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*Common Errors in Ceylon English**

(a) **T**RANSLATIONS of Sinhalese Words, Phrases, Idioms, and Syntactical Constructions into English—'Translation Errors'.

(b) Incorrect Usage—'Ignorant English'.

(a) It is natural that a learner of English whose mother tongue is Sinhalese (or Tamil) should begin by translating literally from his own language into English, and so produce a kind of language in which, while the words are English, the grammar and idiom are Sinhalese (or Tamil). As he grows familiar with the English language by reading books, and by hearing and conversing with good speakers, he progressively purges his English of these vernacularisms. It is not intended here to deal with the literal translations of those who never learn enough English to be proficient in it. The 'translation errors' that concern us are those which have gained currency in Ceylon English. It is obvious that the more proficient a person becomes in the use of English, the less error of this kind there will be in his conversation and writing. But there are locutions, idioms, and even syntactical constructions that are used by quite good speakers and writers, that appear in newspapers and other writing, including the essays of University students; errors of expression that have become more or less fixed in Ceylon English and which the users would be startled and shocked to hear stigmatized as 'un-English'. All but a very small minority of the English-educated use some or all of them habitually. This small minority of 'purists' avoid them consciously and from time to time offer lists of them for the assistance of those who wish to keep their English free from solecisms of grammar and idiom.

It is not possible to draw a clear line of division between errors which commonly occur in the speech and (less often) writing of even well-educated persons and those which are the mark of a poor command of English. Even a person who writes and speaks English with accuracy, fluency and ease may be guilty of some startling solecisms, picked up from the linguistic environment.

*Ch. VII of *The English Language in Ceylon*, Ph.D., thesis, University of London, August 1948, with alterations and additions.

There is, nevertheless, a rough equivalence between the frequency and incidence of such mistakes in English and the degree of proficiency attained in the language.

(b) Under 'Common Errors in Ceylon English' must be included also those mistakes in English which have arisen through ignorance of the correct usage, imperfect assimilation, unfamiliarity with the living language as it is used by good native speakers, and inadequate knowledge of the life and culture it represents.

All the solecisms and Zeylanicisms¹ of Ceylon English come under the head of *Unidiomatic English*.

'Idiom' is the genius or specific character of a language, "the form of speech peculiar to a nation or people". 'Idioms' are the idiosyncrasies of a language; they are often "verbal anomalies which transgress, that is to say, either the laws of grammar or the laws of logic". (L. P. Smith, *English Idioms*, S.P.E. Tract, No. XII). They are intimately connected with the social environment, the habits of thought and life of the speakers who use them. Every language has its 'idiom' and its 'idioms'. The idiom of one language is entirely different from another's, and literal translation, word by word, sometimes makes nonsense and is almost always 'unidiomatic'.

It is not surprising then that Sinhalese (and Tamil) idioms, translated literally into English, give a strange flavour to the English of Ceylon. Besides this, English idioms are often misused by Ceylonese and unidiomatic usages gain currency through conversation and the newspapers.

(a) 'TRANSLATION ERRORS'²

¹The word 'Ceylonism' is commonly used in Ceylon for solecisms peculiar to Ceylon English; this term has been objected to as 'the worst of our Ceyloneseisms' on the ground that one says 'Anglicism' not 'Englandism'. It is true that the suffix—*ism*, forming abstract nouns, is usually attached, in the sense 'a peculiarity in manner or language' to adjectival forms, as in *Galicism*, *Indianism*, but the word 'Ceylon' can function both as adjective and noun. It is adjectival in *Ceylon produce*, *Ceylon English*. Hence it seems permissible to use the form *Ceylonism*, just as we have *Cockney English* and *Cockneyism*.

The illustrations are drawn from three sources:

- (a) Conversation
- (b) Essays and answer-papers of undergraduates
- (c) Ceylon newspapers. (C.D.N.—*Ceylon Daily News*).

Where no source is mentioned, the illustration is taken from conversation.

Meanings of English words and phrases and idioms are quoted from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* (Fowler and Fowler), or Wyld, *The Universal Dictionary of the English Language*.

C.E. — Ceylon English
 Eng. — Standard English.

- Note. (i) This is not an exhaustive list of 'Translation Errors'.
 (ii) Translations from Tamil into English are not dealt with.

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Nouns :

Sinh. **handiya** = cross-roads. C.E. *junction*.

Boutiques, markets, and small shops are usually to be found at a 'junction' or meeting place of roads in Ceylon. It is a centre of life and activity to which people go to meet friends, to gossip, to buy and sell. Hence one often hears *You can get this at the junction ; I'm going to the junction for a few minutes.* (Sinh. **mama handiyaṭa ṭikak gohillā enavā**).

Advts. in *Ceylon Observer*, May 23rd, 1950: "Front room and garage, near Wellawatte Junction".

"Accommodation available with board, near Bo Tree Junction . . ."

News item in *C.D.N.*, May 24th, 1950: ". . . and a few City Fathers met the procession at this junction".

Eng. *junction*, 1. Act or process of joining. 2 (a) Place, line, point at which two things join; specif. (b) Station where two or more lines or branches of railway meet (often in proper names, as Clapham Junction). 3. Means, method, by which two things join; joint, connexion.

Sinh. **iḍa(ya)** = place, room. C.E. *place*.

There is no place (i.e. room) in the compartment for more than four persons.

Eng. *place* = particular part of space; part of space occupied by person or thing, as *it has changed its place*; space, seat, accommodation for person, etc., at table, in conveyance, etc. as *take two places in the coach, always a place for you at our table*.

Sinh. **pātta** = side, direction. C.E. *side*.

e.g. *He belongs to another side (i.e. part) of the town.*

A man from Nugegoda side.

(Sinh. **nugēgoḍa pätten**).

Sinh. **lamayā**, translated *child*.

monavada karannē lamayā? *What are you doing, child?*

In C.E. *child* is used colloquially as the equivalent of English *my dear (girl)*, or slang *old thing, old girl*. It can be used of young people of both sexes, and of females of any age.

e.g. *Come, child, and play the piano.*

One girl might say to another: *When did you bob your hair, child?*

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Sinh. **minihā**, translated *man*, and usually pronounced (men) is used colloquially as the equivalent of English *my dear fellow, I can tell you, old fellow*.

e.g. *The fireworks on Coronation Day were grand, man (men).*

What man, (men) ! did you actually let him get away with that ?

Cp. Eng. *man* as impatient or lively vocative, *Nonsense man ! hurry up, man ! man alive !*

Adjective + Noun :

Sinh. **uḍa raṭa** = hill country, lit. up country.

Hence in C.E. *upcountry*, n. means hill country: *the upcountry of Ceylon is very beautiful*; adj., pertaining to, in the hill country; *the upcountry districts*; adv., to the hills: *I am going upcountry during the hot weather*.

