Redefining Parameters: The Case of Lankan Urban Bilingual Discourse

Chandana Dissanayake
Department of Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, Belihuloya.

Abstract

Spoken and written forms of discourse employed by English-Sinhala bilinguals at present call attention to certain significant factors which have served to condition the exponents of such forms at diverse levels. Research studies dealing specifically with English-Sinhala bilingualism are indeed few; more so any recent evaluations of extra-linguistic determiners applicable to the language behaviour of English - Sinhala bilinguals. In this study, I have attempted to deal with some of the significant features of extra-linguistic interest within the discourse patterns among present day urban English-Sinhala bilinguals in respect of spoken discourse. The main objective of this exercise happens to be the initiation of extensive discussion/research leading to the recognition of the functional aspects of some distinct discoursal features current within urban bilingualism. In addition, this study seeks to update the already available material with regard to new additions of many sorts to be noted within the vocabulary of the present day urban bilinguals which require an in-depth analysis.

My research in identifying these discoursal features and subsequent analysis involved direct and indirect interaction with urban English - Sinhala bilingual representatives of several age groups as well as educational, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds and extensive recording of their use of both languages in question. Special attention was paid towards ascertaining how representative each exponent was of a particular group thus divided, since the quality and the effectiveness of the language functions of certain bilinguals often lead to questions rather than definitions based on the in-group identity of the speakers in question. The focus of this research was also concerned with capturing the aspirations, emotions and attitudes of selected bilinguals as they are framed in language, since interpreting the extra linguistic and social significance of such features would enable one to grasp the character and complexities of language behaviour of present day language users belonging to the urban sector.

Further, it has been attempted to examine some of the attitudes, past and present of linguists and discourse analysts towards the language use of individuals, through reference to discourse patterns among the urban English - Sinhala bilinguals. The value of such attitudes has been questioned by analysing these discourse patterns, considering the very many controlling factors affecting the utterances and writing of these bilinguals within the present day context. It has been argued that extra-linguistic factors governing the language behaviour of the urban bilinguals can hardly be placed in perspective in relation to their discourse acts through some unproblematised theoretical notions of modern discourse analysis.

Introduction

Discoursal features both established and of recent origin used by urban English - Sinhala bilinguals well deserving in-depth analysis happen to be many. Often, a word or phrase among these features, when closely examined, can be made to reveal the multidimensional nature of a variety of influences presently governing the language behaviour of these bilinguals. The fundamental process of employing language in communication, when subjected to socio - linguistic refraction, portrays the varying shades of historical, social, educational, economic, situational, personal and other factors influencing the formation and use of the vocabulary of the language user, and it is such refraction of the linguistic data-base of the bilingual that can truly yield extensive information on the functional and other aspects of English - Sinhala bilingualism in its current form.

How this process of analysis or refraction can lead to a better understanding of the functions of discourse among the urban English - Sinhala bilinguals can best be illustrated by examining thus some of their expressions of recent origin employed in day-to-day interaction with peers. For instance, among the multi-varied expressions used by the upper and upper middle-class young male urban English - Sinhala bilinguals in informal discourse are the inter-related terms "bit" and "Bitscene". These render meanings entirely different from the lexical meanings that come to mind when giving the two words involved a standard (British) English interpretation, having treated them in isolation. "Bit" within the code of the younger males (mostly teenagers) of upper and upper middle-class bilinguals is employed to refer to a young female, belonging to the social class and age group of the speakers themselves. This expression could be treated as the Lankan equivalent of the American "gal", yet unlike the American expression employed to refer to women of different age groups and classes (and even animals at times!), "bit" is strictly confined to identifying females in terms of a particular age group or class;

A female of the same age group from the urban lower middle class or under class, or from the rural upper/lower middle classes would not be identified as "bit"; rather they would be referred to as "dame" or even *"baduwa"* (this latter term is given two shades of meaning by its users: (a) a female having more than one male partner (b) an attractive female of any class).

