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**ARTICLE**

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Menik Ranmal Wakkumbura	

*Full Length Research Paper*

# Language pluralism through the administrative service: The use of the official languages policy in Sri Lanka

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This paper explains how Sri Lanka's Administrative Service has contributed to the use of the Official Language Policy (OLP) in Sri Lanka. This policy supports 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' as official languages (that is, mother tongue) and 'English' as the link language. However the implementation of this policy has become problematic due to critical ethno-political factors. Since 2009 language policy legitimization processes have been aimed at rigorous social reconciliation after the end of the thirty year civil war for which the Administrative service plays a vital role. The limitations in linguistic skills, resources available at the organizational levels and the lack of effective policy changes undermine the effective implementation of the OLP. Utilizing the Official Languages Commission audits in conjunction with a qualitative semi structured questionnaire (n = 80), content analysis was conducted to investigate the relationships between administrators' linguistic skills and administrative functions. The findings reveal the importance of administrators having trilingual competencies; mother tongue, English and the second national language. Overall, findings are consistent with this argument that stable policy to maintain the 'mother tongue' languages while choosing English as the 'link language' in Administrative Service is a pragmatic approach for effective results for social reconciliation of post-conflict Sri Lanka.

**Key words:** Language pluralism, Official Language Policy, Administrative Service (SLAS), Sri Lanka

## INTRODUCTION

Countries like South Africa, Nigeria and Central Asian states like Azerbaijan during post-conflict recovery essentially find 'language pluralism' an interesting policy formulation for social integration (Fishman and Garcia, 2010). The world consists of thirty times the number of languages than there are nation States. Therefore bilingualism has become a fact of everyday life for most people (Fishman and Garcia, 2010). In particular, countries in South Asia find it more challenging to establish a sound socially and politically agreeable

languages policy due to the cultural diversity that impacts linguistic unity (Kachru, 1998). Sri Lanka's ethno-cultural setting and governance structures too have led to complexities over the existing languages policy. However, since 2009 when the 30 year old civil war ended, the existing political movements in the country focused on 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' (Swabhasha- mother tongue) as the official languages and 'English' (Vibhasha- foreign tongue) as the link language for social reconciliation. At a juncture where thirty years (1956 to 2015) have passed

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Since Sinhala was made the official language, and twenty seven years (1988 to 2015) have elapsed since the Tamil language was declared as the official language after the 13th amendment to the 1978 Republican Constitution, the effectiveness of the current languages policy has opened up a vital scholarly discussion. The Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (LLRC), the main commission established to investigate post-war reconciliation, in 2011 has advocated rigorous accountability for 'language rights' as an essential step towards ethnic harmony. Also, the 'National Languages Project (NLP)' under the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration (MNLSI) in Sri Lanka has taken actions to attend to Official Languages Policy (OLP) vigorously (MNLSI: Annual Performance Report, 2013).

The Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS), vital in public administration, and consisting of 2206 officers (Ministry of Public Administration and Management, Sri Lanka, 2015<sup>1</sup>), is one of the permanent government services responsible for the effective implementation of government policies. The Administrative Services are regulated by the administrative policies enforced by the Public Service Commission of the government. In addition, the Service is accountable for front-line workers employed in nine (9) Provinces, twenty five (25) Districts and three hundred and thirteen (313) Divisional Secretariats that cover central to regional administration. The overall objective of the Administrative Service is providing state-administrative services to satisfy citizens and empowering the Service to achieve government development goals. Therefore, the Administrative Service is vital for implementing the OLP as well.

In this context, the OLP in Sri Lanka is crucial in bilingual administration and maintaining a linguistically skilful workforce in all institutional layers. However, despite a number of measures adopted for improving the OLP over three decades, measurable improvement has not been achieved. The language training programs offered are irregular and the linguistic applications at the administrative infrastructure are poorly organized. The findings from the Official Languages Commission (OLC) on the OLP confirmed through their survey of 50 government institutions, that linguistic awareness among all categories of public servants was not up to the expected standards. In parallel, the public awareness of language rights remains at a very low level (Official Languages Commission, 2009).

