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RESEARCH ARTICLE

A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO DINO KELLEGHAN'S *LANKAN ENGLISH: HOW FAR DO WE GO?*

Nimasha Malalasekera.

University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.

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Abstract

This paper is a critical response to Dinoo Kelleghan's article *Lankan English: How Far Do We Go?* Kelleghan (2013) expresses her views on a seminar titled *Kaduva: the Colomboscope Seminar on Sri Lankan English Learning* conducted by the *Kaduva* panel: Dr. Sumathy Sivamohan of the University of Peradeniya, Dr. Shermal Wijewardene of the University of Colombo, writer and editor Malinda Seneviratne, and moderator Shyamalee Tudawe. In the light of "linguistic schizoglossia" (Kandiah, 1981) and "linguistic schizophrenia" (Kachru, 1992), the paper discusses how Kelleghan's arguments reflect the attempt of Sri Lankan users of English to conform to an 'ideal' exonormative variety of English resisting Sri Lankan English (SLE). Focusing on English language teaching and learning, it also problematizes her suggestion to form a "cultural lingua franca."

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Introduction:-

Dinoo Kelleghan expresses her views on a seminar on *Kaduva: the Colomboscope Seminar on Sri Lankan English Learning* in *Lankan English: How Far Do We Go?* The seminar was conducted by the *Kaduva* panel: Dr. Sumathy Sivamohan of the University of Peradeniya, Dr. Shermal Wijewardene of the University of Colombo, writer and editor Malinda Seneviratne, and moderator Shyamalee Tudawe. Disagreeing with certain views expressed at the seminar, Kelleghan aims to pinpoint the contextual extent to which Sri Lankan English (SLE) should be used and the importance of teaching and learning an exonormative standard of English as a lingua franca to gain acceptance and upward social mobility in the international arena. Further, she stresses the need for forming a "cultural lingua franca" to strengthen cultural relationships across the globe. This paper critically examines Kelleghan's response to the seminar arguing that her views reflect how Lankan users of English tend to uphold an idealistic exonormative variety of English resisting SLE. It employs the concepts of "linguistic schizoglossia" (Kandiah, 1982) and "linguistic schizophrenia" (Kachru, 1992) to discuss the above. Finally, it focuses on English language teaching and learning in Sri Lanka in an attempt to problematize Kelleghan's suggestion to form a "cultural lingua franca."

Discussion:-

SLE is not recognized as a separate variety of English by many English-speaking communities. There is also a lack of awareness of the existence of such variety. Thus, speakers of English in Sri Lanka turning a blind eye to SLE is not appalling. As Meyler (2009) notes, there is "both internal resistance among speakers of SLE themselves, and external resistance from the rest of the English-speaking world" to SLE. This may trigger linguistic insecurity in SLE speakers. Calvet (2006) describing three different types of linguistic insecurity, states that statutory insecurity is the consequence of speakers' negative evaluation of the status of the language they use, compared to that of another

language or variety. This kind of insecurity is apparent when Kelleghan argues that one cannot use SLE in “public and official life” in both local and global contexts if one wants to be “taken seriously,” or “understood universally without ambiguity.” She brings in an example where one of her colleagues in Australia was laughed at because of her Chilean pronunciation of English. It is possible to argue that speakers of English in Sri Lanka may fear being ridiculed by the English-speaking world in the same manner for using a distinct variety of English.

Besides, many Sri Lankan speakers of English, because of their colonial mindset, tend to believe that British English is superior to SLE. Kandiah (1981) states the following:

“As a member of the westernized professional and middle class native elite that the British rulers created the English-speaking native Sri Lankan believed that the only standards by which excellence could be measured in any meaningful way were British, with the consequent devaluation of anything that was native... However, owing to the overpowering sense of inferiority that the colonial interlude developed in him, he continued to make the assumption even after LnKE¹ had emerged and to base his judgments of LnKE on BrE.²”

