

The Development of Restricted Languages in Contemporary Sinhala with Social and Technological Influences

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Abstract

British linguist J.R. Firth introduced the term 'restricted language' to refer to linguistic systems designed for specific tasks or contexts. In this context, various adaptations of the Sinhala language utilized in specialized environments can be identified as restricted forms. These adaptations often feature distinct vocabulary tailored to particular domains. For example, traditional agricultural practices, such as threshing, employ specific terminology, while the fishing community has developed a unique lexicon pertinent to their industry. Additionally, K. N. O. Dharmadasa has observed the emergence of new restricted forms in Sinhala, particularly evident in the language used in news headlines and text messaging. This study investigates the influence of recent societal developments on the emergence and characteristics of new restricted forms of the Sinhala language. In addition to analyzing websites, an exploration of social media platforms was conducted to capture the latest trends in language usage. It was observed that specific vocabulary related to epidemic and pandemic situations, as well as the headlines on gossip websites, YouTube titles and thumbnails, social media interactions, and strategies for online income generation, have begun to emerge. These elements can be classified as restricted forms of Sinhala language. Consequently, this study provides evidence of the evolving nature of restricted language forms in response to contemporary circumstances within the speaking community.

1. INTRODUCTION: RESTRICTED LANGUAGES

In certain societies, a man might be ridiculed for using language deemed inappropriate for his gender, much like he would be in our society if he were to wear a skirt. Behaviour must not only align with the individual identity but also suit specific occasions and contexts. For instance, there are situations where a woman wearing a skirt might also face ridicule. A woman competing in a sprint race or swimming in a skirt would appear so out of place that it could provoke laughter. This principle finds a parallel in language use as well (Trudgill, 1979, p. 103).

A dialect refers to a variety of a language that is differentiated based on the speaker. Within a language community, distinct groups of people use different dialects. However, language can also vary along another dimension, determined by its use. The way language is employed changes depending on its function and the context in which it is used. This functional variation of language is referred to as a 'register' (Halliday, 1975, p. 87). Among these registers, some are confined to particular purposes. The British linguist J.R. Firth coined the term 'restricted language' to describe a linguistic system tailored for a specific activity. These languages are tightly bound to their context, allowing for minimal linguistic variation. Found in both spoken and written forms, they appear in everyday and specialized contexts (Crystal, 2005, s.v. "Restricted Languages").

Registers primarily differ in their lexical features. While some registers also exhibit distinctive characteristics at other levels, such as the unique voice quality used in church services or the grammatical variations in newspaper headlines, lexical features are the most prominent. In fact, certain lexical items alone can often identify a specific register (Halliday, 1975, pp. 87-89). As certain registers can be classified as restricted languages, the aforementioned features can be recognized as common characteristics of such languages. Numerous languages in the world exhibit restricted forms in both written and colloquial contexts, and linguists focus on studying these forms.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: STUDIES ON RESTRICTED LANGUAGES IN SINHALA

There is no single definition of restricted languages in Sinhala. Sugathapala De Silva (1963, pp. 9-15) suggests that some languages have distinct written and spoken forms, which can be classified as restricted languages. He further notes that Sinhala language also exhibits this feature, with written Sinhala and spoken Sinhala being the two main types of restricted languages in Sinhala. Within these two types, there are several subtypes of restricted languages. For example, the language used in literature differs from the language used in scientific work in written Sinhala. In spoken Sinhala, there are also various varieties, such as the language used by bus conductors and auctioneers. Therefore, Sugathapala De Silva considers all these forms to be examples of restricted languages in Sinhala.

J. B. Dissanayake (2005, pp. 92-94) classifies dialects into three types, namely regional dialects, social dialects, and situation-based dialects. The third category refers to the way language is used in formal and informal contexts. For example, the language used in a formal lecture differs from the language used in a casual conversation with friends. Dissanayake (2013) further divides the situation-based dialects into two types, formal and informal language. Formal language is used in public lectures and political meetings, while informal language is used in everyday conversations. However, Dissanayake does not refer to these forms as restricted languages, but rather as dialects.