**Research Question:** *How does the Administrative Service in Sri Lanka contribute to languages policy implementation?*

To answer the research question, the way in which language policy has been adopted and implemented by

the Administrative Service will be examined. The study demonstrated the need for establishing attitude and skills transformation of the administrators in order to ensure the productive delivery relevant to the OLP. Not only the empirical examination vital for up-to-date knowledge but also the study aims to make a significant contribution to the limited literature that exists on the OLP in Sri Lanka.

This paper examines the contribution of the Administrative Service to the effectiveness of the OLP by examining aspects of the implementation of the policy. The paper has concentrated on three main aspects in the discussion. They are as linguistic competency of Administrative Service officials, the mind-set change and other procedural and human resources availability. In doing so, the paper highlights the strengths, and also challenges that impede effective policy implementation.

The paper is organized in two main sections. Firstly, relevant current research in the area of languages policy is reviewed. Secondly, a pertinent methodological approach, content analysis and a qualitative semi-structured questionnaire selected for data analysis is presented. The subsequent section will focus on the explanation of the key findings and how the Administrative Service has contributed to the current language policy. Finally, the policy implications are drawn focusing on different layers of the operations of the Administrative Service and by speculating optimal balance of the public institutions and citizens in order to ensure effectiveness of the OLP.

### **Conceptualizing languages policy**

This section discusses the theoretical base of the language policy within plurilingual societies using 'language pluralism' which deals in establishing social integration. It is understood that public attitude to language is central for genuine social reconciliation to occur in practice. Using pluralist approaches can establish structural assimilation as a solution for divided societies (Bar-Tal and Bennink, 2004). However, the process would be highly flawed if explicit consideration of recognizing language specific identity of the individuals in society is not done.

The world literature shows how language pluralism is important for social integration. For example, Rwanda's multilingual policy has been successful in post-genocide reforms (Shamsuddin, 2010). Furthermore, some countries such as the United States, Canada, India and many East Asian States have enforced 'language reconciliation' by including minority languages into education system. In the 'rights based approach' language is considered a 'fundamental right' (UNESCO, 2007; Sen, 2004) for promoting social justice of a society. Looking at the Singapore's language policy, those explicit actions and linguistic preference has considered 'English' actions and linguistic preference has considered 'English' as the language for the attaining economic development.

<sup>1</sup>Ministerial portfolio change from 'Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs' to 'Ministry of Public Administration and Management' since 2015 with the elected new government.

Furthermore, language is considered a medium for communication therefore it naturally becomes a societal resource. And in societies which have multiple languages, the language can act as an important means for an individual identification, that is, people's access to their own cultural tradition and their distinctive religious and political representation. These arguments show how 'language' is used for social, economic and political developments of different countries. However, in Sri Lanka there is less corpus planning and more implicit policy applications evident (Coperahewa, 2009). Thus, one can argue how policy level inefficiency negatively results on outcomes.

### ***Languages policy in Sri Lanka***

The paper identifies two main aspects of the evolution of Sri Lanka's OLP. The aspects are based on: a) historical evaluation of the language policy and regulations from the British colonial period and b) ethnic and socio-political debate on the application of the OLP.

The ethnic diversity of the country, that is, 'Sinhala' as the majority and 'Tamil' as the largest minority aligns their choice of 'mother tongue' to ethnicity. Since the independence of Sri Lanka in 1948, changing political obligations have manipulated ethnic interests for political power gain which has caused negative impact on social integration (Uyangoda, 2011). The OLP established in the Republican Constitution of 1978 recognized 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' languages as official languages. Various judicial and legislative provisions were enacted thereafter to stabilize social integration efforts. One can argue how these developments over more than six decades have had very little contribution towards social harmony. There are several reasons for this argument. Foremost, the 30 years war in Sri Lanka limited proper implementation of the OLP. And also, the various political interests pertaining to political parties impacted negatively on stable language policy implementation.