This points to an interesting view in Kelleghan’s article. She sees the use of SLE as “idiosyncratic.” Accordingly, she claims that her SLE accent on the first syllable in words was in the “wrong place” compared to an “overseas” variety of English. She brings in an example of her pronunciation of the word ‘advertisement.’ Speaking of features of Sri Lankan English, Meyler (2007) notes that “shifting stress in words such as advertise/ advertisement and photograph/ photographer/ photographic tends to be less marked in SLE, with a tendency either to stress the first syllable, or to pronounce all the syllables with a more even stress than in BSE pronunciation.” Kelleghan does not acknowledge this distinctive phonological feature of SLE. For her, it is not distinctive, but “wrong.” This reminds us of Meyler’s (2009) statement that “in Sri Lanka, the term ‘Sri Lankan English’ still carries connotations of ‘broken English’, something sub-standard and inferior.” In the above example, Kelleghan’s reference points to an exonormative standard of English which she refers to as “clean, straight English.” It is presumably standard British English. She provides the standard British English pronunciation of the word ‘advertisement’ /adVERTisement/, /ædvə:rtizmənt/ as the one that she upholds. It exemplifies Kandiah’s (1981) statement mentioned earlier.

In this respect, it is also important to focus on the notion of *kaduva*. The term *kaduva* is believed to have originated in the post-independence Sri Lanka after the enactment of the *Sinhala-only* policy. *Kaduva* is a term used to refer to English. The Sinhala term *kaduva* meaning sword in English symbolizes the English language as an indicative of “defeat, subjugation, humiliation and oppression” (Kandiah, 1984). Therefore, *kaduva* produces social inequality based on the differences in language usage, raising among those who are underprivileged the need for learning to use the *kaduva* to “live in dignity on terms of equality with other men” (Kandiah, 1984). In other words, it is often used to demarcate English speakers from non-English speakers and/or speakers of a low proficiency level of English in terms of social class, position, power, and control. Kelleghan argues that speaking an exonormative variety of English makes one “a source of power” in the eye of “the host community.” The idea of speaking English or using *kaduva* for empowerment is reconstructed in Kelleghan’s argument. For Kelleghan, what empowers a person in the global context is not just speaking English, but speaking an exonormative variety of English. Although Kelleghan insists that it is necessary to alienate ourselves from the “baggage-ridden past points of reference,” namely JVP class war and the *Sinhala-only* act which caused changes in the status and functions of English, it is ironical that she herself reproduces the effects of such events.

The Sri Lankan speaker of English who does not regard SLE as a separate variety of English constantly attempts to distant himself/herself from its distinctive features and embrace features of what he/she considers the exonormative ideal. Accordingly, Kandiah (1981) states the following:

“As the degree of attention the speaker pays to his linguistic act increases, the more he will be inhibited from performing in the free and relaxed manner that comes naturally to him in other circumstances, and be prompted to monitor his own speech.”

¹ Lankan English

² British English

This is exemplified when Kelleghan says that she still needs to pause to pronounce “adVERTisement”/ædvə:rtizmənt/, not “ADverTEESEment” /æ:dvətɪ:zmənt/. Here, the speaker makes a conscious effort to conform to the exonormative standard of English she upholds rather than speaking what comes naturally to her. Referring to a speaker’s attempt to transform his/her linguistic personality, Kandiah (1981) states the following:

“What the Lankan user’s efforts to turn away from the forms and rules of his own distinctive usage to the more distant and alien forms and rules of St.E represents in effect is an attempt to transform his linguistic personality, to change from what he essentially and truly is into something that he can never really be.”

Accordingly, the pronunciation example above shows Kelleghan’s attempt to transform her linguistic personality. In her own words, it is her attempt “to become a chameleon.”

The transformation of one’s linguistic personality is a vain attempt because on one hand, one cannot completely deviate oneself from the sociolinguistic subtleties embodied within oneself. On the other hand, one cannot completely grasp the sociolinguistic subtleties that distinguish an English speaker of an exonormative ideal. As Kandiah (1981) states, the Lankan speaker of English, “even when he is most on his guard against his own Lankan system, his usage is likely to betray residues of it in the form of ‘sociolinguistic indicators’ whose social values he would probably not even be aware of.” Thus, Kelleghan’s idea of turning into “a chameleon” is a mere attempt. The “sing-song intonation” and the “head-wagging stops” may not therefore produce the ideal exonormative English speech style she adheres to. Her assumption that “we quickly learn to become chameleons” corroborates Kandiah’s claim because she is unaware that her sociolinguistic personality contains certain intrinsic traits which she cannot choose to cast aside. Kandiah (1981) states that this “attempted switch” turns the Lankan speaker of English into “some kind of fragmented or disorganized linguistic personality” – someone who never really attains “a state of healthy linguistic integration” and terms this ‘illness’ linguistic “schizoglossia.”

