

BRIDGING DIALECTS: ANALYSIS OF THE LEXICAL DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN SRI LANKAN AND STANDARD BRITISH ENGLISH

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Abstract

The impact of a clear-cut division between Sri Lankan English (SLE) and Standard British English (SBE) has not been fully addressed yet, due to its complex procedure. Therefore, the research problem is the *lack of a clear distinction between SLE and SBE*. The objective of this study is to determine whether there is a clear-cut way to distinguish between SLE and SBE, and whether either condition has any impact on the other. Moreover, "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English", written by Meyler (2007), is a significant piece of work with a vast vocabulary of Sinhala, SLE and SBE. There are 03 research questions to find answers in the methodology of the study: (1) How does Meyler (2007) define SLE? (2) What conclusions could be made by analyzing the context of the immense vocabulary lists in the Sinhala words and the SLE words? (3) Is there a clear-cut separation between SLE and SBE? Analyzing "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English", written by Meyler (2007), and finding answers to the three research questions was completed by applying the Desk Research approach to Meyler's (2007) "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English". (1) Meyler (2007) define SLE as the language spoken and understood by those Sri Lankans who speak English as their first language, and /or who are bilingual in English, Sinhala or Tamil. (2) Around 25000 Sinhala (with phonetic transcriptions) and BSE words in this Dictionary have been described with clear pictures of them and with in-depth descriptions. 3) The results showed there is a clear-cut separation between SLE and SBE, and there is no impact between them. These results and relevant recommendations can be addressed to the relevant SLE syllabus designers and curriculum designers who engage with schools and universities, making teaching SLE and SBE more fruitful.

Keywords: Sinhala Language, Sri Lankan English, Standard British English

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Introduction: Background of the study

Sri Lankan English (SLE) is a subset of South Asian English, commonly referred to as Indian English. Indian English is a more historic and well-established variety. Both Indian English and Sri Lankan English had many similarities, as they both developed from the English used by British colonials in the nineteenth century. Whereas SBE is concerned, it is the form of the English language that is symbolically used in formal communication, such as in education, academic writing, Government documents, media, and official speeches—writing connected with correct grammar, formal vocabulary, standard spelling and punctuation.

The Statement of the Research Problem

The research problem is the lack of a clear answer to whether there is a distinct way to separate SLE and SBE, and whether there is no impact between them.

The Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to determine whether there is a clear-cut way to distinguish between SLE and SBE, and whether either condition has any impact on the other. This study aims to investigate the potential impact of SLE and SBE, employing the Desk Research approach and the Meyler (2007) dictionary as tools to address the Research questions and justify the study.

Research Questions

This study aims to provide answers to the following three research questions.

- (1) How does Meyler (2007) define SLE?
 - (2) What conclusions could be made by analyzing the context of the immense vocabulary lists in the Sinhala words (phonetic sounds are provided) and SLE words?
 - (3) How can it be determined whether there is a clear-cut way to separate SLE from SBE, and therefore, whether there is no impact between them?
- (Here, the 3rd question is the objective of this research study.)

Literature Review: Defining the colonial period and the post-colonial period in Sri Lanka

The three major Western colonial powers: Portuguese (1505–1658), Dutch (1658–1796), and British (1796–1948) had significant impacts on every part of Ceylon, including economy, society, politics, and other sectors. During the British period, the introduction of a new and valuable agricultural system shifted the economy of Ceylon in a significantly different direction. The politically legitimate reforms, as well as the religious foundations, have led to significant changes in Ceylon.

Like any language, SLE is constantly evolving. The language spoken by today's younger generation is very different from the language inherited from the British at independence. On the other hand, many of the features of “colonial” English remain in SLE, having fallen out of fashion in British English, which explains why some aspects of SLE seem outdated and formal to speakers of other varieties of English (Meyler, 2007).

There are many variations of the English Language within the Indian region, whereas Indian English usage has significant differences, especially in terms of pronunciation. Sri Lankan English (SLE) is emerging as a distinctly South Asian variety, with distributional comparisons to Indian English due to their shared colonial backgrounds (Meyler, 2009). English pronunciation in Sri Lanka differs from that in India. There are people in Sri Lanka who speak English fluently, like native English speakers.