K. N. O. Dharmadasa (2019, pp. 119-148) has a different approach to language varieties compared to other classifications. He does not believe that situation-based language varieties can be considered a "language" like Sugathapala De Silva suggested, as they are actually sub-categories of a language. He also disagrees with J. B. Dissanayake's identification of these forms as "dialects", as this term has different interpretations in Sociolinguistics. Instead, Dharmadasa identifies these forms as "registers". According to him, there are two major types of registers in Sinhala: the spoken variety and the written variety. Each of these registers has sub-varieties. For instance, in the written variety, the language used in economics, geography, and literature is not the same. Similarly, different spoken varieties are used in situations like courts and political meetings. Dharmadasa believes that all these forms can be considered registers.

Dharmadasa (2019, pp. 148-152) has identified certain types of registers in Sinhala that are used for very specific purposes. He has named certain language varieties in Sinhala as restricted forms. In contrast to the frameworks presented by Sugathapala De Silva and J. B. Dissanayake, K. N. O. Dharmadasa offers a clear delineation of the registers and restricted languages in Sinhala language, grounded in the explanation given by J. R. Firth. Therefore, this paper is aligned with the classification offered by Dharmadasa. In addition to terminology associated with agriculture and fishery, he highlights that the language employed in newspaper headlines and short message services can also be classified as restricted languages in contemporary Sinhala. In the realm of newspaper headlines, editors frequently utilize various techniques, including the incorporation of colloquial vocabulary and the use of the present tense to convey actions occurring in the past or future. Further, short message services employ a distinct language form that differs from standard usage. In this study, language varieties

employed for highly specific purposes are regarded as restricted languages. While Dharmadasa's identification of the languages used in newspaper headlines and text message services as restricted languages is commendable, there are additional contemporary contexts in which restricted language forms can be observed.

When examining the restricted languages identified in Sinhala to date, the primary characteristic is vocabulary. As Halliday (1975, pp. 87-89) noted, lexical items serve as a key indicator in identifying the respective restricted language in Sinhala. For example, a specialized vocabulary is associated with activities conducted on the threshing floor. Participants in these tasks utilize distinct terms to accurately identify the tools and items present in that setting. Similarly, fishermen employ a specific lexicon to refer to the various fish species they catch, utilizing terminology that is not commonly found in everyday conversation. This specialized language reflects the unique context and expertise inherent in these practices.

In certain specialized contexts, the meanings of words can shift significantly from their everyday usage. For example, the Sinhala word *yathura* typically means "door key," but on a threshing floor, it is used to refer to a winnower. Similarly, the word *kēli*, which usually means "pieces," has different interpretations depending on the context: bus conductors use it to refer to passengers, while garment workers use it to describe clothing. In both cases, the term highlights elements that are essential to the respective industries through which profit is generated. Thus, these words acquire specific meanings within their particular restricted contexts.

Certain restricted languages in Sinhala display unique grammatical and syntactic features, in addition to their specialized vocabulary. For instance, the language used in newspaper headlines often includes characteristics such as sentences without verbs, the use of the present tense verb to indicate all tenses, and an inanimate counting system applied to animate nouns (Dharmadasa, 2019, pp. 150-151). Eg:

Hamuda: sebalunṭa dumriṭa rijæduru puhunuvā. (Hamuda: sebalunṭa = To army soldiers, dumriṭa rijæduru puhunuvā = A training as train drivers)

Æmætītuma: O:stre:lija: jaji. (Æmætītuma: = The minister, O:stre:lija: = Australia, jaji = goes, but the headline indicates that the minister has departed to Australia yesterday.)

Agæmæti Singappu:ru jaji. (Agæmæti = The prime minister, Singappu:ru = Singapore, jaji = goes, but the headline indicates that the prime minister has decided to visit Singapore.)

