Studies in different parts of the world become important when considering the relationship between education and society. In US universities, the formal study of English literature as a subject was begun in the 1860s as a means of teaching a unifying language for the many migrant citizens of that country. By the 1890s the discipline had undergone changes from its earlier focus on composition, pronunciation and speech to literary topics in order to gain 'access to the higher parts of the human body and soul, creating taste and artistic discernment in opposition to industrialization and urbanization' (Durant and Fabb 1996: 21). In Britain the discipline was proposed by the school inspector, poet and critic Matthew Arnold in 1869 as a cultural bonding agent in a culture weakened by the scientific treatise and developments of the period. It therefore began as a means of providing a Humanist education for the many officers destined to serve the British Empire in the colonies (*ibid.*). In India, the study of English literature began much earlier as a complicit method of 'civilizing the natives' by creating 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect' (the infamous Macaulay: 1835).

As far as Sri Lanka is concerned, English became an issue of vigorous public interest from the late 19th century onwards due to the colonial government's policy of preference for English educated employees for government vacancies. Wickramasuriya (1976:16) records the clash between the resultant popular 'craze' for an English education (including its grammar / literature and as an exclusive medium of instruction) on the one hand, and the demands of intellectuals, nationalists, political leaders and missionaries for a more prominent place for the indigenous languages and literatures of Tamil and Sinhala on the other. Those who fought against an exclusive English education resisted on the grounds of the limited scope for the English educated within the government service (as they were relegated to the lower echelons). They critiqued the institution of a new class / generation of Ceylonese who did not possess knowledge of the vernacular languages and who were alienated from their cultural roots and their Sinhala / Tamil-speaking parents. Thus the relationship between the English language / discipline and society has been one of great complexity since colonial times.

The origin of the discipline of English in Sri Lanka is more recent in comparison with the US, UK and India, and seems to be linked to the general objectives of establishing the University College in 1921. Students at the University College Ceylon offered English as a subject for the BA external examination conducted by the University of London. English was pursued by academics like H. A. Passé, E. F. C. Ludowyk, and Doric de Souza at the University College in the 1920s under Leigh Smith and David Hussey (Ludowyk 1979). As 'the child of University College' (*ibid.*) the Department of English then became part of the newly-instituted University of Ceylon in 1942. With the establishment of the new university, the Ceylon Medical College and the Ceylon University College lost their separate identities and were absorbed into the new institution. The Department of English moved to the newly-built campus at Peradeniya along with the Faculty of Arts from 1951/2 onwards when another generation of academics like Ashley Halpé, Lakshmi de Silva, Yasmine Gooneratne, Kamal de Abrew, D. C. R. A. Goonetilleke, Siromi Fernando and Ryhana Raheem read English literature. In 1956, as a consequence of the democratization of university education and the institution of Sinhala as the official language, there was a sudden swell in the admission of students and the need for language courses in English -- as the majority of university students were not proficient in English. The English Department responded to these changes by teaching English as a second language -- initially through a Sub-department in Colombo. Today each of the fifteen universities in the country has an English Language Teaching Unit

(ELTU) irrespective of whether they have a department of English. Furthermore, the ELTU of the University of Kelaniya is currently in the process of upgrading itself as the Department of English Language Teaching with the primary objective of training English teachers. The establishment of other universities in the country (Kelaniya and Sri Jayawardenapura in the 1950s, Jaffna, Moratuwa and Ruhuna in the 1970s as well as a number of others from the 1980s onwards) eventually led to several autonomous departments of English.

The 'origins' traced above convey the varying impulses for the establishment of English Studies internationally as being located in the practical, political, social, institutional and cultural needs of the time periods and countries in question. Furthermore, over the decades, it is possible that not only the epistemological, theoretical and thematic interests within the discipline but the socio-political realities of each country have impacted on the evolution of English Studies worldwide. The following list of contents (incomplete) within English Studies compiled from an internet search gives an idea of some of the disciplinary, interdisciplinary, theoretical and thematic strands of the subject worldwide.