The fact that Sri Lanka was ruled by the English for over a hundred years is also a significant factor. They also created an English-speaking social group at the same time. While British English remains highly valued in Sri Lanka, attitudes towards SLE are becoming increasingly optimistic, suggesting its growing acceptance as a legitimate variety (Bernaisch, 2012).

The SLE is characterised by unique phonological, syntactic, grammatical, and verbal features, distinguishing it from other English dialects. The official languages of Sri Lanka are Sinhala and Tamil. Although English is the international language in Sri Lanka, it is commonly used in universities, schools, institutions and the business sector. English in Sri Lanka assists numerous purposes, including managerial, justice, and educational roles, despite its constitutional status as a "link language" (Mendis & Rambukwella, 2020).

With the Tamil minority viewed as privileged in the colonial system, more protectionist measures were sought in independence for the Sinhala ethnic majority through a "Sinhala Only" language policy, all of which led to the country's polarisation. Crucially, English has continued to be the primary instrument of the dominant, bilingual, Westernized elite, the "kaduva" (Sinhala 'sword'), with the power to divide those with and without access to the language. More recent state discourse, however, reframes English as a functionally distinct tool, one for communication, knowledge, and employment. Two aspects are notable: (i) that English be delivered and desired purely for its utility value, while Sinhala and Tamil are associated with cultural values and identities; and (ii) that English be an important tool (along with ICT) for rural empowerment, with user-friendliness rather than correctness of grammar and pronunciation emphasized (Lim, 2013).

Sri Lanka inherited the English Language from its last colonisers, the British, and a positive interest was taken by the British in teaching English to the Sinhala-speaking students since then. Today, in the post-colonial era, formal teaching of English as a second language (ESL) is introduced in government schools from Grade 03 onwards (Jayasinghe, 2015).

In the literature review shown above, every researcher discusses the evolution of colonial ESL, except for one. Therefore, understanding post-colonial identity in SLE after many decades is crucial, and it justifies the research gap, which this study addresses by utilizing a dictionary review as a tool in the Desk research approach. In Sri Lanka, no other study has been done on a post-colonial research study using "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English Meyler (2007)", systematically reviewed with the desk research approach.

The research problem of this study is the inability to determine whether there is a clear-cut way to distinguish between SLE and SBE, and whether there is any impact between them. The objective of the study is to determine whether there is a clear-cut way to distinguish between SLE and SBE, and whether either condition has an impact on the other.

Methodology

This paper focuses on the desk research approach, and this study is based entirely on secondary data. The Dictionary written by Meyler (2007) was chosen as the analytical tool of the study, and the Desk research approach was applied to Meyler's (2007) dictionary. The Sample size is one, as this research review involved only one particular Dictionary, Meyler (2007). The sampling technique is a systematic review. In this research, three questions were examined in depth by Meylor (2007), and all three answers were found to be successful.

This Dictionary, Meyler (2007), is one of the excellent books of post-colonial Sri Lankan English. In the introduction to Michael Meyler's Dictionary (2007) of Sri Lankan English, he provides a comprehensive guide to his Dictionary, explaining to the reader to whom this Dictionary would be more useful. He offers an acceptable explanation of Sri Lankan English and provides a wonderful description of how his Dictionary is composed. Features of Sri Lankan English: Words and expressions, grammatical features: verbs, nouns, articles, prepositions, and adverbs; word order, and colloquial features have been compiled. Moreover, pronunciation, including vowels, consonants, stress, and connected speech, has been addressed. This book, "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English" by Michael Meyler, is one of the most prominent pieces of post-colonial Sri Lankan English. In this excellent Dictionary, Meyler (2007) provides an outstanding knowledge of Sri Lankan English and Indian English. "Where to draw the line? British English and International English: which stands and why? and right and wrong: a descriptive or a perspective approach?" Meyler (2007).