"Bitscene" is a combined form used to express ideas associated with the number of "bits" to be found in any particular environment/locale: eg. "I was at the College carnival; heavy bitscene and all". This would, in effect, mean that while the speaker was at his college carnival, scores of desirable females of his own class and age group were to be noted within that environment. I say "his college carnival" since for an urban upper or upper middle-class male bilingual "college" would almost always mean a privileged public or private educational institution where he has received his primary/secondary education. The same is true of his female counterpart. These comprise only a fraction of a wide range of expressions that reveal the attitudinal aspects pertaining to extra-linguistic determiners - age, gender, class and region of present day English-Sinhala bilingualism.

There are other not-so-recent features of the discourse patterns among the urban English - Sinhala bilinguals that have not received adequate attention of studies conducted so far. Take for instance the language based oppression of the lower / under - classes by the socially superior, manifesting itself through subtle forms of expression within discourse. Often, the learner talk of a lower/underclass bilingual eager to master the educated variety of Lankan English would be tolerated by the socially superior up to a point. Beyond this point, such learners would be victimized by the patronising attitude of his/her superior participants in discourse by a special type of code switching[1], aimed at discouraging learner talk and challenging the learner's attempt to include himself / herself within the group of the socially and educationally advanced speakers. More often than not, this code switching would take the form of a response in Sinhala by the superior speaker to a question framed in learner English by the socially disadvantaged person. Note the following for instance :

A: They gave you ?
B: Yes, I just went in.
A: What is your results?
B: D *Pahai* C *thunai.*

In this conversation which took place outside the premises of an urban private owned school for males, the first speaker's violation of the subject-verb agreement through the misuse of "is" in his second utterance in extra-linguistic terms serves as a class marker. The second speaker who first responds to his interlocutor in the code of the interlocutor's choice, on noticing this class marker immediately code switches into Sinhala, conveying to the former

[1]The use of different languages by a single speaker at different times, different intervals in a particular discourse act.

the message "you cannot possibly speak the way I do, so use the code of your own class". Here it must be noted that the in-group identity among the participants in discourse is often questionable. Both speakers in this example belonged to the same age group and school, and during the recording of their conversation it became apparent that they together with peers used Lankan English as a locale-related code within the school environment. Yet, despite this shared identity, a type of in-group favouritism was seen to be in operation, based on the overriding powers of a class factor in existence **within** that identity. As perceived through this example, no rule governed definitions in terms of in-group identity can accurately explain on all occasions the language behaviour of the members of a particular group; hence the significance of examining the extra-linguistic determiners encountered within discourse.

The reverse of this phenomenon of class-based code switching in discourse is also to be found among the present day bilinguals. The socially disadvantaged learner bilingual, on noticing the condescension of his/her partner in discourse, would often continue to use learner English throughout the conversation without resorting to code switching or mixing[2], by way of protest, no matter the extent of use of the other code (Sinhala) by the other speaker.

Here, the learner English of the bilingual becomes a marked code[3] seeking the rejection of the notion that his/hers is an inferior sub variety of English vis-a-vis the 'educated' standard form. This use of a marked code can also be linked to a psychological process active within some learner bilinguals, which is governed by a desire to neutralize manifestations of social and educational inferiority reflected through their use of language.

At this stage, it is also necessary to distinguish between some special features of the bilingual's use of a marked code and his/her employing of accommodation strategies[4]. The following example reveals the manner in which these features condition speech events of the urban English - Sinhala bilinguals.

This example comprises a recording of a telephone conversation, this time between a journalist and a ministry secretary. Both speakers are urban male English-Sinhala bilinguals.

A: Could I speak to Mr.....
B: (after a brief pause) *kathaa karanawa.*
A: *Mama* 'Daily News' *eken kathaa karanne.*
B: *Ovu?*
A: .....*me maase siyayata thihakin vedi karanava kiyanne eththada?*
B: You see, the Cabinet has agreed only in principle to increase and up to now, the percentage has not been specified. Prior to implementation, we'll have to go into a number of issues...