African English literature	Morphology
African American English literature	New Historicism
American English literature	Non-fiction writing
Anthropological linguistics	Pedagogy
Applied Linguistics	Philology
Antiquity	Phonetics
Asian English literature	Phonology
Augustan	Playwrighting
Australian English literature	Poetics
Bilingualism	Poetry composition
British English literature	Politics
Business English	Post-colonial literature
Canadian English literature	Post-modern literature
Cinematic narratives	Post-structuralism
Classics in English	Practical Criticism
Comparative English literature Studies	Projects and Presentations
Computational linguistics / Natural language processing	Psychoanalysis
Composition studies	Pragmatics
Country-specific English	Queer theory
Creative writing	Race / ethnicity
Creative non-fiction	Representation
Critical theory	Research methodology
Culture	Rhetoric
Diaspora / Migrant Writing	Romantic
Discourse analysis	Screenwriting
European English literature	Second language
Feminism	Semantics
Fiction writing	Semiotics
Fiction writing	Sexuality
Film and Text	Stage and Performance
Gay	Structuralism
Gender	Society
Genres	Sociolinguistics
Historical linguistics	South Asian
History of linguistics	Sri Lankan English
Ideology	Standard English
Indian English literature	Subaltern
Interlinguistics	Syntax
Language policy planning	Teaching methodology
Latin American English literature	Textual analysis
Lesbian	Visual culture
Literary journalism	War
Literary theory	Women in literature
Literary criticism	Women's studies
Marxism	Women writers
Media	World classics in translation
Medieval English literature	World Englishes
Metaphysical	World literatures in English

Modern English usage
Modernism

Writing skills

The above attempt at listing the contents of English Studies courses is testimony to how the discipline has evolved on several different tracks. They can be loosely categorized as founded on studies relating to literature, language / linguistics, theory, culture, sociology, education, the arts and the media. This deconstructs the claim of English literature studies as being symbiotic of 'Englishness' or English culture⁹ and illustrates the divergent strands of English Studies based on the interests, specializations, and the country-specific needs of each department.

English Studies in Sri Lanka

In making a case for restructuring and rejuvenating English Studies in Sri Lanka, it is a strategic act on my part as a researcher to briefly consider some of the disciplinary developments in English Studies between the original institution of the discipline and now. For instance, undergraduates who read English at the University College in the 1920s sat for the London External degree:

with its Old English, its Middle English, its History of the Language, its Gothic (if one did the honours course), the dreariness of Sri Garwayne as Tolkien and Gordon put him across, Chaucer – slightly less dreary, but bedevilled by etymology and the dull posts of M. E. grammar. All of this to be literally crammed; the only mitigation was Shakespeare and English literature which stopped dramatically in 1880.

(Ludowyk 1979: 2)

As one of the students of University College, Lyn Ludowyk's boredom and dissatisfaction with the iron limits set by the London syllabus is clear in the above extract. Yet given the handful of students (sometimes a single student, as in the case of Ludowyk) working with legendary professors Leigh and Hussey, there were no restrictions on what was read outside of the syllabus (*ibid.*). When the department was moved from Colombo to Peradeniya as part of the University of Ceylon, the emphasis in the new syllabus was placed on literature, language and phonetics as well as the student's own evaluation in both Part A and Part B of the Tripos syllabus. Given the links between the departmental staff and the University of Cambridge, the specific inputs and influence of F. R. Leavis and other leading figures of Cambridge University were in evidence.

For a long time, the syllabi of many departments of English were founded on literature as involving the study of compartmentalized literary periods. A couple of my respondents who graduated in the 1950s and 1960s from the University of Peradeniya attests to the department of English providing 'a grand sweep of literary eras and of literature¹⁰ written primarily in England and an overview of how English developed as a language' (Riza). In many instances, this has now been replaced by categorizations of literary texts according to themes / genres / movements such as war literature, migrant or women's writing.

Over the decades the contents of courses have also responded to the internal thematic and theoretical currents in the discipline. An academic who graduated in the early 2000s from Kelaniya, Rani writes 'I gained knowledge in English Literature (Sri Lankan, British, American Lit, Modern Lit, critical theory, etc.) I also had training on critical thinking and analytical skills'. Another respondent, Ganga notes that past courses have subscribed to an 'archaic type of Practical Criticism and appreciation of literary techniques called "Dating" ... which has proved to be less than useful in retrospect' (unless one was interested in philology). These have been replaced by courses that incorporate the application of theory -- sometimes in preference to Practical Criticism -- given the impact of critical and literary theories from the 1970s onwards.

⁹ Raymond Williams (1989) is one of the critics who has argued strongly against the idea of English literature signifying Englishness or the creation and expression of the nation – especially on the grounds that until the 19th century a vast majority of people in the UK were illiterate.

¹⁰ In the 1960s this sweep terminated with Modern writers such as E. M. Forster and Joseph Conrad.