As the key objective of the study is to examine how the OLP is functioning in the Administrative Service, several limitations have been identified for limiting preference to the OLP rules. The following three sections will elaborate how the language policy is practiced in Sri Lanka. The sections are: a) language and ethnic identity, b) government provisions related to official languages policy and c) promoting 'English' language as the 'link-language'. However, when investigating these debates, there are significant overlaps and crosscuts evident.

### ***Language and the ethnic identity***

Sri Lanka consists of a population of 20.3 million that consist of 74.9% of Sinhala, 11.2% of Sri Lanka Tamils, 4.2% of Indian Tamils, 9.2% Muslims and 0.5% of other ethnic groups (Central Bank of Sri Lanka, 2013). The

studies on group vitality have shown how ethno-linguisticity identified within a number of factors, that is, economic status, ascribed status, socio-historical status and language status (Giles et al., 1977). Sri Lanka not being an exception, the languages policy has stemmed from colonial economic and political history (De Silva, 2001). The ethno linguistic economic status in year 1921 was held by middle-class Tamils, while 76% of the Sinhala population held 46% of the selected professions like, law, medicine, engineering and surveying and 13.3% of the Tamil population held 31.9% share of the selected professions (Dharmadasa, 1993). This shows that the disproportionate economic dominance based on ethnicity and linguistic skills favored Tamils naturally in the professional environment. This led the Sinhala community to adopt numerous changes for improvement of new forms of Sinhala culture in post-colonial policies. A number of changes to the languages policy since the early 1950s indicates dominance of Sinhala nationalistic views when deciding the policy implementation.

### ***Government provisions***

An individual preferring mother tongue is identified by de Silva (2001) as 'linguistic nationalism'. The gradual evolution of language pluralism was obstructed in 1956 when the government introduced 'Sinhala' as the sole language. In parallel, the administrative institutions and policies, that is, Official Languages Department, Cabinet memoranda and administrative circulars made 'Sinhala' the medium of instruction. As a result there was a drastic reduction of 60% in the number of Tamil employees in the public sector between 1956 and 1970 (Brown and Ganguly, 2003). Similar results occurred in the clerical service, engineering and medical services and in the Armed forces (Skanthakumar, 2008). However, the 1958 Tamil Language Act (Special Provision) enable Tamils to use their mother tongue for prescribed administrative purposes, that is, all administrative purposes in the North and the East without prejudice for the OLP (2008).

The legal, judicial and administrative functions in quasi-translation was allowed in the 1972 Constitution enabling language rights in the Chapter III (Nanayakkara, 2006) and the second republican constitution in 1978, stated linguistic rights in chapter IV by granting 'Tamil' official status. The 13<sup>th</sup> amendment of the 1978 constitution has considered both Sinhala and Tamil language in the public sector by enabling 'sufficient knowledge on any language' within a 'reasonable time' as a qualification for employment in public services. The 16<sup>th</sup> amendment in 1988 has positioned bilingual administration in all nine provinces. The OLC established in 1991 as a monitoring body of the OLP and the PA circular 03/2007 was useful in improving language competency of public officers. Simultaneously, the 'second language' competency for Administrative Service was considered obligatory in the PA circular 07/2007 -E/2/3/2/70 (Collure, 2008). It



provisioned language proficiency of Sinhala and Tamil within five years after recruitment. Moreover the Extraordinary Gazette No. 1779/16 in 2012 has established 41 Divisional Secretariats carrying 'bi-lingual position' which later increased to 71 Divisional Secretariats in year 2013 (OLC, 2013).

### **Promoting English**

Studies explain 'language struggle' has been manipulated over the 'language of the people', and which later stood against English speakers (Dharmadasa, 1993). English was used in education and administrative functions only among the middle class 'Anglicized' communities comprising less than 10% of the population, which consisted of middle-class Tamils, and a lesser number of Sinhala people employed in the public sector. Both communities were among the 'small group' governed by a larger group of non-English speakers (Fernando, 1997). The public movements were therefore neither in favor of 'language imperialism' that promoted 'English' nor of 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' bi-lingual approaches.