This exchange comprises several aspects of extra-linguistic interest that reveal as to why the two speakers react to each other the way they do. The journalist's already available information on the language background of the bureaucrat in the first instance is seen to lead to his code selection-to speak in the educated variety of Lankan English. Nevertheless, in this particular speech event, he is also aware of his interlocutor's strong 'nationalist'

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[2]The use of different varieties of language by a single speaker within a single utterance.
[3]A variety of language which serves as a marker of social status, education etc.
[4]Strategies employed by a speaker to keep up with the code of his/her interlocutor, or to compensate for his/her inability to do so.

sentiments pertaining to the use of Sinhala as 'Swabhasha', though the bureaucrat is perfectly capable of communicating in the code he (the journalist) has selected. The brief pause of the bureaucrat denotes indecision, stemming from a conflict between an emotional bias and his knowledge of conversational conventions as well as of what leads to efficiency in communication. Finally, the dictates of emotion are given precedence, and this in turn leads to the bureaucrat's code selection, denoting the national and cultural significance of Sinhala; by implication, the journalist is indirectly indicted for failing to recognise this significance.

However, once the journalist in the example employs the accommodation strategy of reverting to the bureaucrat's own code,the latter's attitude towards his mother tongue is seen to alter, at least momentarily, presumably due to two reasons. Through the information furnished through discourse ("*Mama* `Daily News' *eken kathaa karanne*".), the journalist is seen to reveal his professional links with a state run English daily and in his role-relations with the bureaucrat he seeks to fulfil a professional requirement - i.e. news reporting for publication in the English medium. As for the bureaucrat, being a fluent speaker of educated Lankan English, he is now called upon to perform the function of an informant (source), preferably in English. In addition, established social norms require him on this occasion to assert his identity (official/social) which is inalienably linked with English, this language being a status- symbol for those of his calibre in addition to others. Though his first utterance, once the journalist has revealed his identity, is still in the mother tongue ("Ovu?"), the next utterance of the former which continues in Sinhala at length immediately leads to the bureaucrat's code switching into English, which for him is a situational requirement. Clearly then, the process of code selection in discourse among the urban bilinguals is seen to be conditioned by a variety of extra-linguistic determiners-class, profession, cultural and emotional ties among them.

One of the controversial areas in the field of discourse analysis stems from the distinction drawn by some analysts between what they term `transactional' and `interactional' talk. According to this division, transactional talk is usually aimed at changing the status quo pertaining to one or more situations, such as getting another to accomplish some task, carrying out commercial transactions etc. Interactional talk aims, primarily, at "the lubrication of social wheels"(**McCarthy 1991**), assisting in the confirmation and consolidation of relationships. As made apparent by day-to-day interpersonal communications, however, these categories are not strictly mutually exclusive. Transactional talk can at times accomplish, at least partially, the role of interactional talk. The following exchange between two urban bilinguals at an exclusive leatherwear sales centre in a plush supermarket complex in Colombo, would illustrate this:

Salesperson: What can I do for you?
Customer : I'm looking for a travelling bag.
(Parakrama, Arjuna :Field notes)

Here, the customer who was shabbily dressed was thus questioned by the salesperson as soon as he stepped into the sales centre and did not even have sufficient time to glance at the available products. What he noticed later in this particular locale proved that other customers, well dressed, were not questioned on entering the premises by the salesperson in such a hurried manner. The salesperson's question, then, rather than being framed to assist the customer, could be said to have had an interrogatory function in this particular context, his attire in the salesperson's terms having been inferior to that of the average customer that she usually came in contact with. Her question, therefore, can be attributed to a combined interactional-transactional purpose-i.e. class-based interrogation of an undesirable customer who at first glance did not bear signs of sufficient "purchasing power", and the initiation of a remotely possible commercial transaction which **might**, after all, result in the sale of some item or other.