Furthermore, this Dictionary includes many features of colloquial SLE which would be recognised as mistakes by teachers and examiners of SBE, and indeed by many speakers of Sri Lankan English. Many of these features are marked "(coll)" in the Dictionary. They would not be considered acceptable in a more formal written context. Meyler (2007) states that he believes including such features is the best way to reflect the current Sri Lankan context in which English is used.

Results and Discussion

The 03 questions mentioned in the introduction of this research are answered as follows:

How does Meyler (2007) define SLE?

According to Meyler (2007), the Dictionary states that defining Sri Lankan English is not a simple task. Despite being a relatively small country, Sri Lanka is part of a small English-speaking community, and there are many sub-varieties of Sri Lankan English. Sinhalese,

Tamils, Muslims, and Burghers speak different varieties; Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims have their own vocabulary. Additionally, the older generation speaks a different language than the younger generation. Here, we must also focus on the wealthy Colombo elite. They prefer to speak English as their First Language. The remaining wider community likes to learn English as a Second Language.

Meyler (2007) notes that it is somewhat confusing to provide an exact definition for Sri Lankan English, due to its subvarieties, including Standard Sri Lankan English, Singlish, Tamilish, etc. Therefore, Meyler (2007) simply calls it "Sri Lankan English". Sri Lankan English is abbreviated as "SLE".

Meyler (2007) says, "Sri Lankan English (SLE) is the language spoken and understood by those Sri Lankans who speak English as their first Language, and/or who are bilingual in English and Sinhala or Tamil". Possible questions on this definition of Sri Lankan English (SLE) have been very clearly addressed in this Dictionary.

(2) What conclusions could be made by analyzing the context of the immense vocabulary lists in Sinhala words (relevant phonetic sounds have been given) and SLE words?

In Meyler (2007), the Dictionary provides a clear description of its contents. There are about 2,500 examples, including SLE words, Sinhala words, and SBE words, in this Dictionary. These words and

expressions have been listed in alphabetical order, and they include features of the English Language spoken in Sri Lanka.

All the entries in this Dictionary contain some or all of the following features, as mentioned by Meyler (2007):

1. The **headword** is written in **bold type**. If there is an entry that is also in bold type. If it contains a related word occasionally, it is also in **bold type**. The identical headwords are numbered, e.g. moonstone (1) & moonstone (2). Sometimes an entry is followed by one or more supplementary headwords preceded by a box: e.g. pol is followed by “□” **pol** arrack and other collocations of **pol** according to Meyler (2007).
2. A pronunciation guide, written in phonetic font, is explained in the pronunciation section below. The pronunciation is given for non-English words where SLE pronunciation differs substantially from "Standard British English" pronunciation. A definition of the word, either a simple "translation" into Standard British English or a longer explanation, is given. In most cases, a brief introduction is also included (Meyler, 2007).
3. The derivation of non-English words, such as Sinhala, Tamil, Hindi, Malay, Arabic, Dutch, or Portuguese origin, is mentioned when it is relevant, particularly if the word appears in the Oxford English Dictionary with a different spelling or definition. Sometimes it can be with the derivations from India (Meylor, 2007).
4. Cross references to other entries are also written in **bold type**. There are three types of cross-reference. 1) words in brackets with the symbol =, e.g. king coconut (= thambili), 2) words in brackets with the symbol “>” appearing after the definition, e.g. molgaha
5. (“>” vangediya), 3) words in **bold type** appearing within the text of the definition or notes. e.g. **milk hopper: a hopper made with coconut milk**. (Meyler, 2007).
6. Example phrases and sentences, written in italics and marked with a degree sign: “0”. Many examples are drawn from authentic sources, including newspapers, magazines, and advertisements. Others were overheard on the TV, radio or honest conversations. Notes comparing Sri Lankan and British usage, preceded by the arrow symbol: → these notes explain differences in meaning in more detail, focusing on grammatical and pronunciation features. The abbreviations SLE and BSE refer to Sri Lankan English and British Standard English, respectively (Meyler, 2007).
7. From 30 published books, some quotes have been chosen for this Dictionary, and each quote starts before a diamond symbol: “♦”. The page number is provided as a reference. e.g. (AG 42). This means (Anil's Ghost Page 42). Here. The selected authors of these books (novels and short stories) have been published between 1982 and 2006, set mostly or entirely in a Sri Lankan context.
8. Furthermore, the relevant authors are either Sri Lankan or of Sri Lankan origin living abroad. The quotes are included only to adorn the entries in the Dictionary, but not as a glossary. Double inverted commas are used to show authors' direct speech or colloquial language (Meyler, 2007).