In the 1990s and afterwards the use of 'English' in education and professional spheres, particularly in private spheres has always been a unique topic. The ability to read in English among the population increased to 14% in 2001, the ability to write increased to 30.5% and the ability to speak increased to 23.8% (Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2012). English being considered the 'link language' since the 1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka (1978 Constitution of Sri Lanka IV Chapter, 23 (1) and 24 (1)) and 'English' being the popular language in education and commerce improved English skills in society. A recent development being planned is linguistic integration by considering 'Sinhala' and 'Tamil' as official languages while recognizing 'English' as the 'link language' and the language for social skills. More recently the National Plan, aimed at eliminating language prejudice for establishing a culture of learning, argues that 'English' suits various categories of learners, that is, education, State and non-State sector employment which can benefit the country's social integration in the long run (National Plan for Trilingual Sri Lanka, 2012).

### **METHODOLOGY**

The paper utilizes a qualitative analysis with the use of secondary data and primary data gathered through a qualitative semi-structured questionnaire. Hence the analysis creates an optimum background for pragmatic exploration of the implementation of language policy in the Administrative Service. The analysis collects different opinions about 'language preference' to better understand how 'language' is socially preferred and administratively functioned in Administrative Service in Sri Lanka. The analysis moves as a step-by-step approach for understanding "*how the OLP is implemented and to decide on factors that contribute towards better implementation in the Administrative Service*". The questionnaire is confined within the administrative structure of the government

focusing on the essential institutional levels that is, Ministerial, Departmental, Provincial and Divisional levels in the Service. The author requires a systematic and meaningful analysis to proceed with the 'rich rigor' to understand the depth of the issue. Also the inductive logic for reasoning number of vital issues explore the reality.

The paper uses heavily the conceptual framework supported by Fishman and Garcia's (2010) 'Handbook of Language and Ethnic Identity' and Spolsky's (2004) 'Language Management' for understanding the language policy of a multicultural society. The contextual analysis brings various explanations, ideas and views into a single text. The use of a number of secondary sources, that is, annual reports, government policy procedures, circulars and official databases, book chapters and journal articles have been detailed in contemporary procedural examination of the OLP in Sri Lanka. Some of the vital facts are gathered from selected three special reports of the Official Languages Commission in Sri Lanka (OLC), that is, The Memorandum of Recommendation (2005), Language Resources Need Assessment (2007, 2008) and Annual Report (2010). This has ensured a recent analysis for the study. Furthermore, to capture the demography of districts and language fluency, sources such as Population and Housing data by the Census and Statistical Department Sri Lanka (2012), Lessons Learned and Reconciliation Commission (President Secretariat of Sri Lanka, LLRC Report, 2011) and National Plan for Trilingual Sri Lanka (2011) are examined.

In order to enlarge the thematic saturation, the paper on 'The Language Planning Situation in Sri Lanka' (Coperahewa, 2009), and 'Language Rights in Sri Lanka' (Skanthakumar, 2008) are referred. In addition, several important papers published by the Law and Society Trust, Sri Lanka and data tables, circulars, procedures, information on linguistic trainings provided by the Ministry of Public Administration and Management and the data on language trainings provided by the Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) are among vital secondary sources scrutinized in the discussion.

Importantly, the qualitative semi-structured questionnaire deployed to n=80 SLAS officers who were involved in the administrative decision-making has been used. The officers have been targeted in the assessment for examining the level of linguistic skills and perceptions related to language policy implementation related to administrative functions. The questionnaire is set under five (5) main categories, that is, a) demography, b) languages competency, c) procedures on official languages policy, d) workplace capacity and e) use of languages for customer service.