Tea estates in Ceylon are classified as *Low-country, Mid-country* and *Up-country*.

Eng. *upcountry*, n. and adj., (stress on first syll., secondary stress on second syll.), adv. (stress on second syll.), *up* away from the sea, towards, the interior + *country*, (a colonial usage), n. The interior part of a country, area away from the coast or up a river: *the upcountry is barren*; adj., pertaining to, towards the interior, inland: *an upcountry farm*; adv., in a direction towards the interior, away from the coast: *travelled upcountry for a hundred miles*.

C.E. *The front house* = Sinh. **issaraha gē**, in the sense *the house across the street, facing, opposite to your house*. e.g., *There was a disturbance in the front house*.

cp. Eng. *front*, adj., of the, situated in, front (*front bench front door*).

Adverbials :

Sinh. **nikam**, adv., without object, translated into C.E. *simply*.

A. **monovaṭada āvē** (*why have you come ?*) B. **nikam** (*simply*).

The following note on Tamil **summa** applies also to **nikam** (*Times of Ceylon*, July 12, 1935):

“ *Just simply* ”

“ Every language has its own specially useful word. Tamil certainly has in ‘summa’ one of the most apt expressions any race ever coined.

‘Summa’ has no one word equivalent in English. Indeed, it is often difficult to interpret it in two or three. It may be used in so many

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different senses or in reply to so many different questions. 'What are you doing here?' someone will ask.

'Summa', the Tamil man may reply, meaning: 'Nothing in particular'. 'Summa' always implies lack of definite purpose, which is about as near as we can get to a comprehensive translation.

'Summa' is often translated into English by 'Simply' or 'Just simply'. This is not really correct and the use of 'simply' in this sense would not be understood in England. It must be admitted though that it makes a useful addition to the English language and as such its use is justified".

A witness was asked by the magistrate why he had shaved his moustache. He replied with a disarming smile: "Simply I shaved!"

Sinh. **huṅgak kalakin** (**kalakin** abl. used adverbially).

Translated into C.E. *from a long time* ;

e.g., *I have not seen him from a long time.*

He has not paid his bill from a long time.

Sinh. **gedarin**, C.E. *from home*, in such sentences, as: *Do this exercise from home.* (Eng. *at home*). The Sinh. equivalent is **mēka gedarin karagana gēṇḍa** (**gēṇna**, **genenna** ; also **aran eṇḍa**), i.e. Having done this bring it from home.

Eng. *of late* recently, lately : " *I have of late, but wherefore I know not, lost all my mirth, . . .*" (Hamlet).

C.E. *since of late* : *I've been rather ill since of late.*

This may be due to the influence of Sinh. **hiṭan** (since) in such expressions as **ṭika kalaka hiṭan**, lit. since a little time, **iyē hiṭan**, since yesterday.

Sinh. **udē pāndara**, lit. early morning :

e.g. " Clerks attending Colombo offices were disappointed *early morning* when they were refused shaves". (Under the headline *Barbers' Strike, Times Sunday Illustrated*, Sept. 8, 1935).

Sinh. **kalin**, **vēlapahin**, early, in good time, is translated into C.E. *early part* :

e.g. *We went to the railway station early part.*

Cp. Eng. the *early part* of the century, the *early spring, morning*, etc., the *early part* of spring.

Verbs :

The use in Ceylon English of *to like* in the sense of Eng. *to wish*, is due to the ambiguity in

Sinh. **kāmati** = pleased, willing, desirous;

kāmati venavā = (i) to be pleased, to *like*.
(ii) to be willing, to *wish*.

Eng. "I like him very much" may be expressed in Sinh. **mama eyāṭa bohōma kāmatiyi**.

Sinh. **mama bat kanna kāmatiyi** can mean "I like to eat rice", or "I wish to eat rice". Sinh. **ūmba kiri kanna kāmatida** can mean "Do you like to eat curd?" or "Do you wish to eat (some) curd?" (The ambiguity could be avoided by saying **ūmba kiri kanna āsā da**, do you *like*). Hence English "I wish to see you tomorrow", "I wish to tell you this", etc., are sometimes expressed in C.E. *I like to see . . . ; I like to tell . . . ; I like to object to this bill.*

The use in Ceylon English of *to keep* in the sense of English *to put, place, leave*, is probably due to the fact that in Sinh. the ideas of 'keeping' and 'putting' are expressed by the same stem:—

tabanavā, tiyanavā, to put, place (also **damanavā**); **tabāgannavā** to keep.

Eng. I put the book on the table.

Sinh. **mama pota mēse uḍa tībā (dāmmā)**.
(**tībā** = placed with care, **dāmmā** = put, threw).

Eng. I kept the book in my almirah (cupboard).

Sinh. **mama pota almāriyē tībā**.

Eng. I shall put the book on the table.

Sinh. **mama pota mēse uḍa tiyannan**.

Eng. I shall always keep this book on my table.

Sinh. **mama hāmatissēma mēse uḍa tiyāgannavā** (or **tiyāgannam**).

Examples of the use of *keep* in the sense of *put, place*, in C.E. :—

Keep the pen on the table when you've done with it ; He kept his hat on the floor before sitting down.

"She took the bottle, kept the glass on a table, and poured out a dose of the mixture". (Newspaper report).

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“ Mr. Beven kept his gun against the wire fence and tried to jump across when the gun got entangled in the wire fence and fired, hitting Mr. Beven on the arm ”. (C.D.N., Nov. 4, 1935).

C.E. *keep* for Eng. *leave*: *keep the book in my room*.

The use in Ceylon English of *to have* in the sense of English *to be* may be due to the equivalence of Eng. *have* and Sinh. *tiyanavā* in such sentences as :—

Eng. I have a book.

Sinh. **maṭa potak tiyanavā** (lit. to me a book there is).

Eng. There is a book there.

Sinh. **potak etana tiyanavā** (lit. a book there there is).

Eng. There was a book there.

Sinh. **potak etana tibuna**.

Hence English ‘ There is light ’ is sometimes expressed in C.E. as *have light*.

One hears dialogue such as the following :—

A. Are there enough books to go round ?

B. *Have*.

A. Why are you reading in the dark ?

B. *Haven't a lamp here*.

The use in C.E. of *I am having (money)* in place of English *I have (money)* is perhaps due to Sinh. **maṭa** (or **mā laṅga salli tibenavā** or **tibē**).

The use in Ceylon English of *to tell* in place of English *to say*.

Sinh. **kiyanavā** means *to say, tell*.

Sinh. **eyā maṭa mēka kivvā** can be Englished “ He told me this ” or “ He said this to me ”.