In the language front, the lack of student proficiency in language skills and grammar has led to virtually all the universities incorporating language courses and thereby diluting the earlier primacy of literature courses. An overview of how English developed as a language has been supplemented by a range of courses on language structure (morphological, phonological, semantic, and orthographic), history and discourse features, English Language Teaching, and Professional English – some of which have been designed for language proficiency. From its inception in 1990 the Open University of Sri Lanka has focussed on teacher training as has the English Language Unit of the Kelaniya University in recent times. Diplomas in English Language Teaching have now been developed into fully-fledged BA degrees in ELT. My respondent from the Open University states ‘our concept of English Studies includes a sound knowledge of the language, its structure its history and development and its discourse features as well its literature from Elizabethan to post-colonial times, including literature translated into English and New Englishes’.

As a result of postcolonial consciousness both at material and theoretical levels, curricula have incorporated not only texts from other postcolonial countries¹¹, but also indigenous texts in translation as well as comparative studies. The University of Peradeniya, for instance, conducts a long-standing course outlining Sinhala and Tamil Literature ‘in an attempt to keep students grounded in the specific context of literary production in Sri Lanka’ (Vivian).

The understanding of what constitutes ‘a literary text’ has also been expanded to include all written material, communication media, artifacts, the visual realm, social and cultural discourses. Vivian therefore contemplates that ‘English academics now publish on just about anything bringing discourse analysis and cultural studies to bear on what they read—be it literature, society, culture, politics, whatever’. Consequently, English Studies also involve ‘interdisciplinary studies ... with reference to gender, culture, and the construction of meaning’ says Malini. As a university teacher who graduated from the University of Kelaniya, she feels that it would be more appropriate ‘to call the Department one of literature, language and culture studies now, rather than the traditional Dept of English literature’ in view of its current interdisciplinary focus. Vivian sums up the status in her department by saying ‘all major orientations in English Studies--Literature, English Language Studies, Theory, Linguistics, Cultural Studies—are now represented in our syllabus’.

The above vignettes of how some departments of English have evolved over the years indicate some of the divergent strands pursued in the practice of English Studies in Sri Lanka. When it comes to literature courses, the supremacy of the Humanist canon of literature¹² and the touchstones of literature valorised in the early part of the 20th century have been subverted chiefly due to the epistemological influence of feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism/postmodernism in knowledge generation. These critical theories have undermined the legitimacy of a literary canon by exposing the phallocentrism, arbitrariness, elitism and social/aesthetic values of the criteria in selecting the standards for such a canon. Inputs from linguistics, women’s studies, cultural studies, sociology, media and communication studies, management, philosophy, political sciences and education have significantly explored the disciplinary boundaries of English resulting in new dynamic possibilities.

Consequently, English Studies in Sri Lanka is today an interdisciplinary subject that incorporates the study, teaching and research of 1) literatures written in English (including British, American, postcolonial literatures and translations) 2) language and sociolinguistics, 3) literary, critical, political and philosophical theories, 4) gender, culture and society 5) media and communication, 6) pedagogy and research methodology. The internal growth and diversification within the discipline have taken place as a response to academics and teachers pursuing further studies abroad, interacting at a global level with other international departments and academics, presenting their work at global knowledge forums, being published worldwide as well as through keeping abreast of avant-garde knowledge developments.

¹¹ Halpé (1993) discusses the problems of naming these literatures in English, internationalism, the criteria for inclusion / exclusion, and balance in his paper on English and the curriculum.

¹² An English literary canon was originally advocated by F. R. Leavis (1948).

Contemporary Issues and Challenges relating to the Study of English

The selective literature survey on English Studies in Sri Lanka, the responses to my Interview Schedule as well as my own experiences as a teacher, researcher or practitioner of English Studies led to the identification of the following issues that need to be taken into consideration in re-conceptualizing English Studies.

To begin with, there is a need to engage with the postcolonial resistances and paradoxical emotions towards English within the wider populace in the country. There are dominant misconceptions that are prevalent with regard to the discipline of English. I refer to the stale and sour remnants of nationalist allegations of the presumed interests of English courses as being British and eurocentric, as being 'western' and therefore alienated from Sri Lankan culture, as catering only to the Sri Lankan elite, and as not serving national needs. These accusations reflect the tensions of the complex, complicit and contradictory relationship of those who do not possess English language skills and who see themselves as alienated or estranged from these facets of Sri Lanka's multibrid culture. Thus the way in which English ('kaduwa')¹³ becomes a metonymy for a particular aspect of culture, class, kingship, colonialism, and non-democratic power at varying times are explored by a number of Sri Lankan scholars (including Fernando 1976; Kandiah 1984; Gunesekera 2005).

