A Sri Lankan University Context as a Site Which Simultaneously Encourages and Discourages Bilingualism: A Case Study of the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya

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This abstract argues that bi/multilingualism is simultaneously encouraged/ discouraged in the Sri Lankan university context and focuses on the Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya. This particular context is read as a space where various dimensions of power relations operate multi-directionally. The paper examines the socio-political, economic, cultural and ideological factors that contribute to the established argument. The members of the minority ethnic groups in this context are often forced to become bilingual, whereas the first language speakers of Sinhala are notencouraged to use/learn other languages. The L1 speakers of Sinhala, are often reluctant to adapt to the multi-cultural/ multi-lingual situation of their immediate context. Bilingualism is often perceived as a resource as well as a deviation from the norm. Many researches on bilingualism show that the becoming of a bilingual is not always spontaneous. In this case, the linguistic factors are less important than the extra-linguistic factors or "the (additional) value conferred on a specific language (and often on its users) as a result of the geopolitical and socio economic (hegemonic) power wielded by the language vis-à-vis other languages with which it comes into contact". Data has been collected through both formal interviews and casual conversations with the target groups alongside with several published work concerning the fields of bi/multilingualism and ESL learning/teaching. In conclusion, the abstract established the ways in which bi/multilingualism operate in this context and determined the nature of bi/multilingual (dis)advantage.

Keywords: Bi/multilingualism, extra linguistic factors, hegemony