Following Standards and Creating New Paradigms: Informal Discourse

A communicative act of a speaker or writer can often be an access-code for interpreting his/her identity and behaviour. When an English-Sinhala bilingual female tells another "I'll give you some; but the thing is the fellow came drunk yesterday and plucked, and it's neither *kos* nor *polos* so how to use for your pickle?", she is not merely referring to the value of temporance or to temporary insanity but, due to whatever reason, asking the other to leave aside any hopes of sharing the fruit in question! The speaker's use of Sinhala loan words *kos* and *polos* instead of the Lankan common subtitute 'jak', tells us of her ethnicity - that she most probably belongs to the Sinhalese community, and probably to the middle class, the members of which often use such loan words and also phrases like "so how to use for your pickle" than any other group within the Lankan social hierarchy. In addition, the subject- matter of this text of discourse, through its association with home-grown fruit and a home-made traditional culinary preparation usually attended to by females, conveys some idea of the gender of the addressee as well as that of the speaker. It would be assumed through the words employed that this conversation would have emerged during interaction between the speakers within the domain of friendship. An utterance or written text then, when closely examined with reference to linguistic/extra-linguistic factors and contextual parameters often turns out to be an informative preface vital for understanding the multidimensional character of participants in discourse and their physical and non-physical[5] environment. I shall now discuss a variety of features currently apparent within the discourse patterns of urban English-Sinhala bilinguals that serve to highlight the extra-linguistic value of words and phrases which are indeed informative in a socio-linguistic sense. Further, the discussion seeks to assert the identity of these units of language as truly Lankan in character, ie. truly Lankan 'property' of Lankan English.

During the research activity that provided material for this study, speech patterns and written forms pertaining to discourse among urban English-Sinhala bilinguals were recorded extensively. Particular attention was paid to capturing as many speech acts as possible in 'natural' informal contexts. While some interlocutors were unaware that their words were being processed either on tape or paper, others undertook to converse as 'naturally' as possible, disregarding the necessity of assisting in research (their very assistance was in fact based on this attitude). This led to the availability of segments of 'language-in-action' produced under little or no interlocutory constraint which enabled the close analysis of certain distinctive features within the discourse patterns among these bilinguals. Such material may not have emerged through marked self conscious attempts of subjects at providing information for a researcher. Yet, I shall proceed by leaving behind the rule and considering an exception - an occasion in which a speaker on noticing the presence of the researcher, produced an expression due to a particular type of interlocutory constraint, not merely to achieve her stated objective, but chiefly to declare her identity as a member of a particular group constituent of the urban community of English-Sinhala bilinguals.

Effacement of Identity as Reflected through Discourse

This speaker, a Sinhalese English-Sinhala bilingual female aged 36, had been brought up, as was revealed later, in a westernized urban family residing within the Colombo municipality. In the family domain, from childhood she had been exposed to extensive use of Sinhala and frequent code-mixing involving a few English expressions such as nouns referring to objects, items of food, illnesses etc., while her primary and secondary education at a private owned Colombo school for females had been in the Sinhala medium. With regard to social/economic status, this speaker belonged to the westernized upwardly mobile middle-class.

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[5] Socio-cultural, political, economic etc.

Married to a state sector executive using Sinhala as an L_1 to communicate with the family, the speaker had two children who had been trained to identify their parents with the Sinhala expressions *Ammi* and *Thaththi* within and outside the family domain. Yet, as contained in the recorded text, in the presence of a stranger, (in this case the researcher) the speaker was heard to employ the following expression to instruct her children:

Ask Dada to come

By analysing this expression with reference to the context of communicating in the presence of a stranger, it could be given a problematised reading which would serve to highlight a variety of factors of extra-linguistic significance, lying beyond the stated intent of the speaker. Firstly, the expression *Dada* contained within the utterance could be defined as an extremely Anglicized upper-class term, still prevalent within the family domain of a few users of Lankan English as L_1 as part of the British colonial inheritance. Given the speaker's social standing, quality of discourse within the family domain and the educational background as well as the language choice of her spouse, it would be most unlikely that this term would fit into her vocabulary (and that of her children) under normal circumstances.