Since Sinh. **kiyanavā** is used to translate both Eng. *tell* and *say*, *tell* is sometimes used unidiomatically for *say* in Ceylon English :

e.g. *What did he tell ? He told that I was to come to-day*.

Sinh. **illanavā** to ask . . . from (abl. case)

e.g. **salli eyāgen illaṅḍa**.

Lit. *Ask the money from him*.

This construction is sometimes rendered literally into C.E., and takes the place of Eng. *ask him for*.

Sinh. **vahiṅḍa enavā** lit. it is coming to rain.

Hence *coming to rain* is substituted in C.E. for Eng. going to rain : e.g. *It is coming to rain heavily.*

Eng. *enjoy oneself.*

Sinh. expresses the reflexive idea in a different way : **mama satuṭu venavā** lit. I become pleased, happy ; experience joy.

Hence *enjoy* is used in C.E. in the sense *experience pleasure* without the reflexive pronoun.

e.g. *We enjoyed very much at the party.*

They simply enjoyed at the other's expense.

The Sinh. expression **māt ekka hināvenavā** is translated into C.E. *He smiles with me*, and this is substituted for Eng. *smile at a person.*

The following literal translations from Sinhalese are common colloquialisms

Sinh. **damanavā to put** is used as a verbal factotum.

Hence C.E. *to put water to the plants* = to water the plants.

to put water in the radiator = to pour.

She puts rouge on her lips = uses rouge.

Did you put soap on your hands = soap your hands.

C.E. To buy and give

Sinh. **aran denavā**

i.e. having bought to give

C.E. To go and bring

Sinh. **gohin genenavā**

i.e. having gone to bring

C.E. To jump and run

Sinh. **pānalā duvanavā**

C.E. To run and come (home)

Sinh. **duvalā (gedara) enavā**

C.E. To take and come

Sinh. **aran enavā**

C.E. To tie (bind) and keep
(a dog)

Sinh. **bāndalā tibonavā (tiyanavā)**

C.E. Come go (i.e. let us go)

Sinh. **enḍa yaṇḍa**

It is not polite in Sinhalese to say "I'm going now". You say **mama gohin ennan** which is translated into C.E. *I'll go and come.*

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In Sinhalese a transitive verb is sometimes used without an expressed object, the object being understood from the context.

e.g. **denḍa mama geniyannam.** This is literally translated into C.E. *Give, I'll carry.*

The Sinhalese impersonal **puluvaṇ** *it is possible* is translated into C.E. *can.* Thus Sinh.:—

- A. **ēka heṭa karaṇṭa puluvanda ?**
B. **ovu puluvaṇ.**

is translated :

- A. Can that be done tomorrow ?
B. Yes, *can.*

Similarly :

- A. Have you written that letter ?
B. *Can write later.*

Idiomatic Expressions :

The Sinh. expression **nidi maraṇavā** literally to kill, destroy, sleep, i.e. to do without sleep, to keep awake, is translated into Ceylon English : *to break rest* : e.g. *I had to break rest last night because my child was ill, I broke rest till 2 o'clock this morning.*

Cp. Eng. *break* in the sense interrupt, e.g. *to break one's rest, fast; to break one's journey.*

e.g. "A drowsy Watchman, that just gives a knock and breaks our rest, to tell us what's a-clock".

Pope, *Dunciad IV*, 443-4.

Sinh. **gonek vaḡē vāḍa karanna epā.**

lit. Do not do the work like a bull (i.e. stupidly).

Sinh. **mēka gon vāḍak**

lit. This is bull's work (i.e. work only fit for a bull to do).

Hence one frequently hears in C.E. such expressions as :

This is only bull work; I can only do the bull work.

Recently I heard a number of undergraduates discussing the questions in an examination paper and one of them exclaimed : *Hellish bull work, no men!*

Sinh. **ekaṭa eka kiyanavā** lit. to speak, answer, one to one.

This gives rise to the colloquialism *to answer one to one, to answer word for word.*

Cp. Eng. *to answer back*

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Sinh. **mūnaṭa kiyanavā**, lit. to tell to the face.

i.e. to say a thing to a person's face, openly, in his sight or hearing :
e.g. *They spoke behind his back what they could not tell to his face (to the face).*

Yes men, he was trying to foist it off on to me—I don't want it, but what to do? How to say no to the face!" (From an Article entitled How to Say 'No' To The Face? by Elizabeth Mayo, *Ceylon Obs.* Sun. Morn. ed.).

Cp. Eng. to one's face, look one *in the face*; *face to face*, etc.

Sinh. **vāṭak baṇḍinavā**, lit. to tie a fence : e.g. *I intend to tie a fence round my garden.*

Eng. to *put a fence round*, *put up a fence*.

Sinh. **magē atē satayak hari nā**, lit. *I haven't even a cent in my hand.*
This is used as the equivalent of English 'I am out of cash', 'I have no money at all'.

Sinh. **kaṭē pas**, lit. *sand in the mouth*, in the sense of English to *put a spoke* in a person's *wheel*, thwart, frustrate, his purposes.

This is translated into C.E. to *put sand in a person's mouth*.

Example : "Several young men had, it appears, been influenced by the stanzas, and it was stated in court that a certain married man had also corresponded with this 'poetess' and that he even went to the extent of wanting to divorce his wife, when the wife finding out his intention wrote to Marlinie and *begged of her not to put sand in her mouth*". (Report of a case in the *C.D.N.* of September 17, 1937, under the title *Story of Agreement to Marry*).

Sinh. **baḍa pirenḍa denavā, baninavā**, lit. to give, scold a person 'bellyfull' (i.e. enough to fill his belly).

This means to fill a person up with one's scolding, i.e. to scold a person to one's own complete satisfaction, to berate him soundly.

To give a person a bellyfull is a common colloquialism in Ceylon.

Sinh. **nāti** is not, **nam** if ; **nātnam** if not.

This is used idiomatically in emphatic affirmative replies :

e.g. A. **mēka um̄bagē vādakda?** B. **nātnam.**

A. *Is this your work?* B. *If not!* (i.e. of course it is).

This is translated into C.E. *if not or without, or what else, or otherwise*:

e.g. A. *Did you actually see him?* B. *If not!*

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“ We were a Colts’ XI, playing the Darrawela Planters’ XI at cricket. A very sweet and gracious lady was being nice to a very common Colt. ‘ You gentlemen must put in plenty of practice to play so well’. ‘ Without !’ The very sweet and gracious lady toyed earnestly with a trifle at luncheon”. (From an article entitled *Selecisms or Zeylanicisms*, by Leonard Arndt, C.D.N., February 29, 1936). (Cp. also Sinh. **vena monovada**, C.E. *What else ?*)

Sinh. **nātnam** is also probably responsible for the C.E. construction :
If not for the heavy rains, the crop would have been very good ;
If not for him, I should have been drowned, i.e. were it not for,
if it had not been for.