On the other hand, there is grudging acknowledgement of the indispensability of English when it comes to employment opportunities. The supremacy of the English language within the globalizing processes of economic migration, trade, travel, information technology and the media have thus fuelled a massive demand for English language proficiency. This hunger for competence in communication has also resulted in aspirations to read for a BA in English – sometimes based on the assumption that such a degree is founded on language (or as leading to greater language proficiency). There does not seem to be adequate understanding that the current degree in English is founded on a high proficiency in English language, analytical and critical skills. Often, departments of English are expected to be solely committed to teaching English language to those not proficient in English, despite the work done by the English Language Teaching Units. 'There is a national demand to make undergraduate degree programs more "vocationally oriented". This places demands on English departments by making them opt for more "professional/vocational" content rather than the more academic. More support in terms of funding and research opportunities go to ELTUs as opposed to departments of English (the World Bank grants being case in point)' writes Rizvina, a respondent from an ELTU.

This mismatch of expectations on the part of potential undergraduates and the disciplinary standards / diversity that constitute the discipline of English today have resulted in large numbers of angry, disappointed and alienated students who unfortunately do not qualify to read English at the universities each year. Currently, English departments do not have the requisite expertise or the institutional capacity to meet these erroneous expectations at university level (so as to enable graduate employment via English proficiency as well as associated competencies in IT and 'numeracy' skills). However, it must be noted that a number of English departments have incorporated courses on soft / personal skills into their syllabi in recent times. The lack of compatibility between student expectations, the professional requirements of a transitional country like Sri Lanka and the capacities and expertise of departments of English would need serious contemplation in restructuring English Studies.

Within universities, a critical issue affecting the quality of English Studies is the plummeting standards of English language proficiency in undergraduates of the English departments in recent years. Proficiency in reading and writing has dropped. My respondent Riza writes of the 'poor knowledge of English, of the language, its structure, vocabulary, idiomatic and rhetorical patterns. This is probably because the reading habit has not been encouraged for a complexity of reasons -- linked to this is the lack of analytical and writing skills. Lack of reading has also led to ignorance of the world, its history and its literature.

¹³ The Sinhala term that came into prominence in the 1970s to signify the power of English language use as a weapon of privilege related to class / culture (though it is not so frequently used now).

Students tend to be culturally 'monogamous'!! They only know – if 'know' is the correct verb -- about their own religion and culture'. For the first time in the history of the Department of English at the University of Kelaniya, there were no undergraduates qualified to sit for a Special Degree in English in 2008. The abject state of English can be related to a number of reasons. At the macro-level, though successive governments in the country have identified the urgent demand for English by the populace, but there has not been a sustained, integrated approach to respond to this need over the years except through *ad hoc* policy changes and provisional measures. The appointment of teachers not always adequately trained or qualified to teach English in schools and the diminishing faculty influence over English teaching and 'A' Level marking at secondary levels over the years could be other contributory factors. 'Less stringent marking at the A/Ls and the lowering of the pass mark at the Dept of Examinations in order to increase the number of A/L English passes results in students who normally would not have been admitted to study English at the degree level, now gaining entrance to universities' writes Malathi (usually to ensure that a larger number of students qualify and are selected to read English at universities). This has resulted in greater diversity amongst students as the bigger intakes draw 'on students from both provincial and urban, rural Maha vidyalayas¹⁴ and elite schools' as pointed out by Dhamani. The changing profile in the aptitude of undergraduates who read for a BA in English needs to be taken into account in restructuring efforts.

It must be stressed here that the problem is not simply one of language acquisition; rather, it is a far more complex challenge of corrective action that neither the Departments of English nor the English Language Teaching Units have the adequate pedagogical expertise to address. 'We have not been trained to address, or 'unlearn', or solve the problems of decades of faulty English language learning' writes Kumari from an English Department. The departments therefore are faced with not only a disciplinary but an ethical / political dilemma. Options for most departments have been whether to stick to departmental standards and fail students (with the attendant slog of additional paper marking each year for the already overburdened faculty); provide supplementary grammar / writing courses and individual tutorials for weak students (identified *via* internal testing) in the vain hope that these students will catch up; restructure courses in such a way that the bulk of student assignments focus on oral presentations rather than written work; or bring down the standard of marking and pass students. Options for students are exceedingly limited. Those who have obtained 'A' and 'B' grades as well as those who have received simple passes are now informed that their aptitude is worthless. Their enthusiasm and confidence are crushed; and some of them are actively discouraged from pursuing their subject choice. Where they have achieved 'competence' during their school years, they must now struggle to deliver and for some it may not be possible to do so. The following comments exemplify the debate within English departments with regard to English Studies today.