What then would be the stimulant, which triggered off this expression within the given context? My reading would point to a strong underlying class factor leading to an attempt at complying with a psychological obsession, requiring the speaker to consciously seek the alteration of her identity before another. The speaker, belonging to the upwardly mobile middle-class as was noted earlier, in this instance is indeed a victim of cultural falsity, arising through social aspiration of acquiring at least a few elements of the language behaviour of the Anglicized upper-class. Thus, in the presence of the stranger who presumably had been unaware of her genuine identity, the speaker could be said to have engaged in a deliberate attempt at placing herself at an upper rung of the Lankan social hierarchy considered superior to her own, through a unit of discourse.

This example serves as an index to certain larger-than-personal (i.e. social) areas concerning the lifestyle, thought processes and discourse of urban English-Sinhala bilinguals. Currently, many bilinguals among the middle and lower-middle classes using Sinhala as L_1 seek to upgrade their social status and gain access to relatively beneficial avenues of employment through what is more than a mere "working knowledge" of English. In attempting to meet this requirement, the bilinguals mentioned not only learn the language at the primary, secondary, tertiary levels through schools, courses of study conducted by individuals and institutions such as the universities, The British Council etc., but also attempt at imitating the language behaviour of whom they consider to be 'role models' among English users. These 'role models' (if there can be such beings considering the multiplicity of factors governing the choice and use of language among individuals) for them are persons who are necessarily Anglicized, belong to the upper stratum of the social scale, and whose spoken (and written) variety of Lankan English, in Lankan terms is closest to Standard (British) English. (Since the 1980s with the introduction of American television programs and an increased number of American films, some bilinguals have begun to veer away from this trend and move closer to the American variety.) Some among the in-group and out-group expressions of these trend-setters are in actuality direct borrowings from the British Standard, and are markers of the idiom and other linguistic as well as extra-linguistic features found among mother tongue speakers of English in Britain. As pointed out by **Thiru Kandiah [(1978)1981]** too, this entire process involving 'role models' and their followers is linked with the bilinguals' own irrational rejection of the very identity of the Lankan English speaker as a 'Symbiotic personality' with a distinct variety of that language at his/her command which embodies his/her own linguisticocultural norms. [6] Similar to the speaker in the example, these lower-middle and middle-class and in some cases the upper middle- class bilinguals in most urban locales resort to such speech strategies to shade their

[6] See Kandiah[(1978)1981].P.79

feelings of social insecurity, albeit unsuccessfully; infrequent and imitated use of a limited number of expressions in selected contexts could never qualify a speaker as a proficient user of the code to which such linguistic features in actuality belong.

And, as in the given example, among the lower, lower-middle and upper-middle classes, these imitators cannot very well master (and their need to do so is indeed problematic) the discourse patterns among the upper-class English speakers of Lankan English as L_1, leave alone those of the Standard (British) English speakers. This is basically due to the operation of certain linguistic, personal/social factors such as the phonological inheritance of some members of these groups {as pointed out by **Chitra Fernando[(1976)1982]** and **Kandiah [(1978)1981]** }, the extent of the influence of Sinhala as a mother tongue on their English, the lack of an Anglicized family/ancestral and educational background etc.

Having discussed some of the attitudinal aspects of urban English-Sinhala bilingualism, which serve to reinforce my previous related arguments, I shall now proceed to illustrate through units of data how the urban bilinguals within given domains interact as interlocutors using Lankan English in order to achieve a variety of objectives-aided, governed, altered and at times even violated by the language that they use.