Sinh. **vena kavuda ?** lit. *who else ?* is responsible for the C.E. use of *who else ?* in the sense “ surely you know it can be no one else”, “ it is certainly he ”:

e.g. A. Was it John who said so ?
 B. *Who else ?*

Cp. Eng. *else*, in addition, besides, *who else ? anybody else ;* instead, *what else could I say ;* otherwise, if not, *run (or) else you will be late.*

Sinh. **nēda** no ? isn’t that so ? Translated into C.E. *no*.

In Sinh. **nēda** is a very expressive word and can be used to convey various shades of meaning. It is used in a very characteristic class of questions which expect the answer “ yes ”; they are really statements or assertions which the speaker wishes to have confirmed :

e.g. Sinh. **eyā iyē āva nēda ?** *He came yesterday, no ?* (i.e. didn’t he ?)
magē yāluvā tāma dākke nā, nēda ? *You haven’t yet seen my friend, no ?* (i.e. have you ?)

This idiom has given rise to the very common Ceylonese habit of tacking on *no* to the end of questions, in the senses *isn’t it, aren’t they, isn’t that so, wasn’t it, didn’t he, etc. :*

e.g. *He is the better player of the two, no ?* (isn’t he)
She was very mischievous to-day, no mummie ? (wasn’t she)
The postman didn’t come here to-day, no ? (Isn’t that so ? Did he ?)
I told you not to do that, no ? (Didn’t I ?)

When this error is corrected, speakers sometimes get into the habit of tacking on *isn’t it* indiscriminately in such sentences :

- e.g. *They are very bad, isn't it ?*
 They are now living there, isn't it ?
 He is the eldest son, isn't it ?

nē is also used in Sinh. as a kind of emphatic affirmative, in such sentence as :

ū hari mōḍayā nē.

He is an out-and-out fool.

This appears in C.E. as

He is a real fool, no !

Further examples :

- A. Why didn't you give him the news ?
 B. *He didn't ask me, no !*
 A. Why did you sit on that chair ?
 B. *I didn't know it was broken no !*

“ I understand that his (a State Councillor's) joking took the form of facetious remarks at the expense of the Fiscal Authorities whom he congratulated because, as he said, it was a ' sure hanging case, no ? ' ” (from an Article in the *C.D.N.*, August 10, 1936, by ' The Political Correspondent ').

“ And in the next compartment the same evening I overheard a delightful tit-bit of classic Ceylonese. One passenger addressed another who was studying the Acts of the Apostles with a quiet air : “ What, you're reading the Bible ? ” The answer came with the rapidity of a machine-gun : “ What to do. Must read the Bible also now, no ? ” (*Ceylon Obs.* Sunday ed. 1939).

Note : These uses of *no* occur in other types of Foreign English. Cp. the following extracts from D. H. Lawrence's, *The Plumed Serpent* (pocket ed., Heinemann), pp. 55-6.

“ Oh no ! ” said Kate in front of the caricatures. “ They are too ugly. They defeat their own ends ”.

“ But they are meant to be ugly ”, said young Garcia [a Mexican].

“ They must be ugly, no ? Because capitalism is ugly, and Mammon is ugly, and the priest holding his hand to get the money from the poor Indians is ugly. No ? ” He laughed rather unpleasantly. . . .

“ That is how they are no ? ” . . .

“ You have to be more Mexican than human, no ? ”

Sinh. -*la*, C.E. *and them.*

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When the suffix *-la* is attached to the name of a person it means "the person and those others whom we connect with him". For example, *Nadōris lā āvada ?* means "Have Nadōris and the others (who are expected with him) come ?"

This idiom is translated into C.E. "(Nadōris) and them": e.g. *Have Nadōris and them come ? Mary and them will be angry. We invited Vernon and them to our party.*

Sinh. **maṭa dān velāva hari**, lit. *for me now the time is right* is translated into C.E. *my time is up*. (See de Lanerolle, *English-Sinhalese Dictionary*, Vol. II, p. 957: *Up; time is up*).

e.g. *I must go now, my time is up* (i.e. it is the right time for me to go).

Eng. My time is up = exhausted.

Sinh. **hābāda ?** Is that so, is that true ?

Translated into C.E. *true ?*

A. He is actually said to have turned down the offer.

B. *True ?*

Sinh. **ēka tamayi**, C.E. *that's the thing !*

A. He is become unmanageable.

B. *That's the thing !*

Sinh. **ēka tamayi kiyanṇē**, C.E. *That's what*.

Sinh. **kavuda kivvē**, C.E. *Who said ?*

Sinh. **Monavada karannē ?** C.E. *What to do ?* (Eng. *what's to be done ?*)

Sinh. **ehema tamayi nēda ?**

C.E. *That's the way, no ?* meaning "That's the way you behave, treat me". (Spoken reproachfully).

Sinh. **kiyanda ṅnāda ?** C.E. *Must you say ?* (Eng. *Is it necessary to mention it, of course*).

Sinh. **ātida ?** C.E. *Enough ?* (Eng. *Have you had enough of it ? He has given you more than you bargained for*).

Sinh. **vena monovada ?** C.E. *What else ?* (Eng. *of course !*)

Sinh. **kohēda ?** Where ?

Example : **Kohēda ēyāṭa mēka karaṇṭa puluvan.**

C.E. *Where can he do this ?* meaning " He is incapable of doing this "

Also in such expressions as :

Where, he won't even answer a reasonable question !

GRAMMAR

Uncertainty regarding the use of the Definite Article

There is no ' definite article ' in Sinh. corresponding to English ' the ' ³.

The adjectival and adverbial functions of ' the ' in English are performed in Sinhalese by other grammatical means. " The Sinhalese substantive is always definite in singular :

gōviyā means ' the cultivator '

kikilī means ' the hen '

ata means ' the hand. ' " (Geiger § 117).

The indefinite substantive is distinguished from the definite in the singular by " adding the numeral **ek** ' one ' to the substantive ". (Geiger *ibid.*). For example, **gōviyā** the cultivator, **gōviyek** a cultivator ; **kikilī** the hen, **kikiliyek** a hen ; **ata** hand ; **atak** a hand ; **nuvara** the town, **nuvarak** a town.

It is, therefore, natural that the idiomatic uses of the definite article in English are learnt slowly by those who are habituated to a different grammatical machinery. Lapses from the correct use of ' the ' are frequent until the learner has attained something near to mastery of the language. Even at that stage occasional lapses may occur.