Students who are identified as "weak" in English are given extra classes in English. These classes are not for credit but we expect all our students to attend those classes. Some members of staff (those who teach the "language" sections of the syllabi) are assigned the task of teaching these students. Of course, how to do remedial English classes is a question not yet successfully resolved: small groups, one-on-one, what type of writing (academic / personal / creative?), whether the focus should be on writing assignments that the students do for credit courses, etc. This year, because we have a Fulbrighter who regularly teaches writing in the US, we are offering these remedial English classes at the first year level. Some feel we should catch them as soon as they enter or even before.... We have also assigned a young lecturer to attend the classes in order to train him to take over instruction once the Fulbrighter leaves. We are also debating whether to give up the First Year entirely to teaching writing (a lot of resistance there from staff), to take over one of the compulsory first year courses for this purpose, to bring the students offering English along with the rest of the student population for the intensive course and to offer them special instruction'.

¹⁴ This refers to the central schools in the rural areas of Sri Lanka.

(Vivian)

English Studies also needs to grapple with the challenges posed by competitive and highly commercialised local knowledge economies. Within the country, there are numerous unregulated institutions, 'tutories', and self-proclaimed experts who teach spoken and written English as well as 'A' Level English. Even some prestigious institutions offer dubious external and sub-standard internal degrees and diplomas when it comes to English. Indiscriminate printing of lesson materials, study guides and translations by publishing houses and individuals have further relaxed standards and compromised on quality. In fact, the potential of English teaching as a commercial venture is being exploited to the fullest – though not by Sri Lankan universities.

The goals of organisational efficacy in universities through periodic organizational restructuring funded by global multilateral agencies, though designed to maximize on higher education, have not always yielded the expected results. In particular, the changes to curriculum according to course systems have led to a tapering in academic interests while a single-minded pressure to focus on quantitative outcomes have been at the expense of processes. Thus it must be observed that without compromising on the desired objectives of institutional efficiency, evaluation methods need to be diversified to prevent superficiality in appraisals and a lowering of academic standards. This struggle is evident in 'Faculty trying to reconcile standards they are expected to maintain vis-à-vis majors in English without crashing the entire system by failing 70% of those who sit for their first year examinations—those who really should fail' writes my respondent Prabath. Maintaining departmental or disciplinary standards in quality have thus become a critical issue.

For decades, the overwhelming majority of undergraduates reading English have been women. A number of departments have responded to this demographic fact by focussing on women's perspectives and issues as well as mainstreaming gender concerns into the syllabi so as not to alienate women students. Nonetheless, the situation requires further contemplation -- for the discipline as well as for the students themselves. Do we need to consider special provisions for male students for the sake of gender equality? Do we need to orient the discipline in recognition of the gendered interests of its women students?

As noted earlier, we have also to engage adequately with the status of English Departments as progenitors of interdisciplinary scholars and research studies. The interdisciplinary nature / phase of English Studies need formal sanctioning not only for epistemological reasons but also because of its implications *vis a vis* the job market. Furthermore, 'English Studies (literature) is also an elitist discipline to a large extent in Sri Lanka. Therefore it is inevitably confined to a small group of people. On-line courses could make it more accessible. The attitude to English should change -- one need not have an inherent aesthetic sensibility to appreciate English literature. So the syllabi need to change -- English lit also should not act as a status symbol' writes Vasanthi, another respondent. Doubtless, exploiting the technological revolution in information would broaden access to English Studies to some extent.

As academics of the discipline of English we are unavoidably aware of the politics associated with the teaching and study of English language and literature. A number of critical essays within the discipline have dealt with the politics and ethics relating to English. Recent examples are Crusz (2008) on an aesthetic of and duty to justice; Wickramasinghe (2008) on the ethics of reading and researching English literature; Nuhman (2008) on Tamil / Sinhala and Sinhala / Tamil translations of literature as a socio-political and literary activity designed to sponsor mutual understanding and harmony amidst moribund ethnic relations. This brings us to the point that, despite being caught up in unresolved postcolonial identity politics, we have not exploited the full potential of English in supporting ethnic harmony. Thus even at this juncture it is important that there are integrated efforts on the part of the government and the universities to devise national policies and programs aimed at peace and reconciliation through English Studies. Furthermore, as pointed out by Kanagaratnam, a respondent from an ELTU, 'English Studies need to further expand its relevance to indigenous cultures / languages' especially given the implications of Sri Lankan English and bilingualism / trilingualism in today's context. Given the commercialization of academia in recent times, it is

critical that restructuring attempts are located in Humanist and liberal values as well as the critical tradition of English Studies – if the academic core of the discipline is not to be diluted.