Novelty Amidst Established Usage

The variability in patterns of discourse among the urban bilinguals is further illustrated by the language behaviour of upper-middle and middle-class bilinguals, who use Lankan English as a first language within almost all domains despite Sinhala being their mother tongue. The code used by them in informal discourse with peers, depending on the extent of their allegiance to the Anglicized lifestyle is characterized by code mixing and code-switching with the use of Sinhala. Particularly, the younger bilinguals of this group(it is a group that can be included in **Chitra Fernando's [(1976)1982]** Group Two, provided that the latter group is redefined)are prone to use Sinhala expressions increasingly than their older counterparts. Given below is a text transcribed from a tape recording made at the 1995 Royal-Thomian cricket match in Colombo, Sri Lanka. The participants were Sinhalese male upper-middle class English-Sinhala bilinguals aged 16-17 years who use Lankan English as an L_1. Only one participant(C) was aware of the presence of recording equipment.

A: These buggers are mad *machang*. Look where he lifted that. *Thava podden athey* caught. At this rate there'll be no match on Saturday. We'll be all out before close.
B: Buggers are feeling down machang. But the other thing is, considering their batting we can't afford to *thattufy*.....
C: Mm
B: at this stage. So the buggers must be thinking hit out or.....
C: Yeah
B: get out and whacking. *Naththang ithin*.....
A: Yeah, but the one he lifted now was too dangerous.
C: True
A: Peiris won't usually miss one like that. We're lucky. Last time....
B: Same with his bowling .The bugger is well seasoned. What were you saying machang?
A: Last time.....I told you! there! he's gone. That one was lifted to the same spot. *Illang parippu kanawa*. This is the end machang, this is theeeeee end. The rest of our guys will do nothing with this kind of bowling. *Heta wenakangallan hitiyoth pudumai*. Aa..they are bringing the drinks. *Machang* shall we go down and have.....
B: O.K.
A: .....something? This heat is a bloody killer.
C: Here, are we leaving the bags or..
B: We'll leave them and go. Otherwise some bugger might...

A: Shit *machang! I* was hoping that we'd be well into the game and full *dayma gahai kiyala.*
B: Don't cry you bugger. If no match on Saturday, we'll go for a swim or something. Or we can....
A: Swim *koheda?*
B: Mount or somewhere.

What becomes apparent through the code of each interlocutor in this conversation is that while each could habitually (effortlessly?) communicate in English, code-mixing and switching here is clearly aimed at reinforcing an informal register appropriate for establishing friendship/intimacy and asserting in-group identity. There are more instances of code switching than mixing to be noted, for most of which the speaker A is responsible. This could be attributed to a strong influence of Sinhala as mother tongue, yet considering the overall performance of the participants, A happens to be the most communicative and consequently possesses a wider linguistic repertoire at his command in discourse.

The fact that code switching takes precedence over code mixing throughout the speakers' interaction would indicate a conscious effort on their part to preserve the quality of their L_1 English as 'English' and not [7]'Singlish', since this spoken language qualified as "better" is indeed a status symbol. Nevertheless they are not reluctant to introduce certain day-to-day expressions within this 'superior' variety which are characteristic of the Lankan consciousness of the 'symbiotic personalities'[8] that they are. The expressions *thattufy* (to bat on slowly) and *illang parippu kanawa* (asking for trouble) are typically used in discussing cricket by the bilinguals; while the former (which in L_1 Sinhala is known as thattu) is employed by both young and older male bilinguals alike, the second is 'endemic' among the middle and upper-middle-class young urban bilinguals.

The element of code-mixing in A's utterance:
I was hoping that we'd be well into the game and full *dayma gahai kiyala*

needs to be analysed closely, since it brings out a commonly shared feature of most discourse acts of urban English-Sinhala bilinguals - the employing of grammatical structures/syntactic arrangements of Sinhala in code-mixed elements included within discourse that happen to be predominantly English-oriented. The expression "full dayma gahai kiyala" (would play throughout the day) cannot be treated as a mere code-mixed item facilitating communicative efficiency alone. Granting that it does achieve this purpose, one needs to be aware that it is linked with wider social implications that condition the language behaviour of the speaker, emerging from the terrain of the subconscious while participating in discourse.

