

## Establishing the Online Teaching Space as a Site of Further Marginalization

WSA Wanniarachchi and BPBW Rathnayaka

*Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

*Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Arts, University of Peradeniya*

<sahanwanniarachchi@yahoo.com>

**Abstract** – When the pandemic situation worsened, Sri Lankan higher educational institutions had to, albeit grudgingly, opt for non-traditional teaching/ learning spaces. Even though institutions insisted on student attendance, they turned a blind eye to the many problems students face on online platforms. The ESL classroom became noteworthy here since it had already been established a site of oppression and marginalization. The indisputable discrimination based on linguistic competence and access to and proficiency in technology eventually led to further oppression on said space. Amongst many, the teaching session being recorded which materializes their realities on the virtual platform, being instructed to switch on audio, and sometimes video when speaking and spoken to which allowed an unsolicited scrutiny of their private space, having issues due to interrupted internet service in which case the ESL teacher would not stop the class on the said student's account, never being able to attend online classes due to inadequate facilities etc. function as such instances of marginalization in the online space. The theoretical framework of this study was mainly based on the works of Michel Foucault, Robert Phillipson and Suresh Canagarajah. The study used data from interviews with 10 undergraduate students from two state universities, classroom observations and informal discussions. The study concludes that the *gaze* of the online classroom which forces the student to confront their socio-political, economic and linguistic position and capabilities within the online space as well as in the larger society, limits, if not, discourages the performance of the ESL student.

**Keywords:** Marginalization, Gaze, Linguistic and technological capabilities