

**BETWEEN TWO HEGEMONIES: THE DOUBLE MARGINALISATION OF  
“UNDER-CLASS” TAMIL USERS OF ENGLISH**

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We have come a long way from the days when Sri Lankan English was seen as a collection of errors or a “deviant” from/ incomplete form of Standard British English. While the description and analysis of Sri Lankan English by scholars like Kandiah and Parakrama, have contributed much to legitimizing this variety, it appears that the examples (lexis, syntax and discourse) are predominantly from Sinhala bilingual use. Thus, though the specificities of educated Lankan English reflect the areas of common language contact between Sinhalese and Tamils, and may therefore be appropriate to middle and upper class bilingual usage, they appear to exclude and thereby marginalize under-class and rural Tamils. As long as the Sinhala user of English remains the ‘standard-bearer’ of Lankan English, there will be (and have been) negative implications on the acceptance of under-class Tamil usage. The markers for such “non-acceptance” (or a deliberate refusal to accept) appear predominantly in one’s pronunciation and varying grammatical constructions.

Building on a presentation at the SLELTA Conference (2006), this paper seeks to provide examples of how the norms and standards of Lankan English, as well as vestigial Standard English value systems, tend to discriminate against, and pathologies under-class Tamil usage. In addition, it will seek to demonstrate how, in an already (ethnically) charged environment, these “errors” become more than simply markers of class and caste, but of ethnicity; and this has serious implications, in today’s Sri Lankan context.