Rejuvenating and Restructuring English Studies in Sri Lanka

The issues and challenges highlighted in the earlier section need to be the base of any project aimed at restructuring English Studies, and in the words of Gayathri Chakravorty Spivak:

“I am attempting to suggest our pedagogic responsibility in this situation: to ask not merely how literary studies, more correctly the universitarian discipline of English studies, can adjust to changing social demands, but also how we could, by changing some of our assumptions, contribute toward changing those demands in the long run.”

Gayathri Chakravarthy Spivak (1987: 100)

Spivak’s concerns were focused specifically on deconstructing the positioning of English Studies as separate from society / ideology; and for a reading that supported dialectical and continuous engagements between these two areas. This paper is founded on the assumption of a symbiotic relationship between society / ideology and English Studies as a whole (constituting strands of language, literature, theory, linguistics, culture, gender, media etc.). Consequently, the crucial question remains the same. To put it simply: in relation to English Studies in Sri Lanka, how can we reinvent and restructure the discipline of English at the University of Kelaniya and other universities in Sri Lanka so as to a) to meet the social needs of the country; b) to not compromise on the integrity and standards of the Department; c) to change our assumptions about the discipline; and d) to create new social / disciplinary demands. ‘The primary challenge is to remain an academic discipline while catering to the needs of the job environment’ as asserted by Rizvina. This would require changes to the curricular and discipline, teaching and pedagogy, educational structure (new programs), institutional structure, networking and linkages as well as departmental inputs at national level and international levels, concludes Dhamani.

Firstly, the Discipline and the Educational Structure

In the earlier sections of this paper, I discussed the evolution of English Studies on several different tracks simultaneously – globally as well as in Sri Lanka. However, the educational structures have not always changed correspondingly to accommodate these developments. In Sri Lanka, changes to the educational structure would involve expanding and diversifying the conceptualization of ‘English Studies’ to include several different B A and MA degree programs over a period of time. The University of Colombo has already instituted the option of specializing in either literature or linguistics in their B A Special degree programs. Jaffna University is also ‘planning a degree course named English Language Studies accommodating English linguistics, language skills, translations, Sri Lankan cultural studies (accommodating Dalit and women studies) solely on English and English related studies for a three and four year study programme with specialization in ELT, English language and literature designed in a semester system’ writes Kanagaratnam. The following are other possibilities.

- **B A in English Language**

This degree could be designed to address English language proficiency needs in the country – by immersing students in courses that focus on English language acquisition (reading, writing and speaking skills) and remedying inappropriate usage as well as support courses on literature, linguistics and other interdisciplinary aspects of English Studies.

Students could specialize in Business English, Medical English, Legal English and other varieties of technical Englishes that are required for various professions.

- **B A in English Literature**

A degree in literature could engage those interested in literatures in English (including translations from world literatures) and could conform to the more traditional disciplinary bent towards the analysis of literary and other texts and critical thinking. Traditionally, many of our graduates have exploited the skills developed from the traditional core of English Studies – critical analysis -- in various job sectors. Given that today, texts have come to include newspapers, films, policy documents, graphics, legal drafts, advertisements, historical writings, letters, diaries, websites, artefacts, etc., critical and analytical expertise can be utilized in the following fields as pointed out by Durant and Fabb (1996). Training in rhetorics can develop skills in analysing techniques of speech, writing and persuasion for speech writers in politics, professions, business and the media. Training in Christian theology and hermeneutics has assisted in delving into the possible meanings of religious and legal texts in other countries. Philology and textual criticism have established accurate versions of texts (especially historical texts). Professional criticism and reviewing courses have assisted critics in evaluating contemporary creative work. Academic criticism has served to engage with / inform teachers and students. In general, the fields of education, advertising, journalism and the media have generally recognized the worth of English degrees. To provide value addition however, English departments need to professionalize / market this valuable training in textual analysis by orienting it to the employment needs of the legislature and politicians, policy-makers and lawyers, theological institutions and research organizations, the Department of Archaeology, the National Archives, etc.