Æmæti hatarak matā gæṭumākā (Æmæti = Ministers, hatarak = Four (inanimate things) matā gæṭumākā = Have opposing views)

Furthermore, the language employed in text messages follows a distinct writing style. In both English-speaking and Sinhala-speaking communities, it is common to use abbreviations or shortened forms in text messages. For example, in English, terms like "GM" are used to signify "Good Morning," and "B4" represents "Before." Within the Sinhala-speaking community, abbreviations such as "MK" for "*Mokāda Kāranne:*" (What are you doing?) and "BS" for "*Budu Sarānaji*" (May Lord Buddha bless you.) serve the same purpose of enhancing efficiency in communication. However, the most notable aspect of the restricted languages identified in Sinhala is their specific vocabulary.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Language and society maintain a dynamic and interdependent relationship, wherein variations in language emerge as reflections of social incidents, developments, and trends. These linguistic variations are often closely tied to specific events or movements, remaining relevant to particular time frames or contexts. Furthermore, certain variations may be unique to distinct social groups or communities, serving specific functions and purposes within those groups. When examining these variations, a notable characteristic is the distinct vocabulary

associated with them. It is apparent that some forms of language variation that arise from current events and trends can be classified as restricted languages in Sinhala. This study will explore several of these forms in detail.

In order to identify new restricted forms in Sinhala, data has been collected from online sources, including websites, YouTube channels, and other social media platforms. A carefully curated selection of samples on the above platforms was made to ensure adequate representation of each identified restricted form. Further, examples were chosen based on the most current data pertinent to the respective categories. For instance, records from the COVID-19 period were examined to analyze language associated with epidemic and pandemic contexts, while more contemporary records on social media were examined to identify language relevant to methods of online income generation, which are increasingly prevalent. The selected samples were examined qualitatively to assess their potential to represent a distinct restricted form in the Sinhala language.

4. DISCUSSION AND RESULTS

4.1. Language Usage in Epidemic and Pandemic Contexts

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 represented an extraordinary global event, as the world had not previously encountered a pandemic of this scale. Speaking communities across the globe needed a new terminology to express ideas related to various aspects, including the transmission of the virus, minimising the spread, and treatments. The English-speaking community used both the existing vocabulary and newly created terms for this purpose. Although these English terms became popular in other speaking communities, too, various language groups began to develop their own vocabularies to convey the ideas related to the pandemic. Research has been conducted to examine COVID-19-related terminology in English (Alyeksyeyeva, Chaiuk and Galitska, 2020; Akut, 2020; Asif and others, 2020) and other languages (Al-Dala'ien and others, 2020; Cartier and others, 2022; Wang and Huang, 2021).

As COVID-19 was a new experience to the Sinhala-speaking community, too, they needed a new vocabulary to convey the ideas related to the pandemic. As the existing vocabulary did not suffice to convey new ideas, they utilized English terms such as "lockdown", "mask", "sanitizer", "PCR" and "RAT", and sometimes these words were transcribed in Sinhala script. Subsequently, Sinhala translations of some of these words became popular. For example, the term *wasā: dæmi:mə*, which has the meaning of prohibiting entry and exit, was initially used to describe the concept of a lockdown. Over time, the English term "lockdown" was adopted in Sinhala script. Ultimately, this led to the translation of the term as *aguḷu dæmi:mə*, which means "locking a door." This term has since been established as the equivalent of "lockdown." In the wake of concerns regarding the Nipah virus following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sinhala-speaking community received communications indicating that there would not be an *aguḷu dæmi:mə*. This reflects that the process of developing vocabulary during the COVID-19 pandemic not only served as a mechanism for expressing ideas during that time but also marked the beginning of creating a specialized lexicon related to epidemic and pandemic situations.