The questionnaire captured the satisfaction in a four level Likert scale from the range most satisfied to least satisfied with regard to officers' trilingual skills, availability of signboards, name-boards and direction boards in three languages, correspondence in all three languages, translation facilities and complaints management. These areas have been identified for investigation after reviewing the OLC languages audit reports. The questionnaire was pre-tested among 10 administrative officers who participated in the 'Capacity Building Program' during the month of March, 2014 at SLIDA. The targeted groups were participating in the SLAS class I and class III, *Capacity Building Program* during May to August, 2014 at SLIDA and this was a purposive sample. The respondents were from grade I and III levels - in other words from middle to senior level administrators. Among the respondents, 37 and 35 officers, respectively have 7 and 14 years of experience at the Administrative Service. The data revealed that those respondents are from all nine (9) provinces with representation of seventeen (17) out of twenty five (25) districts. The population representing levels of institutions are 21.25% at Ministerial, 38.75% Departmental, 17.5% Provincial and 22.5% at Divisional. The sample consisted of 37 male officers and 43 female officers comprising ethnic representation as 68 (85%) Sinhala, 9 (11.25%) Tamils and 3 (3.75%) Muslim. Hence, there were 68 whose mother tongue is Sinhala and 12 whose

mother tongue is Tamil. At the second stage,  $n = 10$  individuals were interviewed to gather more elaborative answers on the OLP implementation and their role within. The focus group interview has been carried among 4 Sinhala, 3 Tamil and 3 Muslim officers.

There were few limitations in the data collection. The sample did not consist of respondents from Killinochchi, Mannar, Vavuniya, Mullathivu, Ampara, Puttalam, Polonnaruwa and Monaragala districts. This become a natural constrain as Administrative Service recruitment is based on a competitive examination and not upon district representation. The first six districts are largely Tamil populated. The entire data collection was limited to four (4) months, restricting the author to pursuing the questionnaire for a wider audience covering all twenty five districts. In addition, the survey data and results of language audits of the OLC were up to year 2010 only. However, the focus group discussion among the  $n=10$  officials have enable us to gather some qualitative answers related to the above 5 categories to make a balance interpretation on ethnic perceptions of the languages policy implementation.

The data gathered was analyzed in strata analysis-statistical software. Particularly, those open-ended questions were coded under number of themes for percentage calculation. Overall percentages of each five categories were presented individually and in cross-examination. The discussion has enabled the building of a casual relationship between the linguistic skills and administrative functions that result in better policy implementation. In addition the discussion explores some vital challenges for future discussion and policy improvement.

The following conceptual framework (Figure 1) supports the main discussion of the paper. The framework is based on two main themes that is, administrative functions and linguistic skills. The first theme on *administrative functions* consist of : i) availability of signboards, name-boards and direction-boards in all three languages, ii) accessibility for information in the mother tongue, iii) availability of a language officer and iv) availability of translators. The second theme on *linguistic skills*: i) language trainings, ii) bi-lingual skills with reference to Sinhala/Tamil, iii) bi-lingual skills with reference to mother tongue and 'link language' (Sinhala and English/Tamil and English) and iv) Trilingual skills (Sinhala/Tamil/English). These two themes are legislatively provisioned and placed as policies in the administrative circulars. Furthermore, the two themes are procedurally inter-related and interdependent for each other's' development.

The following discussion demonstrates the change of ethnic composition within the population and the linguistic skills within. By examining the geographical changes of such demography the paper attempts to ascertain the trends of literacy and ethnic distribution which emerged from 2001 to 2012. The paper also attempts to recommend how the Administrative Service can deliver their services effectively by understanding the current population trends, facilitating the OLP.