Illustrations of a few of the uses of ' the ' in English, with the equivalent forms of expression in Sinhalese :

Eng.	The child is in the garden.
Sinh.	lamayā vattē innavā.
Eng.	A child is in the garden.
Sinh.	lamayek vattē innavā.
Eng.	The scholar has a hard life.
Sinh.	śiṣyayō amāruven jīvitaya gatakarat.
i.e.	scholars have a hard life.

3. On *The Definite Article* in English, see Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar* §§ 16.41—16.93.

COMMON ERRORS IN CEYLON ENGLISH

or **sāma śisyayekma** = every scholar.

or **siyaluma śisyayō** = all scholars.

śisyayā (sg.) lit. 'the scholar', would mean 'one, particular scholar'.

Eng. The man in the street.

Sinh. **sāmānya minissu.**

i.e. ordinary men.

Eng. The new woman.

Sinh. **vartamāna tarumyō**

i.e. modern young women.

Eng. The children are in the garden.

Sinh. **ē lamayi vattē innavā.**

i.e. *those* children are in the garden.

lamayi alone would mean 'children are . . .' or 'there are children in the garden'.

Eng. Children like sugar.

Sinh. **lamayi sīni valaṭa kāmatiyi**

or **sāma lamayekma** = every child.

or **siyaluma lamayi** = all children.

Eng. The men are away.

Sinh. **ē minissu metana nā.**

i.e. *those* men are not here.

minissu metana nā = There are no men here.

Examples of confusion and uncertainty in the use of the Definite Article frequently occur in the English even of undergraduates :—

Spenser revels in the sheer sensuous beauty.

The sonneteering fashion enjoyed its highest popularity in years 1580-1600. (Cp. Eng. in years to come).

The Times of Ceylon, Saturday Evening, October 5, 1935, had the following note by "The Tatler": "Royal College: Now that the name has been in use for so many years and on the lips of so many thousands, will somebody definitely lay it down once and for all whether the article 'the' should or should not precede 'Royal College'.

By way of analogy we have 'The Royal College of Music' and 'The Royal College of Surgeons'. On the other hand, at Oxford and London there is

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'University College' not 'the University College' as the institution in Colombo is sometimes called.

In Colombo we are rather partial to the article and there are people who speak of 'the Ananda College', and 'the Victoria Park'."

Note : The definite article is chiefly used in English "when the word without it would not be easily understood as sufficiently specialized. There is therefore a strong tendency to do without it in many cases where the individualization is self-evident. Examples are *father, mother, baby, uncle, nurse, cook* and other names of persons in familiar intercourse . . ." (Jespersen, *Essentials of English Grammar*, § 16. 51).

For example : *Father's gone a-hunting*
Mother's gone to buy a skin . . .

In C.E. the list has been extended by the addition of such words as *driver, teacher, ayah, appu, podian* : *After some time, driver returned without the car ; Teacher told me this ; Tell ayah (podian, appu) to come here.*

Word Order

Sinh. **rupiyal deka**, lit. *rupees two*.

(The abbreviation Rs. 2/- probably contributes to the use of the Sinhalese word-order).

The use of 'rupees two' in place of 'two rupees' is not common among educated Ceylonese.

Sinh. **jēm̄is māma**, lit. *James uncle*.

Colloquially this order is used sometimes in C.E., especially when the speaker is using a mixture of Sinhalese and English, as **jēm̄is ankaḷṭa kiyāṇḍa**, *Tell James uncle*.

Translation of Sinhalese Reduplications

- Sinh. **puñci puñci kāli**, (to cut into) *small, small pieces*.
Sinh. **unu unu ven**, (to eat something) *hot, hot*.
Sinh. **hemin hemin**, (to proceed) *slowly, slowly*.
Sinh. **añḍa añḍā yanavā**, *to go crying crying*.
Sinh. **monava monavada**, *What and what (did he say?)*
Sinh. **kavuru kavuru da**, *Who and who (came to the party?)*

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(b) Incorrect Usage—'Ignorant English'

Nouns :

Balance C.E. keep the balance = Eng. keep the change.

Cp. Eng. *balance* = the remainder of anything.

Blotting is used in C.E. for a *piece of blotting paper, a blotter.*

Boarding in C.E. in the sense of Eng. *boarding house.* Perhaps this is a translation of Sinh. **bōḍima**, which is the form in which English *boarding house* has been borrowed into Sinh.

e.g. "Royal College Boarding"—title of an editorial in *C.D.N.*, June 8, 1936.

"Boarding Life"—Caption in *C.D.N.*, May 31, 1937.

"Mr. A. B. de Rooy, the next witness said that between 6-30 and 7 p.m. on the 19th instant, Miss Varney left Mrs. Karney's boarding". (*C.D.N.*, March 29, 1938).

C.E. *crop* for *hair-cut* : *I went to the barber's for a crop.*

Cp. Eng. *crop* n. cropping of hair ; style of wearing hair cut short.

crop v. to cut short (ears, tail, hair, nap of cloth, edges of book).

C.E. *leave* in *I'll take your leave* for Eng. *I'll take my leave* i.e. go away, where *leave* means departure. Cp. also Eng. *to take leave of*, bid farewell to, as *I took leave of them at the station.*

Adjectives :

due to is very commonly used in C.E. where

owing to is the construction required. (Cp. *Kennedy Current English*, p. 325 ; and S.P.E. Tract No. XXII, p. 53 where the erroneous use of *due to* is discussed).

Due to the good work of inspector Laaz, the fingerprint expert, the murderer was traced . . ." (*Times*, August 14, 1935).

Cp. *Concise Oxford Dictionary*. "The adverbial use for *owing*, as *I came late due to an accident* is incorrect". The correct use of *due* as an adjective meaning to be ascribed to cause, agent, etc. is illustrated in *the difficulty is due to our ignorance, the discovery is due to Newton.*

last adj. in C.E. *last morning, last afternoon.* Eng. *last*, next before expressed or implied point of time, latest up to date, most recent,

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e.g. *in the last fortnight, last Christmas, last Tuesday, or Tuesday last, last evening, or night or week or month or year used as adverbs, but not last morning, day or afternoon.*

The idiomatic expression is *yesterday morning, yesterday afternoon (but last evening, last night).*

Serious in C.E. in the sense *seriously ill*:

e.g. "As he became suddenly serious after that his father took him to an Ayurvedic Physician who pronounced the case to be hydrophobia". (C.D.N., February 20, 1936).

"TWO SERIOUS" (Sub-Title of report of an accident in C.D.N., August 17, 1936).

Eng. serious = not to be trifled with, not slight : *serious illness, danger.*

Stand-out Adj. in C.E. in the sense *outstanding*

e.g. *He is a stand-out man in the team.*

Eng. *stand out* verb. hold out, persist in opposition against, or endurance ; be prominent or conspicuous.