Such expressions often convey a sense of protest against Anglicized linguistic hierarchy and a desire within the speaker to alter the language-related status quo, possibly due to one or more extra-linguistic reasons. As mentioned, the speaker A who employs this expression could be one influenced considerably by the operation of sinhala as a mother tongue.

Though English is his L_1 within the domains of family and friendship, it is possible that he had been exposed to the use of Sinhala from childhood among neighbours and later among fellow students at the primary and secondary levels of education. His use of Sinhala within English in the above manner, then, would mark a necessity to award recognition to a mode of expression prevalent among other speakers within his communicative environment, a mode which despite its 'otherness' in the light of his own code, is associated in his mind with a notion of shared racial inheritance, the overriding powers of which alter his speech acts

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[7]See Chitra Fernando [(1976)1982].P.200
[8]See Kandiah (1981).PP.96-97

wherever possible. Thus, it is vital to emphasize the necessity for looking beyond the established definitions (such as code-mixing) and parameters if one were to accurately interpret the extra-linguistic complexities situated within the discourse patterns of urban English-Sinhala bilinguals and other speakers.

The speakers here alternately employ the expression *machang*, which literally means 'brother-in-law'. An expression markedly in-group in character, *machang* is currently employed by both young and older English-Sinhala bilinguals (but not by those who are above the age of seventy or so) belonging to all levels of the social hierarchy, in informal discourse. A very special and interesting feature of its employment in discourse which emerged during my research activity was that having remained a male prerogative expression until recent times, *machang* was now being used by some upper-middle and middle-class urban *females* aged around 16-26 - schoolgoers, undergraduates, and commercial sector employees (shop assistants, stenographers etc) among them. They were heard employing this expression along with Lankan English while travelling in buses, during "shopping-sprees" and in informal discourse at locales ranging from universities to carnivals. The fact that they were clearly 'violating' an established, gender-related norm did not seem to deter them at all, since the term was being employed quite audibly in the presence of out-group members of many types.

Having discussed some aspects of the influence of Sinhala expressions and language structures on Lankan English, I shall now analyse some features of linguistic and extra-linguistic interest noted within the Sinhala-oriented discourse patterns of middle-class English-Sinhala bilinguals. Speech acts contained within informal discourse of this group are characterized by the frequent inclusion of English lexical items, some of which happen to be well established at present within L_1 Sinhala of most speakers. This combined use of the two languages in the present day context can be illustrated by the following informal discussion between three middle-class female bilinguals aged 33-46, at a Colombo private sector commercial institution in December 1994. Participants were aware that their conversation was being recorded.

A Notice *eka daalada ane?*
B: *Thaama na. Nathnam melahakatath aaranchiya gihin.*
A: Notice board *eke baluwada?*
B: *Ovu.*
A: *Kohomath* pay *ekath ekka gevai. Pereda* news *walatath kivva..*
C: *Me paara tikak vediyen dunnanang....*
A: *Pereda* news *walata kivva* private sector *ekatath denna oona kiyala.*
B: Hm..
C: *Ape* increments *hadalada? Mata nam dan ahala ahala epaa wela. Giya sumaane...*
A: Computer section *eke Nishanthi kivva eyaalata okkoma* details *evalalu.* Feed *karanna witharalu thiyenne.*
B: *Eyaala* feed *karanakota labana avurudda vei. Dan kavada indalada*
A *Kohomath me* month *eka ivara venna kalin hadai. Indranige* wedding *ekath langai....*
C: *Ovu.*
A *Needa?* List *eka patan aragenada?*
B: *Thaama na., Monavada ithin* present *ekata denne? Lalanita wage* porcelain....
C: *Ae* set *eka dan ae gaanata ganna ba. Langadi* prices *vedi vuna. Api* cake tray *ekakui...*
A: Cake tray *ekakata vadaa gedarakata oona deyak...*
B: Plates, tea set *ekak wage deeval thamai honda.* Colpetty *paththe giyoth* ceramics showroom *eken* prices check *karanna puluvan.*
C: Lunch *eke giyoth velaa madi.* Saturday *withara?*