## DISCUSSION

### Examining the current population trends

With reference to the analysis on the demography and language skills, Table 1 elaborates the landscape of the ethnic distribution which is compared to language fluency of the population. As can be seen, there is widespread and diverse population distribution with regard to ethnicity in all districts. However, it should be noted that some ethnic groups are over represented in their spread within and across the districts. The table shows a comparison of population in 2001 and 2012, while the population of

the Northern and the Eastern provinces is not available due to data unavailability in 2001. The table clearly shows an increase in the Muslim population, whose mother tongue is 'Tamil' in all districts. The significant increase of Sri Lankan Tamils in Western and Southern provinces, particularly Gampaha, Kalutara, Kandy, Galle and Matara districts and Indian Tamils in Nuwara Eliya is evident. Also, the Sinhala population has increased in Colombo, Kandy and Matale districts and all districts in North Central and Uva provinces while a stability or slight decrease in other districts. The table has excluded the population of Malays, Burghers and other communities consisting 0.5% in the total population.

Moving from population distribution to literacy, Sri Lanka demonstrates the highest rate of literacy in South Asia by recording 91.2% (UNDP, 2013). The trilingual competencies on the other hand from year 2001 to 2012 with reference to the ability to speak in Sinhala shows a significant decrease from 92.9 to 86.9% and the ability to read and write decreased from 81.8 to 79.4%. Conversely during the same period the Tamil speaking population increased from 20.3 to 28.8% and the ability of writing in Tamil increased from 14.9 to 26.5%. Similarly, English speaking skills increased from 14.4 to 23.8% and the ability to read and write in English increased from 17.1 to 30.5% (Department of Census and Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2001, 2012). Evidently the change in the literacy pattern is consistent with demographic patterns (Table 1) and improvements in language education in Sri Lanka. The availability of data pertaining to the Northern and the Eastern parts of the country in 2012 has directly impacted the increase in the total Tamil population that shows increased Tamil literacy. In addition the wide-spread use of Tamil language in the school curricula contributed to the increase in the use of the Tamil language.

As to the Trilingual National Plan executive summary (2011) the absolute need for the future generation to be able to communicate in three languages is highlighted as a vision for the country.

Therefore achieving bi-lingual and tri-lingual literacy matters greatly to government policy implementation. When examining the language competency, Sri Lanka's education system plays a vital role. Bi-lingual education since 2001 has mandated learning the first language L-1 (Sinhala/Tamil) learning the second language L-2 (Sinhala/Tamil) and the link language (English) compulsory from grades 6 to 11 through the teaching of reading, writing and speaking in these languages. Moreover, the government initiatives 'English as a life skill' introduced in 2008 has encouraged English for professional education. English has also become the most favored language in Sri Lanka for higher education and professional education (Fernando, 1997; Coperahewa, 2009).

An interesting observation is the way in which Sinhala literacy has decreased as a result of Sinhala ethnic population decrease or remaining stable in several areas

**Table 1.** % of ethnic population distribution at provincial and district level: comparison of census in year 2001 and 2012

Province	District	Sinhala%		Sri Lankan Tamil%		Indian Tamil%		Sri Lankan Muslims%	
		2012	2001	2012	2001	2012	2001	2012	2001
Western	Colombo	76.7	76.6	10.0	11.0	1.2	1.1	10.5	9.0
	Gampaha	90.6	91.0	3.5	3.2	0.5	0.4	4.2	3.8
	Kalutara	86.7	87.1	2.0	1.2	1.9	2.7	9.2	8.7
Central	Kandy	74.3	74.1	5.2	4.1	6.1	8.1	14	13.1
	Matale	80.7	80.1	5.1	5.5	4.9	5.3	9.1	8.7
	Nuwara Eliya	39.6	40.2	4.5	6.5	53.2	50.6	2.5	2.4
Southern	Galle	94.3	94.4	1.4	1.1	0.5	0.9	3.6	3.5
	Matara	94.3	94.2	1.1	0.7	1.5	2.2	3.1	2.9
	Hambantota	97.1	97.1	0.4	0.4	0.0	0.1	1.1	1.1
North Western	Kurunegala	91.4	91.9	1.2	1.2	0.2	0.2	7.1	6.5
	Puttalam	73.6	73.7	6.3	6.8	0.3	0.3	19.3	18.8
North Central	Anuradhapura	90.9	90.7	0.6	0.7	0.1	0.1	8.2	8.3
	Polonnaruwa	90.6	90.4	1.8	2.0	0.3	0.1	7.2	7.5
Uva	Badulla	73.1	72.4	2.5	3.8	18.4	18.4	5.7	5.0
	Moneragala	94.6	94.5	2.2	1.4	1.0	1.9	2.1	2.0
Sabaragamuwa	Ratnapura	87.1	86.8	5.1	2.8	5.8	8.1	2.0	2.0
	Kegalle	85.6	85.9	2.4	1.9	5.0	5.6	6.9	6.4
North	Jaffna	0.6	na	98.9	Na	0.1	na	0.4	0.4
	Mannar	2.0	na	81.3	Na	0.4	na	16.2	Na
	Vavuniya	10.0	na	82.4	Na	0.8	na	6.8	Na
	Mullaitiuv	9.6	na	86.0	Na	2.4	na	1.9	Na
	Killinochchi	0.9	na	97.0	Na	1.5	na	0.6	Na
Eastern	Ampara	38.7	39.9	17.4	18.4	0.0	0.1	1.1	1.1
	Batticalo	1.2	na	72.6	Na	0.2	na	25.5	Na
	Trincomlee	27.0	na	30.6	Na	1.7	na	40.4	Na