It is important to acknowledge the semantic shift of words observed during the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, various English terms that convey particular concepts acquired new meanings. This phenomenon is similarly reflected in the Sinhala language, where existing translations also demonstrate a shift in meaning. For instance, the terms 'cluster' and 'wave' hold distinct definitions in the context of COVID-19, and their corresponding translations in Sinhala, referred to as *pokurā* and *rællā*, adopt different interpretations under these circumstances. In general usage, *pokurā* denotes a bouquet, while *rællā* refers to a water wave. However, during the COVID-19 context, these meanings diverge significantly.

In circumstances where a speaking community encounters an emergency, particularly when that community is small, there is often a tendency to use existing vocabulary rather than creating new terminology. The urgency of the situation necessitates the swift expression of ideas, which can result in the appropriation of existing words and the evolution of their meanings. Through this lens, language researchers have the opportunity to explore Sinhala terminology associated with the COVID-19 situation, assess its application during and after the pandemic, and identify a form of Sinhala language that is uniquely linked to epidemic and pandemic scenarios.

4.2.Headlines on Gossip Websites

K. N. O. Dharmadasa has identified the language utilized in newspaper headlines as a distinctive form of restricted language in Sinhala (Dharmadasa, 2019, pp. 150-151). He has pointed out several notable characteristics of this language, including the use of colloquial vocabulary and specific grammatical features. In the current media landscape, while traditional newspapers remain prevalent, there has been a significant rise in news websites and gossip platforms that also disseminate news to the public. Gossip sites aim to publish rumours or sensational information rather than to make the public aware of factual news. Therefore, headlines on these platforms are often written with a distinct language style to attract the audience. The following table, which includes the English translations of headlines from a news site and a gossip site, illustrates the two different approaches of presenting information.

News Site (Hiru News)	Gossip Site (Hiru Gossip)
The Kottawa entrance to the highway has been temporarily closed due to an emergency fire incident.	The Kottawa entrance to the highway has been closed due to an emergency situation. Please see further details regarding the incident.
Hurricane Yagi has resulted in the tragic loss of 60 lives.	An extraordinary event unfolded in a matter of seconds.
A cat weighing 17 kilograms has been uncovered.	An intriguing story has emerged concerning a cat that weighs 17 kilograms.
Special mosquito control week declared from the 19th of May.	See what happens over an entire week starting from the 19th of May.
Two girls drown in Galgamuwa lake.	The sad story behind the roses drowned in Galgamuwa lake.
Chamari Athapaththu fined by the ICC.	Chamari Athapaththu fined by the ICC. What has actually happened?
Egg prices drop in local market.	The unforeseen situation happened to egg prices.
Slight decrease in local gold prices.	The location where the gold price halted, leaving everyone in awe and wondering.

When examining these headlines, it can be noticed that they are designed to grab attention and spark curiosity. The choice of vocabulary, distinct tone and unconventional grammar are the main features of that language. The headlines often lack direct information related to the news, but are designed to engage readers with compelling language. Terms that have the meanings such as "extraordinary," "intriguing," "unforeseen," and "wondering" are frequently employed to pique interest. For instance, the decline in egg prices has been presented as an unforeseen situation related to egg prices. Additionally, more sensitive terminology, such as "roses," is sometimes used to describe tragic events, such as the drowning of two young girls in a lake.

In contemporary society, operating a gossip website has emerged as a viable income generation method. To attract and retain a substantial audience, these websites often employ

targeted vocabulary and distinctive language patterns. This approach is essential for maximizing audience engagement and, subsequently, advertising revenue. Considering these facts, it is beneficial to identify and examine the restricted language form emerged based on Sinhala gossip sites.

4.3. Thumbnails and Titles on YouTube

YouTube is currently becoming popular in the Sinhala-speaking community too. Individuals are creating YouTube channels across various themes, including cooking, sports, entertainment, technology, education and psychological well-being, not only to share information, but also to earn an extra income. Therefore, attractive thumbnails and titles can be seen on YouTube channels that help to attract the audience. The following are the English translations of Sinhala video titles related to cooking a dhal curry.