- **BA in English Linguistics**

A degree in English linguistics could encourage the study of the English language; its structure (morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and orthographic) its history and development and its discourse features especially with special reference to Sri Lankan English, bilingualism and trilingualism. It would serve to ground English Studies in the Sri Lankan context and aim to address some of the burning political / ethical needs of the hour.

- **B A in Interdisciplinary Studies in English**

This degree could incorporate the global trends in the discipline towards interdisciplinary studies. It could acknowledge the special status of English in promoting interdisciplinary post-graduate work relating to women, gender, culture, communication, ethnicity, politics, peace, development, disability, and the media, to name a few examples. These interdisciplinary characteristics have often led to our graduates finding employment with INGOs, NGOs, development organizations, research institutions, media institutions and institutions of higher education.

- **B A in English Professional Studies**

This B A degree can build on the technical expertise related to English Studies in the form of courses in translation methods, interpreting, critical analysis, editing, drafting, speech writing, website designing, report writing, screen writing, copywriting, teaching and pedagogy as well as research methodologies. With the assistance of other departments and faculties (Business Management, for instance) in the university it could develop a bank of professional experts in English Studies who could also be self-employed if they so wished.

- **B A in English Language Teaching**

There is no doubt that teaching English language should be a priority in the country. As argued by Vasanthi, 'a literature degree should not be seen as a qualification to just teach

the English language. It should be considered as a clearly defined discipline'. Both the Open University of Sri Lanka and the University of Kelaniya are currently offering degrees in English Language Teaching. This is aimed at building the capacity and a corps of English language teachers to address English language proficiency needs in the country at primary and secondary levels.

- **B A in Creative English**

With an emphasis on creative writing, this degree could train students to capitalize on their innate talents for creative purposes with the help of other departments and faculties (for instance, Liberal Arts) as well as creative and professional writers from the community. Students could also be given practical skills on writing book proposals, developing manuscripts, writing funding proposals for creative projects, budgeting theatrical productions, accessing sponsorship etc., so as to direct them into generating their own work opportunities.

The degree programs outlined above need not be conceptualized in complete isolation from one another. In order to preserve and maintain the academic integrity of English Studies it is vital to ensure that the core facets of the discipline (literature, language, linguistic, interdisciplinarity and research) remain as important components of each degree.

Secondly, the Institutions

Given these manifold possibilities for future English Studies, the current institutional casing and compartmentalization into a singular department of English would need reorganization into a number of departments under a Faculty of English Studies (along the lines of the law or medical faculties). The final goal would be the institution of departments of English Literature, English Language, English Linguistics, English Language Teaching, Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary English Studies, English Pedagogy and Policy Studies, and a Centre for English Research Studies -- to name a few. Under the institutional structure of a faculty, students should take courses only from English Studies, thereby immersing themselves in the subject as far as possible. Other faculties from within the university (such as the Faculty of Management) could provide supplementary courses that could professionalize degrees and provide self-employment / income-generating components. Such initiatives would lead to diversified but inclusive programs of study that are scholarly and cutting-edge, professionalised and needs-based. If undertaken, the objectives delineated above need careful consideration and adaptation according to the ground situation of each university. Keeping in mind the different historical, socio-political and cultural priorities of each institution, universities should formulate long-term policy and a step-by-step comprehensive plan calculated to fund, equip, and develop academic cadre so as to institute Faculties of English over a period of time.

Thirdly, the Departments

The lack of a strong ties and consistent networking (especially with the English departments in the North and the East) as well as the lack of an inter-university forum on English Studies have led to the English departments in the country working in virtual isolation. In order to be in the forefront of English Studies and influence national policy directions it is important that English departments organize themselves into a convincing force / academic cum professional body that can engage with the challenges of our times. As proposed by Pushparani, one of the tasks would be to formulate common benchmarks in the quality of English Studies that all universities should endeavour to follow.

Today, the institutional cultures within universities (promoted by global reorganization efforts) challenges academics to 'makeover' from top-down approaches, isolated research work and distancing from students to more engaged, participatory and interactive roles within departments. While these may allow for a greater degree of innovation in teaching, it does not always allow space for research. On the one hand, this needs to be urgently rectified given the significance of research (for instance, in teaching methods / pedagogy to 'unlearn'

flawed English; to develop benchmarks in quality; for inputs into national policy on English within the discipline; and to move towards the establishment of guiding principles on Sri Lankan English for primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education). On the other hand, departments need to be professionalized through in-house staff training on the latest in pedagogy, research methodology, networking techniques, ethics and participatory leadership and updated resources if they are to become forerunners in English Studies. This could be complemented by the establishment of local and international linkages, networks with employers, employers' federations, professional bodies, academic bodies, media and arts organizations, creative writers etc. Furthermore, many English departments 'lack variety in specialization; confine themselves to internal recruitment so no new blood (we seem to like clones); no postgraduate students' writes Dhamani. Measures need to be taken to diversify academic interests and ensure a vibrant academic cadre from other universities and specializations. A considerable chunk of resources need to be allocated to engaging with internal and external students via the internet.