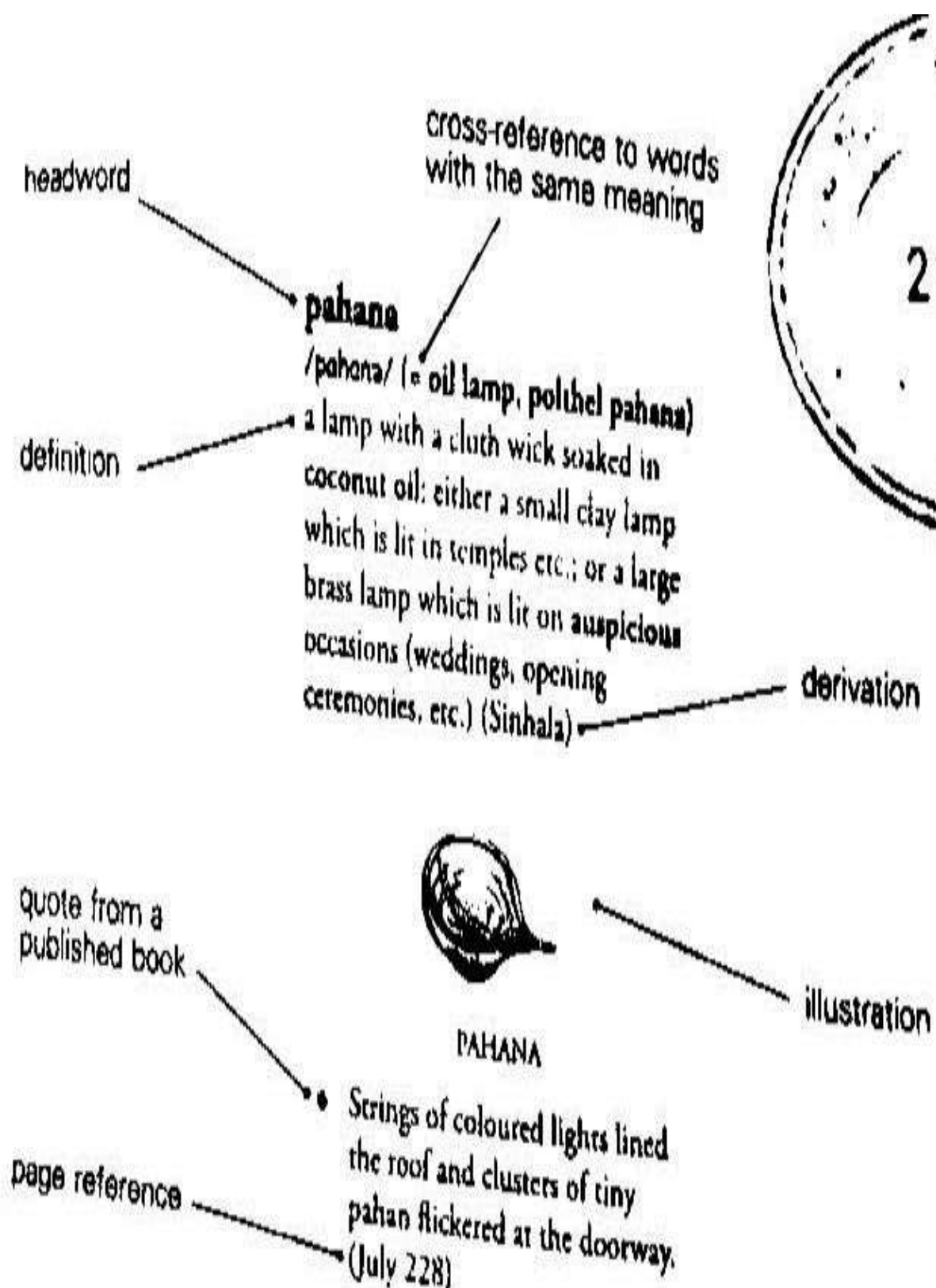


Figure 01: Description of the Sinhala word “Pahana” in Meyler (2007) Dictionary

In the vocabulary of the Dictionary, it is visible that for some words, there is a direct word in English; e.g. “Custard apple”. Its Sinhala name is “= aatha, anoda”). When there is a direct equivalent in English for such vocabulary, the researcher believes that the Sinhala word aatha/anoda is not necessary to use

in Sri Lankan English. Therefore, when teaching or speaking Standard British English and Sri Lankan English, the usage in this entry should be referred to as "Custard apple" only.

When teaching Sinhala food items in Sri Lankan English, "sweet meets" (kokis, asmi, konda kavum, athirasa) do not have an English term, as they derive from Sri Lankan culture. We have to use only the Sinhala term "Sinhala sweets" in Sri Lankan English. When it comes to the teaching process of Sri Lankan English, we also have to use (kokis asmi, konda kavum, athirasa) if they are taught individually; otherwise, we have to simply use the word 'sweet meets'. Here is a discrepancy in the usage of teaching Sri Lankan usage and British Standard English.

According to Meyler (2007), many of the English words and expressions used in SLE are not found in British English. Some may be unique to SLE, others may be found in other varieties elsewhere in the English-speaking world. The SLE includes several features of British colonial language that have fallen out of fashion in contemporary British English. One contemporary feature of SLE is a more marked difference between the written and spoken language than in Standard British English. There are a few cases where non-English words have been "Anglicised" by the addition of an English Ending, such as the plural -s on nouns such as "hal massas" and "karra pottas". Colloquial SLE is less strict than BSE. Sometimes at a dining table, instead of asking "Do you like some more rice?" without the object "rice", we can just ask "Do you like?" or "Yes, I like" as the answer.