Dhal Curry Made Without Coconut Milk
 Preparing Dhal Curry: Enhancing Flavor and Shelf Life
 Essential Techniques for Achieving a Flavorful Dhal Curry
 A Unique Approach to Making Dhal Curry That Lasts Longer

To attract the audience, creators are using a language form distinct from the standard language use and the specific vocabulary, different sentence structures, and specific tone can be identified as the features of this language. Additionally, there may sometimes be discrepancies between the titles and the actual content. Efforts to attract a larger audience often focus on enhancing visibility and generating revenue. It is important to recognize that conventional language may not always suffice in achieving these objectives. Therefore, tailoring language to meet the specific needs of the audience is essential for effective communication. It is beneficial to explore this linguistic phenomenon as a restricted form within the Sinhala language.

4.4. Language Utilization on Social Media Platforms

In addition to YouTube, the younger generation engages with a variety of social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Messenger, and Telegram, which facilitate both private and group conversations. An analysis of these conversations reveals that users consider the simplicity and ease of typing in the language they utilize. This is illustrated in the following table.

Conventional Language	Usage on Social Media
<i>tijāṇava:</i>	<i>ti:nāva:/tināva:</i>
<i>tijāṇavadā</i>	<i>ti:dā/tidā</i>
<i>kārannā</i>	<i>kārāno</i>
<i>kārāṇavadā</i>	<i>kārānodā</i>
<i>janāva:nam</i>	<i>janonam</i>

Although the aforementioned formats offer convenience in typing, the rationale behind some modifications may not be easily justified. It can be seen that the younger generation adopts these language patterns as a form of self-expression. This approach appears to reflect their desire to differentiate their communication style from the conventional language. Eg:

Substituting the letter *m* for the first letter in double consonants (*komla:* for *kolla:*, *lamsānā* for *lassānā*)

Replacing the letter *m* for the letter *n* at the end of the words (*itim* for *itin*, *gom* for *gon*)

Using the sound *i* instead of *e* at the ends of the words (*kəṛəṇəvani* for *kəṛəṇəvane*, *dannəvani* for *dannəvane*)

The young generation engaging with social media platforms represents a distinct linguistic community. Within this context, they often adopt varied styles, either consciously or subconsciously, to differentiate their language usage. This phenomenon results in the emergence of a unique linguistic form that is specific to social media environments. Due to these distinct characteristics that differ from standard language usage, it is valuable to examine this language as a restricted form in Sinhala.

4.5. Language Relevant to Online Income Generation Methods

Currently, methods of generating income online are becoming popular relative to traditional employment. Therefore, there is a growing need for a specific vocabulary to express new concepts and practices associated with online employment. As a result, new terms are often coined, or existing English words are adapted to fit the evolving context. Non-English speakers frequently adopt these English terms directly, translate them into their native languages, or create entirely new words. Notably, in the case of the Sinhala language, various approaches have emerged to develop vocabulary that accommodates these modern trends.

Initially, the Sinhala-speaking community used English terms or incorporated Sinhala auxiliary words alongside English terms to express new concepts. Over time, this practice evolved to include the combination of Sinhala suffixes with English words, allowing for the adaptation and localization of these terms within the linguistic context.