An upstairs(s) house in C.E. is a two-storeyed house.

Eng. *upstairs* adj., adv., on, to an upper storey.

e.g. *an upstairs room.*

Verbs :

effect, 'bring about, accomplish', is sometimes substituted in C.E. for *affect* 'produce (material) effect on', e.g., "Mr. Bandaranaike, it is stated, is in favour of this proposal but it was pointed out by some others that . . . it would *effect* very adversely those members of the public who are in a position to pay for the special services rendered by these doctors". (C.D.N. 5-5-50).

know to is frequently used instead of *know how to*:

e.g. *He knows to speak to his superiors.*

He knows to play his cards well.

It is also used unidiomatically in the sense of *know, be versed in*:

e.g. *He knows to speak three languages* (i.e. he knows three languages ; he can speak, is versed in three languages).

He knows to play the piano, (i.e. he can play the piano skilfully).

He "fends" for himself in a two-roomed flat and knows to cook quite well. (Observer in Cey. Obs. Sunday, June 4, 1950).

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Cp. Eng. *know* in the sense *be aware of (fact), be versed in* (languages, science, etc.); *he would do it if he knew how.*

C.E. *make* (a person) *to do*: e.g. *You must make him to come early.*

Eng. *make* in the sense *cause, compel* (without *to* in the active) as *make him repeat it*, but *he was made to repeat it.*

C.E. *operate* in place of Eng. *operate on*: e.g. *He was operated for appendicitis.*

C.E. *shift* in the sense of Eng. *move*.

Eng. *move* to change one's abode, *move about* = do this often, *move in* take possession.

Eng. *shift* change or move from one position to another, *shift one's lodgings.*

"In other countries people *move* at midnight with the rent unpaid: in Ceylon we *shift* on Sundays or lucky days" (*Solecisms or Zeylanicisms* by Leonard Arndt).

C.E. *side* in place of Eng. *side with*, take sides:

e.g. *The crowd sided Chandiya and a scuffle followed.* (Local newspaper).

Eng. *side* v.i. take part, be on same side, *with* disputant, etc.

side n. take *sides*, decide to espouse one or the other cause.

C.E. *wish* in the sense of Eng. *salute* v.t. and i. make salutation to, greet.

e.g. *Did he wish you when he passed you in the street this morning?* (i.e. salute, greet, wish you good morning).

Eng. *wish* say one hoped for (joy, luck, pleasant journey, sorrow, etc.) in person's favour or against him (indirect object or *to*; *I wish you joy, wish success to each and all*):

Note: With the omission of *joy, success, good morning*, etc. after *wish* in C.E., cp. the omission of the object or complement in St. E. after *to recruit* (one's strength), *to retire* (to bed, to rest), *to shake* (hands), *to knock off* (work): *he usually retires at ten; we knocked off at two.*

Phrasal or Periphrastic Verbs⁴

The 'phrasal verbs' in English are highly idiomatic, and they give a great deal of trouble to the foreign learner. The nuance of meaning expressed by such particles of aspect as *up, off, in, out, on, with, to* is often so subtle as to be within the control of only a master of the language. The fine edge of this tool of expression is blunted in the hands of the inexpert. In Ceylon these particles, and particularly the adverb *up*, are mishandled, inserted where they are unidiomatic and left out when they are needed.

Away. C.E. *to carry away prizes.*

Eng. *carry, carry off prize.*

About. C.E. *to describe about a journey, etc.*
discuss about a question, etc.

Eng. *describe a journey, discuss a question.*

For. C.E. *to order for a new suit.*

Eng. *order* v. direct tradesmen, servant, etc., to supply as *to order a new suit.*

order n. give *orders, an order* for something to be done.

Down. C.E. *to get, order things (books, clothes) down from England, America, etc.*

Eng. *to order (things) from America, to send an order to America for. . .*

Into. C.E. *to investigate into something (a case, etc.)*
The police are investigating into the case.

Eng. *investigate, examine, enquire into.*

of. C.E. *to play the fool of, or out of a person.*

They spend their time playing the fool of their master. (Undergrad).

The poet seems to have been played the fool of. (Undergrad. 1946).

To play the fool of, or out of a person is very commonly used in Ceylon in the sense "to befool, to make a fool of, make game of".

To fool a person is used in the same sense, and not as in St. E. *to cheat, deceive, indulge a person's folly* (as in "fooled him to the top of his bent"); to cheat (person) *out of money* etc; *to fool* to play the fool, idle, trifle, (also *fool about*, and, U.S., *around*).

Eng. *play the fool* = blunder, trifle; indulge in buffoonery. This sense is usually expressed in Ceylon by *act like a fool*.

off. C.E. *to pose off. Attempts are made by the Petkoffs to pose off as civilized people.* (Undergrad).

4. See L. P. Smith, *Words and Idioms*.

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Eng. *to pose* set up, give oneself out, as (connoisseur, etc.).

C.E. *to come out* from India, England, etc. : e.g. *An Indian cricket team is coming out to Ceylon.*

Eng. *come out* go on strike, emerge from examination etc. with such success, emerge from clouds, be found out, be solved, show itself, make debut on stage or in society.

C.E. *to find out* a job, work : *I must find out a job before the end of the month.*

Eng. *find* discover by search ; succeed in obtaining ; *find out* discover, devise, solve, detect in offence.

C.E. *to play out* to trick (a person) out of, to diddle, take mean advantage of : *He played me out of my money.*

I was making good progress with her, but he played me out.

To play out is used in Ceylon in the sense of

Eng. *play it on, play it low on, play (low) down on*, take mean advantage of a person, play a (shabby, dirty) trick on, and

Eng. *to trick*, cheat a person out of thing.

Eng. *play out, play* (congregation, etc.) *in, out*, play on organ etc., as they come in, go out ; *played out* exhausted of energy or vitality or usefulness : *our horses were played out, I felt played out, Free Trade is played out.*

C.E. *introduce to* for Eng. *introduce into*, e.g. C.E. *Shakespeare introduced blank verse to his plays.*

Eng. *introduce into* bring into use (customs, idea, improvement, etc. *into* place, system, etc.) ;

Eng. *introduce to* make known, esp. in formal manner (person *to* another) ; draw attention of (person *to* subject etc.)

In the following cases an unidiomatic *up* is used with the verbs.

To coach up. Example :

“ WANTED Tutor with good knowledge of English, Sinhalese, to *coach up* two girls and one boy attending College”. (Advt. in *C.D.N.*, June 6, 1941).

To cope up with the work.

To dress up, in the sense *to put on one's clothes*.

Eng. *dress up* attire oneself, attire (another) elaborately or in masquerade.