There is seemingly a tension between Kelleghan’s awareness of the existence of SLE and her conscious attempt to replace it with her idealistic exonormative variety of English. Kelleghan’s claim is that SLE should be confined to private spheres of Sri Lankan company and that it should not be carried into the public life both in local and global contexts with a “false patriotic sentiment.” Kachru (1992) terms this tension between the actual production form and the target norm of using English as “linguistic schizophrenia.” The Lankan user of English may not necessarily use SLE to portray his/her patriotism, instead he/she may use it because it perfectly fits “the expressive and communicative needs of the symbiotic linguistic-cultural personality that its user is” (Kandiah, 1981). If SLE is confined to private spheres of Sri Lankan company, the chances of it being known and accepted as a separate variety of English in either local or global arenas would be minimal. That would impede its potential to achieve endonormative stabilization.

It is also important to focus on Kelleghan’s comments on ESL teaching and learning. Kelleghan speaks of the importance of teaching and learning English as a lingua franca targeting an exonormative ideal. Lankan learners of English are motivated to learn English due to various reasons. These reasons can determine whether the Lankan learner of English acknowledges SLE, or pursues an exonormative variety of English:

“Learners who learn a language for practical reasons (e.g. better employment opportunities) or in order to communicate with other non-native speakers, might more readily accept an endonormative Sri Lankan standard, whereas learners who identify themselves with native speakers or their culture or learn a language primarily to communicate with native speakers might wish to hold onto an exonormative standard” (Künstler, Mendis & Mukherjee, 2009).

It is possible to argue that Kelleghan may belong to the second group of learners among the two groups discussed above owing to her arguments on “the need for a cultural lingua franca.” She attempts to identify with the culture and/or speakers of the exonormative variety of English that she idealizes.

However, the variety that Kelleghan upholds as the ideal is ambiguous because on one hand, she does not define what the ideal variety of English is. On the other hand, she constantly bases her judgments of SLE on English spoken and used “overseas” where there is not just one, but several varieties of Englishes. For instance, Kelleghan notes that her husband who teaches English to Australian non-English-speaking adults says that the “best accent

wins.” The question here is what parameters he uses to determine the “best accent” among the non-English speaking Australians. Australia being a multi-cultural and multi-lingual nation, is it in relation to (standard) British English, (standard) Australian English, (standard) American English, (standard) African English, or any other variety of English? The opinion itself is prejudiced. Although Kelleghan does not define what the ideal variety of English is, she refers to the movie ‘My Fair Lady’ in which Professor Higgins mocks the Cockney accent with his upper class friend. Here, the accent that one is expected to adopt seems to be that of the British upper class. This being so, there arises the question whether every English speaker including the native speakers of English of “the inner circle” (see Kachru, 2005) in USA, Canada, Australia, and South Africa should aspire to the variety of English spoken by the upper-class British.

Kelleghan’s need to form a “cultural lingua franca” is to strengthen cultural relationships around the world. However, this idea borders on a linguistic-cultural extremism. Speakers of English across the globe are of different cultures. It is apparent in Kachru’s (2005) model of three concentric circles of English: the inner circle consisting of the native speakers of English in Britain, USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, the outer circle consisting of English speakers in countries like Sri Lanka, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Kenya etc. – which turned Anglophone because of the colonized rule of the British, and the expanding circle consisting of English speakers in countries like China, Japan, Malaysia, Indonesia etc. All these speakers of English have their own socio-cultural norms, values, customs, and traditions. Thus, forming a unified culture is impractical and impossible.

Moreover, one does not necessarily have to form a new cultural identity in order to communicate with and understand those of different cultures in the presence of a lingua franca. Besides, it is ironic to deprive oneself of one’s own culture to emulate the cultural lingua franca that Kelleghan rallies around. Therefore, bridging the gap between cultures through a “cultural lingua franca” appears to be problematic.

Conclusion:-

In response to Dinoo Kelleghan’s article *Lankan English: How far do we go?* which expresses her views on the *Colomboscope Seminar on Sri Lankan English Learning*, this paper identified that she invokes the idea of resisting one’s own distinctive variety of English considering it sub-standard or inferior to an idealistic exonormative standard. By critically reviewing Kelleghan’s arguments, the paper discussed how her views reflect SLE speakers’ attempts to transform their linguistic personality. It also pointed out the ramifications of conforming to an exonormative variety of English on an individual’s linguistic personality in the light of linguistic schizoglossia and linguistic schizophrenia. Finally, it problematized her idea of forming a cultural lingua franca.

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