English Term (+ Sinhala Auxiliary Word)	English Term + Sinhala Suffix
token <i>ekə</i>	<i>tɔ:kənəjə</i>
entry <i>ekə</i>	<i>enʈrijə</i>
bounty <i>ekə</i>	<i>bavunʈijə</i>
traders	<i>tre:də:sla:</i>
freelancer <i>kenek</i>	-
profit <i>kəṛəṇəva:</i>	-

In addition to the previously mentioned methods, there are instances where English words are integrated with Sinhala terms. Typically, the Sinhala word either aligns closely with the meaning of the English term or serves to enhance its clarity. Eg:

exchange - exchange *ginumə* (*ginumə* = account)
 AMA - AMA *sæsijə* (*sæsijə* = session)
 scam - scam *vaŋca:və* (*vaŋca:və* = scam)
 dropshipping - dropshipping *vja:pa:rəjə* (*vja:pa:rəjə* = industry)
 halving - halving *krija:vəlijə* (*krija:vəlijə* = process)

Furthermore, members of the Sinhala-speaking community occasionally engage in direct translations of English phrases into Sinhala, which can result in literal interpretations. Eg:

freelancing - *nidəhas se:vəkə* (freelancing = *nidəhas se:vəkə*)
 forex market - *vide:ʃə viniməjə veledəpolə* (forex = *vide:ʃə viniməjə*, market = *veledəpolə*)
 decentralized money - *vike:ndritə mudal* (decentralized = *vike:ndritə*, money = *mudal*)
 virtual currency - *atatjə mudal* (virtual = *atatjə*, currency = *mudal*)

initial coin offering - *mu:likə ka:si nikutuvə* (initial = *mu:likə*, coin = *ka:si*, offering = *nikutuvə*)

Beyond these direct translations, established Sinhala equivalents for English terms may also be utilized to express concepts related to online earning methods. In such cases, one can observe a semantic shift in the meanings of these existing translations. Eg:

address - *lipinəjə* (A distinctive alphanumeric string that functions as a digital identifier on the blockchain)
 wallet - *pasumbijə* (A secure location for the storage of cryptocurrencies)
 blocks - *kutti* (A repository of information on the blockchain)
 bag - *bæ:gəjə* (An individual possessing a substantial quantity of cryptocurrency)
 coin - *ka:sijə* (A specific category of cryptocurrency)

In the context of online income generation within the Sinhala community, individuals are progressively cultivating a specialized vocabulary that facilitates the expression of their ideas and the education of newcomers. Similar to the group that engages in social media, this group also exchanges ideas and perspectives through online platforms. To facilitate effective communication, they require a specific vocabulary. While English terms may be utilised in colloquial Sinhala, a distinct set of terminology is necessary for written communications in Sinhala. As these online methods gain traction, it is anticipated that this vocabulary will continue to grow, potentially leading to the emergence of new linguistic features. Therefore, the language associated with online income generation methods can be considered a restricted form in Sinhala language.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on specific functions and contexts, various registers can be identified within a single language. According to the British linguist J. R. Firth, registers designated for limited purposes can be considered 'restricted languages'. The main characteristic of the restricted forms in the Sinhala language is the distinct vocabulary. Notable examples include the language utilized in traditional agricultural practices and the vernacular of the fishing community, which illustrate the diversity of restricted forms within the Sinhala language.

Language variations are often context-specific, arising in response to particular movements or historical periods. K. N. O. Dharmadasa has previously identified the language forms utilized in newspaper headlines and short message services as new restricted forms within the Sinhala language. This study investigates the emergence of new restricted forms arisen from recent developments and trends within the Sinhala-speaking community. The research highlights vocabularies associated with epidemics and pandemics, headlines from gossip websites, titles and thumbnails on YouTube, social media interactions, and online income generation methods. The increasing popularity of certain restricted forms within the Sinhala-speaking community has contributed to improved mutual intelligibility among the members. However, while widely recognized situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic have gained attention across the broader speaking community, language pertaining to online income generation methods remains confined to groups within that specific field.

The emergence of popular restricted forms in Sinhala language is poised to facilitate a significant advancement in language development. As ongoing developments in the several fields progress, the associated vocabulary will also continue to evolve. Furthermore, new restricted languages are likely to emerge in response to shifting social trends. Future research can be conducted to identify and explore these restricted forms within the Sinhala language. The study also encourages scholars to investigate the emergence of restricted forms in other languages as a result of social developments and trends.

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