According to Meyler (2007), Phrasal verbs also differ in many ways. Several phrasal verbs exist in SLE, but are not in SBE, e.g. "You have *put on* since I last saw you," and "She *came down* in Maths". Simultaneously, phrasal verbs in SBE ("put on" or "throw away" are used without the particle in SLE; I will put on the shirt and come, and "please do not throw my letter".

Pronunciation of Vowels

Mykle Meyler has used a Phonetic font on his own to show the pronunciation in the Dictionary, as some of the sounds are not available in the English Phonetic Alphabet. Meyler (2007) clearly and precisely illustrates his own phonetic alphabet usage on page xx, accompanied by examples in English and Sinhala / Tamil words. e.g. Usage of Vowels in Meylor (2007) dictionary as follows:

Symbol	English		Sinhala/Tamil example	
ă	parcel	/p ăsəl/	aachchi	/ ăchchi/
e	men	/men/	elle	/elle/

There is a tendency in SLE to pronounce vowels more closed than in SBE, which reflects the way Sinhala and Tamil vowels are pronounced. However, there is more exaggeration among first-language speakers of Sinhala and Tamil who do not speak 'SLE'. Indeed, this tendency is satirized by standard SLE when they refer to a "not pot" accent, pronouncing the English words 'not' and 'pot' with an exaggeratedly closed 'o'. Speakers of standard SLE will make a distinction between a more open 'o' in English words like, such as 'office', and a more closed 'o' in Sinhala words like 'pol'. "Sponge, oven, worry, wonder: the letter 'o' pronounced / a / in SBE, /o/ in SLE (making 'wonder' a homophone of 'wander'), moreover, Airport: SBE /æ̃/. SLE /eya/ pronounce the word "air".

Consonants

Most of the consonants are pronounced almost identically in SLE and BSE. The main exceptions are the following.