At National and Regional Levels

Any attempt at restructuring English Studies requires a national approach as well as the support of the state. 'I think restructuring English studies in the universities necessitates restructuring English studies in the school system, the A/L teaching, evaluation and marking as well. Isolated restructuring of the higher education system is going to be a flop' writes Piyumi. Referring to the emphasis on English language teacher training in the educational reforms of the early 2000s, Raheem (2004: 42) concludes 'in contrast to the past the assumptions of society at large, the views of the legislature and the goals of the ELT practitioner seems to have coincided'. She goes on to list the challenges that need to be faced given the harmonizing in policy and practice: they include appropriate guidance for teachers in terms of the required methodologies and approaches; equitable distribution of qualified teachers and resources to underprivileged areas; teacher higher education and training; re-skilling'.

The quality of English language teaching is a recurring issue. 'Given the mushrooming number of tuition classes around the country, I don't think that accessibility is the issue, its quality that matters. Therefore, the quality of primary and secondary English teachers should be improved to foster a culture that discourages students from attending tuition classes' writes Devini. Consequently, it is also imperative to re-establish the English Departments' lost status as the drivers, standard-setters and final authorities of English Studies nationally, as one reason for sliding standards is the marginalization of university academics from powerful decision-making bodies and the corresponding disinterest of academics to contribute to these bodies. The contributions of academics would lead to a strengthening of linkages between English at primary / secondary levels and the universities, the adherence to common quality standards and the infusion of the latest developments into the discipline at secondary level.

Another issue that requires state support is the status to be assigned to Sri Lankan English within the education system. Rizvina writes of the need to remove 'the stigma attached to those who don't speak 'standard' English The concept of standard vs non-standard has to be challenged'. In 1994, Raheem and Gunsekere discussed this very issue of defining standards for the spoken varieties of English in Sri Lanka given the complexities associated with English usage. In today's context, given the challenges discussed earlier, it becomes even more urgent to subscribe to a consistent policy on written and spoken Sri Lankan English at all levels, especially as there seems to be a mismatch between the variety of English accepted at secondary level and tertiary level.

The vibrant possibilities of re-conceptualizing English Studies discussed above could explode, once and for all, some of the more fundamentalist and parochial condemnations of the discipline of English within the country as elitist, impractical, colonial remnants. At the same time, it is also necessary to look outwards in terms of how Sri Lankan universities could engage with the increasing English language requirements of the South and South East Asian region. 'The ELTU of the University of Kelaniya has over the years attracted students from Asian countries to some of our courses' write Kumeri. This seems to be the way forward as well as by improving networks and linkages with universities from other countries so as to

facilitate the expansion and exchange of updated knowledge on the discipline from different perspectives as proposed by a number of respondents.

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As discussed hitherto, the potential for English Studies is immense -- if we apply an alternative paradigm of engagement. This requires long-term policy and structural changes first, a systematic program of action at university level and the preparation and training of adequate specialised cadre for some of the areas outlined. Given the necessary groundwork, such a prospect may not be immediately achievable. However, it should be a goal for the not-too-distant future if we have an inclusive and liberal vision, the intellectual courage and the ethical conviction to plan ahead and prioritise funding; and to re-design and re-structure the discipline. Such initiatives should not only meet the local on-ground needs of national concord and individual economics but also engage with global epistemological movements and knowledge possibilities. Thus in view of the diverse issues relating to English Studies and the varying standards of English proficiency in the country, there needs to be multi-pronged approaches to rejuvenate and restructure English Studies in Sri Lanka. In so doing the original classicist humanist objectives and the critical tradition in learning should not be compromised. Furthermore, contemporary goals of interdisciplinarity, flexibility, fusion and dynamism in what constitutes knowledge in English Studies must be maintained. Only then can English Studies be a form of progressivist education that can assist the critical, intellectual, professional, as well as commercial growth in individuals and address the national needs of the country.

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