To mix up. Example : *The men and women students do not mix up at socials.* (Undergrad.)

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To raise up a question at a meeting.

To refer up. Example: *Chancer asks anyone who wishes to know the rest to refer up Ovid or Dante or Claudian.* (Final Hons. 1937).

I request the aggrieved teacher to refer up pages 31 and 36 of Sessional Paper X of 1947 . . . (Letter to the Editor, *Cey. Obs.* 24-5-50.)

To round up a performance, career, sentence, etc.

Eng. *round off* bring to complete, or symmetrical or well-ordered state.
"The evening was *rounded up* by a Ceylon record in the 4 × 440 yards Club Relay". (*C.D.N.*, October 8, 1938).

"The stanza of Milton's ode is *rounded up* by an alexandrine".
(Undergrad.)

To rub up the wrong way.

Eng. *rub the wrong way* stroke against the grain, irritate or repel as by stroking cat upwards.

To take (up).

The differences of meaning between certain uses of *take* and *take up* are disregarded in Ceylon English. *Take up* is used for Eng. *take* in the senses:

(i) captivate, charm,

e.g. *what takes* (captivates) *my fancy*; *was much taken* (charmed) *with or by her manners*, as in Shakespeare's "Daffodils that come before the swallow dares and take the winds of March with beauty" (A.W.T.).

(ii) be examined in e.g. *Take the mathematical tripos*.

Examples: (i) "Knowing his weakness and with an eye to profit by it, a would-be tenant posed as a great lover of books and the other *was greatly taken up with* the prospective tenant, and sad to relate, taken in as well". (From the Gossip Column of a Ceylon Newspaper).

"Faustus was much taken up with Helen". (Undergrad.)

(ii) "... the class of students who have been recently thronging the University College would begin *to take up* the London Intermediate Examination". (*Times of Ceylon*, editorial, July 3, 1936).

The distinction between *take* in the above senses, and *take up* in the senses: engage in, enter upon (profession, subject, enquiry); pursue (matter, enquiry) further, as in the sentence "A candidate who *takes up* Latin a year or two before his examination . . ." is thus lost in Ceylon.

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OCCASIONAL ERRORS :

To *blink at*.

"Mr. . . . said they must not *blink at* the fact that the minority communities lacked absolute confidence in the major community". (*Ceylon Observer*, Sunday, September 3, 1944).

Eng. *blink* trans. ignore, shirk consideration of, (esp. *the fact*). (Eng. *blink* intrans. means to open and shut the eyelids rapidly, look with eyes opening and shutting, shut the eyes for a moment).

To *hit at*, in the sense hit upon.

"Spenser *hit at* the novel idea of the pastoral". (Undergrad.)

Eng. *hit* strike with blow or missile ; direct blow *at*; *hit upon* light upon, get at (thing aimed at).

To *reflect on* "The passage *reflects on* Criseyde's character". (Undergrad.) (The writer meant *reflects*).

Eng. *reflect* show image of, reproduce to eye or mind, exactly, correspond in appearance or effect to ;

reflect upon bring discredit upon person or method responsible ; go back in thought, meditate or consult with oneself (*on, upon, or abs.*).

Note : In Ceylon, as in America, *cater to* is preferred to *cater for*.

ADVERBS :

Soon C.E. *come soon* in the sense *come quickly, hurry up*.

Eng. *soon* not long after the present time or time in question or after specified time, in a short time, as *shall soon know the results*.

With expressed or implied comparison: willingly, as *I would just as soon stay at home* (as go) ; early, as *what makes you come so soon*. Readily, quickly, as *you will soon get the better of him*.

The Ceylon use is probably developed from the senses *early, readily, quickly*.

Up to date. *I have not seen him up to date* means in C.E.,

'I have not seen him up to the present day, moment'

Up to date nine cases have been dealt with by the P.S.C. (*Times Sunday Illustrated*, June 4, 1950).

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Eng. from bookkeeping phrase for accounts completed to current day, now as adj. or adv., meeting, according to, the latest requirements or knowledge, in accordance with the newest fashion, e.g. *an up to date knowledge of a subject; the design is no longer up to date; bring it up to date.*

Miscellaneous :

No sooner he came than in place of

Eng. no sooner did he come than . . .

C.E. *as best as* in place of Eng. *as well as*, or *as best*:

e.g. *Do this as best as you can.*

THE MISUSE OF ENGLISH IDIOMS

This kind of error arises from the 'by-hearting' (a picturesque Indian and Ceylonese coinage) of idioms (from Grammars and Handbooks) in isolation, and without regard to their contextual significance; or from books, without a knowledge of the social and psychological background of the life from which they spring. These errors are due to verbalism—the attention to words instead of to their meanings.

Errors in the use of English idioms do not usually become standardized. They occur casually, as it were, and are examples of 'ignorant English' not of distinctively Ceylonese errors. They are caused by (i) the confusion of literal and metaphorical senses, (ii) a vague understanding of the meaning of the idiom, (iii) the confounding of two or more idioms.

Examples :

(i) The confusion of literal and metaphorical.

To pull a person's legs.

Dryden hits the nail on his opponent's head. (Undergrad).

He has so many things on the fire that he can't attend to even one properly.

Eng. *Too many irons in the fire* + a picture of a typical Ceylonese hearth ('fire-place') with several pots simultaneously cooking over wood fires.

(ii) Vague Understanding.

It is only Hardy that could load another dice upon the drowning Henchard. (Undergrad).

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(Figure : *to load the dice*, and a vague idea of vengeance falling, or guilt resting upon a person).

Mrs. Bennet receives Lydia with open hands. (Entrance Exam).

(iii) The confounding of two or more idioms.

Gray expressed the thoughts that took the upper hand in his mind.
(Undergrad.)

(to take the upper hand + to come uppermost).

When he found that I met him half-way, he also cooled down.

(to meet a person half-way + to meet trouble half-way; to meet a person's eye, i.e. return his gaze, to meet oppose in battle or duel).

I kept my tongue in my cheek and did not say a word.

(to keep a still, civil, tongue in one's head + to put, speak with, one's tongue in one's cheek).

They played foul, so we also played the game.

(to play the game + to play the same game).

COINAGES

VB. *To by-heart.*

Eng. to learn by heart.

NOUN *I say.*

From such English sentences as "I say, what's the matter with him!" "I say, who was that?" Where *I say* is an exclamation used to draw attention, open a conversation, or express surprise; (or, in the same sense, *I say!* alone), has grown the use of 'I say' (**aysē**) in C.E. as a noun meaning 'you, the person addressed', 'you sir', 'you mister so and so'.

C.E. *What, I say, is the meaning of this?*

(i.e. What, my dear fellow, . . .)