ʈ	Thomian	ʈoʈmian/	thaaaththa	/ʈaʈʈa
/ʈ	tea	/ʈiʈ/	chatti	/chaʈʈi/
d	than	/dæñ/	duwa	/duwa/
ɖ	Dada	/ɖæɖa /	bandakka	/bɕnʈakka/

The symbols /ʈ/ and /ɖ/ represent the retroflex t and d, pronounced somewhat like the English /t/ as in 'ten' and /d/ as in 'dog' but with the tongue further back on the roof of the mouth. These sounds are common in Sinhala and Tamil, and this is how the letters 't' and 'd' tend to be pronounced in SLE. This in-depth description clearly shows that the prestigious Dictionary, "A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English" by Meyler (2007), provides a very usable, comprehensive, and appropriate list of words, offering great knowledge, including the relevant pronunciation of Sri Lankan English as well.

(3) The vocabulary of Sri Lankan English included in this Dictionary, which is practically used in the real context in Standard Sri Lankan English Teaching, may not be practical in certain contexts in Sri Lankan English. The researcher believes that in Sri Lankan English, when there is one word (e.g. custard apple) in SBE and the same "custard apple" is named as aatha/ anoda, one can use only "custard apple". When we use Meyler (2007) dictionary, if a word has a Sinhala name, it also has the SBE name, most of the time. Therefore, it is clear that it is correct to use only the SBE name (aricanut /erikənat/) without using the Sri Lankan name "puwak". Therefore, the result is that there is a clear-cut way to separate SLE and SBE, and there is no impact between them. In schools, we can teach the Standard British English words and the SLE words separately. Sometimes, there are food items for which we cannot find English translations, especially when they are available in Sri Lanka but not in a British context (e.g., "kokls ", a Sinhala word). Then we have to use it as "kokls " only.

As long as a particular SLE word has an SBE translation, it is possible to say that it is an SBE word. If an SLE word does not have an SBE translation, it is not possible to say that the word is an SBE word. Therefore, this way we can separate SLE words and SBE words clearly.

Moreover, it is evident that Sri Lankan English does not significantly impact British Standard English in the Sri Lankan context, as they are distinct from each other.

The vocabulary of Sri Lankan English included in this Dictionary, which is practically used in real contexts in Standard Sri Lankan Teaching, may not be practical in certain contexts of Sri Lankan English. Therefore, if any entry in the Meyler (2007) dictionary has the name SLE and also the SBE name, it is very correct to use only the SBE name. Therefore, the result is that there is a clear-cut way to separate SLE and SBE, and there is no impact between them. Using the Desk research approach and the use of this outstanding Dictionary, Meyler (2007), the results show there is a clear-cut separation between SLE and SBE, and there is no impact between them.

Conclusion

The Dictionary on "Standard Sri Lankan English" was systematically reviewed, and three suitable questions were formulated. Applying the Desk research approach to this Dictionary, the following answers to the relevant questions were found. Questions :

- (1) How does Meyler (2007) define SLE?
- (2) What conclusions could be made by analyzing the context of the immense vocabulary lists in the Sinhala words (phonetic sounds are provided) and SLE words?
- (3) How can it be determined whether there is a clear-cut way to separate SLE from SBE, and

therefore, whether there is no impact between them?

Answers:

- (1) Meyler (2007) has provided an instrumental and comprehensive definition in his Dictionary.
- (2) In Meyler (2007), the Dictionary provides a clear description of what the Dictionary consists of. There are 2,500 examples of SLE words, Sinhala words, and SBE words in this Dictionary. These words and expressions have been alphabetically listed, accompanied by characteristics of the English spoken in Sri Lanka, as well as phonetic translations.
- (3) Showed there is a clear-cut separation between SLE and SBE, and there is no impact between them. This is the objective of the research study.

Recommendations

The Desk research approach was used as a tool in this study to review Meyler's (2007) dictionary. In this way, the Dictionary could be comprehensively read, and 03 relevant questions on this Dictionary were made, and the appropriate answers were found. This is an indepth review of this Dictionary. This suggests that for other professional books, research articles, and magazines, an exact summary of the given contents can be applied using this same method.

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