

Variant grammar features in SLEs and their implications for English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka

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This study focuses on variant features in SLE grammar and their implications for English Language Teaching in Sri Lanka. Features of SLE have been extensively described by scholars of SLE and previous studies have revealed that these features do occur in both speech and writing in Sri Lanka. Further, national level attempts have been made to incorporate SLE into English language teaching. This study explores the extent to which the variant grammatical and lexicogrammatical features of SLE continue to occur in semi-formal writing through a corpus study and examines the level of acceptability associated with them among first/co-first language English speakers in Sri Lanka by means of an acceptability study. The corpus study draws data from the Sri Lankan component of the SAVE corpus and a self-compiled newspaper corpus of 2 million words. The acceptability study is based on a sample of 80 first language/co-first language speakers of English in Sri Lanka who responded to 30 sample sentences drawn from the two corpora, 16 of which included grammatical/lexicogrammatical features of SLE. The corpus study revealed that, from the 36 variant grammar features in focus, 21 appeared at least in one corpus and 16 appeared in both corpora. The phrasal verb “pass out” had the most prominent presence. The findings of the acceptability study reveal that there is a strong consensus regarding the acceptability of ‘come down’ as a variant phrasal verb belonging to Standard SLE. It also revealed even though the sample is not completely exonormative in its language attitude, a strong consensus cannot be observed among the respondents regarding the acceptability of a majority of the features while there is a very strong consensus regarding the unacceptability of five features. Thus, a majority of these variant features could not yet be considered accepted alternative norms in SLE as there is no strong consensus among the speech community regarding their acceptability even though these features do occur in authentic writing. This sociolinguistic situation may have important implications for English language teaching in Sri Lanka.

Key words: acceptability; English language teaching; language attitude; SLE; varietal features