This word (**aysē**) has passed into Sinhalese. In a conversation between schoolboys occurred the sentence : **eyā hari aysē neda?** He is a fine person, isn't he? (ironically).

WHAT IS THE ATTITUDE TO BE ADOPTED TO 'TRANSLATION ERRORS' AND 'INCORRECT USAGE'?

Is it possible to regard such deviations from standard English usage as

creating a new and vital idiom with a distinctive flavour of its own, like American English or Australian English ?⁵

Mr. R. C. Goffin in his pamphlet on INDIAN ENGLISH (S.P.E. Tract No. XLI) suggests that this is possible in India ; the reviewer of Mr. Goffin's pamphlet in OVERSEA EDUCATION is even enthusiastic about it :

“ Mr. Goffin finds signs of the growth of a distinctive and vital idiom. May we expect the evolution of a form of English as distinctive as that, say, of the well-educated American of the Eastern or Pacific states ?

Our author has carefully and usefully distinguished common and (by effective teaching) eradicable errors from evidence of a local idiom which ought not to be discouraged. By so doing he has pointed the way to a profitable field of investigation in all countries where English is gradually becoming a medium of daily intercourse. What needs investigating is the amount of local ‘ error ’, or shall we say ‘ innovation ’, that can be safely tolerated, and that must be tolerated if we are to avoid pulling up the wheat with the tares.

We need not, for instance, be too ruthless in our attack on archaic phraseology. We welcome the retention of ‘ gotten ’ on the other side of the Atlantic and can extend the same welcome to such phrases as . . . ‘ a man of parts ’, ‘ a man from Madras-side ’, ‘ I have a mind to go ’. Ingeniously devised words such as ‘ to by heart ’ for ‘ to memorise ’ can be accepted if they become popular. Idioms and phrases born, as it were, of local conditions, redolent of India's soil, and in tune with its temperament, are certainly preferable to the colourless, irritating jargon that mars the English pronouncements of the Bureaucracy ”.

But this distinction between allowable and intolerable ‘ errors ’ must be largely arbitrary. Mr. Goffin himself makes no attempt to define the boundary. The reviewer mentions one criterion, *viz.* ease of intelligibility :

5. There is no real analogy between language conditions in America or Australia, where English is the mother tongue, and those in countries like India and Ceylon, where varieties of ‘ foreign English ’ are used as a second language, and it is hardly possible to expect the development of a new and vital idiom. Even in the case of American and Australian English the forces of unification are becoming stronger than those of separation. Sir William Craigie writing in the *Saturday Review of Literature of New York*, in 1931, on English as spoken and written on both sides of the Atlantic, says :

“ The tendency to separate, which has seemed so inevitable to many, is being counteracted in other ways. The very growth of the population in the United States and Canada, which will bring about in time a shifting of the centre of English, will also act as a uniting force, affecting Britain and the British Colonies on the one hand, and on the other that large section of the world which is steadily acquiring English as a second tongue.

A distinct American language, clearly marked off from other forms of English, in the same way as one Germanic or Romanic language is from another, is less likely to arise than seemed possible a century ago . . .

The new American Language, it may be, is equally impossible, for the reason that it can no longer develop by itself, but must keep in touch with that wider English which concerns the world at large ”.

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“ What is obviously important in the development of local forms of English is that the users of these forms should be easily intelligible to English speakers from other parts of the world. Nothing that is likely to impede easy and pleasant intercourse between the various English-speaking races can be tolerated. If this be secured, we shall waste our time in trying to eradicate everything that distinguishes local speech and writing from that of an Oxford don in a Times Leader ”.

In conclusion the reviewer touches on the question of pronunciation :

“ We should like to argue an equal need for local varieties of pronunciation, subject of course to the same condition of intelligibility. But we shrink from arousing the wrath of the phonetician ”.

A similar plea “ for courageously maintaining Indianisms in the English language, thus building up what he called ‘ Indian English ’ was advanced by Professor Amarnath Jha, Vice-Chancellor of the Allahabad University, addressing a conference of English professors, playwrights and critics, convened at the instance of Professor Nirmal Kumar Sidhanta of the Lucknow University ”. (I quote from a report in the *C.D.N.* of December 28, 1940, under the caption IN DEFENCE OF BABU ENGLISH—Professor’s Plea for Indianisms).

Referring to the difficulties and irregularities of English Mr. Jha said :

“ May I in that respect venture to plead for the use, retention, and encouragement of Indian English ? The Americans have a language of their own, so different from English that there is now ‘ An Oxford Book of American Usage ’. Is there any reason why we need be ashamed of Indian English ? Who is there in the United Provinces who will not understand a young man who has enjoyed a ‘ freeship ’ at college, and who says he is going to join the ‘ teachery ’ profession and who after a few years says he is engaged in ‘ head mastery ? ’ Similarly, why should we accept the English phrase ‘ mare’s nest ’ and object to ‘ horse’s egg ’, so familiar in the columns of the *Amrita Bazaar Patrika* ? Why should we adhere to ‘ all this ’, when ‘ this all ’ is the natural order suggested by the usage of our own language ? Why insist on ‘ yet ’ following ‘ though ’, when in Hindustani we use the equivalent of ‘ but ? ’ Must we condemn the following sentence because it does not conform to English idiom, even though it is a literal translation of our own idiom : ‘ I shall not pay a pice, what to say of a rupee ? ’ Is there any rational ground for objecting to ‘ family members ’ and adhering to ‘ members of the family ? ’ . . . A little courage, some determination, a wholesome respect for our own idioms, and we shall before long have a virile vigorous Indian English ”.

Professor Jha then quotes a very sane note on the subject from the Report of the Sadler Commission on the Calcutta University :

“ We do not mean that the English of the Indian would necessarily be indistinguishable from that of the English-born citizen. But it would be by special qualities and characteristics that it would be distinguished, not by incongruities and faults ”.

Professor Jha concludes : “ I advocate the cultivation of these special qualities and characteristics ”. But do not his examples suggest that he is advocating rather the standardization of “ incongruities and faults ? ” With

the exception of ' horse's egg ', all his other examples are instances of ignorant English or of literal translations of Indian idiom into English.

No rule can be given by means of which solecisms can be classed as ' allowable ' or ' intolerable '. The only safe rule is that ignorant English must be corrected. It is a mark of ignorance to translate the idioms of one language into another. For idiom is untranslatable and literal translation can only produce monstrous incongruities of language. If it happens that translations from the native language into English produce locutions that might conceivably have grown up in the home speech climate (as very rarely it might), then these may be admitted. But ignorant English, translation errors, incongruities and faults of grammar and idiom, and mis-pronunciation must be pointed out and corrected. The English we learn and use must as far as we can manage it be good English.

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