B: *Ovu.* List *eke wade kaata hari baaraganna vei.*
C: *Andung laasthi karagannath oona. Mage hatteta* material *ekak balannath thiyanawa.*
B: *Eka gamaninma okkoma kaloth lesiy.*
A: *Koheluda* wedding *eka thiyenne?*
B: *Thaama* invitation *deela nane. Habai gedera thamai gannava kivve.*

The speakers here are representative of the upwardly mobile middle-class, some members of which, contrary to Chitra Fernando's definition of Group Two bilinguals, are in fact competent users of Lankan English as L_2. In informal discourse among peers (with similar status, education, age and of the same age group) they often use L_1 Sinhala, a code substantially influenced by their knowledge of English, gained outside the family domain in most cases, through primary, secondary and tertiary level education. The loan words from English included in their code belong to several categories - kinship terms (husband, wife, brother-in-law); terms referring to meals (lunch, tea); terms associated with profession (pay, increment, advance, short leave, absent, C.C meaning Chief Clerk and the ubiquitous boss); reference to illnesses, bodily functions (flu, fever, malaria, measles, menses, labour-pains - Sinhala equivalents are almost never used for these last two terms, presumably since the English terms carry a certain neutrality which is absent in the Sinhala equivalents which sound awkward to most speakers); references to occasions in life (birthday, wedding, funeral, welcome, farewell - these terms are used with the Sinhala suffix "eka", and a most notable term referring to young female children reaching puberty: attained. Often mispronounced as "attend" and used together with the Sinhala suffix *"welaa"*, it is a derivation from the English expression "attained age". Yet another term for which a Sinhala equivalent is almost never used is pregnant); references to places (shop, hospital, supermarket, annex meaning a section of a private residence given on rent by the owner, library, hotel, pool, town hall) and many other terms.

To turn to the example, as mentioned the utterances of all the participants carry a distinct flavour of English and the expressions used such as *notice board, pay, news, private sector, list, porcelain, material invitation* etc. can be described as terms well assimilated into the code of these middle-class speakers through long association with Sinhala. The expressions "feed karanna" (to "feed" or process data) and "computer section eka" are relatively new comers but are well on their way towards established usage since computer technology is currently present in many spheres within the urban context.

Conclusion

The outcome of the analyses of different patterns of discourse among the urban English-Sinhala bilinguals in each section of this discussion calls for the recognition of the fact that the prevailing language standards/interpretive criteria should be reformulated to suit the varying forms and levels of expression currently serving the communicative requirements of the different strata of urban bilinguals. Validating their 'non-standard' expressions subject to well developed levels of coherence and efficacy in discourse has to be awarded priority in any constructive attempts at truly improving the quality of the individual and collective language behaviour of urban language users. The use of Lankan English and Sinhala in informal/formal discourse, through levels of synthesis determined by context and extra-linguistic determiners applicable to the urban community, has to be viewed in a truly Lankan perspective leaving aside some standard British notions that are hardly helpful in correctly interpreting the language behaviour of this particular community.

Given these facts and the undeniable truism that the language behaviour of any community is subject to constant evolution, it is necessary to emphasize the need for future extensive research studies/publications that would reveal many other aspects of urban English-sinhala bilingualism well deserving recognition, acceptance and promotion. Such constructive

attempts should also lead to awareness, seeking the elimination of certain undesirable elements of language behaviour among bilinguals, ranging from standard-based irrational intransigence of purists to totally unacceptable features of usage among certain bilinguals. Openness of academic minds probing discourse patterns and socio-linguistic transition among bilinguals, must lead to the formulation of new paradigmatic values serving to strengthen the healthy, innovative aspects of language behaviour prevalent among all urban/rural groups subdivided under linguistic and extra-linguistic parameters. Only then would it be possible to substantially diminish and perhaps totally negate the language-based stigmatising of some sections of the Lankan people in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation and acts of discourse.

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