Source: Data available from the Department of Census and Statistics, Sri Lanka in year 2001 and 2012.

including in four provinces that is, Western, Central, North Central and Uva, out of total of nine provinces. It is however unrevealed how there may be other reasons contributing to the decay in Sinhala literacy.

Importantly, these observations provide an insight on the differences in the progress of the overall development of linguistic proficiency and demographic gains in the whole island. These changes have resulted in the Administrative Service making bilingualism compulsorily and being trilingual an effective alternative approach. The Administrative Service becomes important for a variety of administrative reasons. Their answers to the question on why OLP is important, the following says:

*'An administrator plays multiple roles: starting from merely handling the grievances of a villager on his or her land dispute, to a complex matter related to resolving a development issues. A divisional administrator is recognized as the first point of contact within the division and generally deals with every individual. Their roles and responsibilities are not merely an administrative task but varying of management aspects and good governance. The activities are opened to the public and therefore an administrator's linguistic skills become an essential component for better service delivery'. (Interviewee 51)*

On the other hand, considering the overall linguistic skills

of the country, it shows an increased number of people having trilingual skills and least with bilingual fluency. This is a strong sign for understanding the gradual shading of deep 'monolingual' attitudes of people. The citizens often deal with the Administrative Service and therefore may expect the service to be able to operate in their own language when interacting with these institutions.

The need for being a 'bilingual' institution thus becomes very important. Not surprisingly, the initiation since mid-1990s to establish bilingual administrative divisions was called upon by Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga when she was the president of Sri Lanka during 1994 to 2005.

This initiative focused on how best an institution can serve the ethnic population of a given territory while considering language needs.

However a discussion held in 2013 between the OLC and the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs explained the weak status of those 41 bilingual divisions when establishing 71 divisional Secretariats to work as bi-lingual divisions by 2014. Establishing bi-lingual administration has been provisionally provocative while actual functioning become problematic. An interviewee from Trincomalee district<sup>2</sup> says:

*'I am a Tamil officer. The majority in my district is Tamil speaking. But since there are Sinhala people too we work in both languages. Tamils and Muslims who come to our office speak either Sinhala or Tamil. Especially when I see them I communicate in Tamil and they respond to me in Tamil. It is because our mother tongue is the same. If any of my Sinhala colleagues at the office meet a Tamil who cannot communicate in Sinhala, I mediate in translating the dialogue. We have Sinhala and Tamil administrative practices. But there are more resources needed if we are to perform better, such as language translation officers, and effective computer software applications. However, we have never received any complaint on a language rights violation. It is not because the language rights are fully established but we are mutually agreeing about each other's' competencies and do not consider not knowing either Sinhala or Tamil a weakness'. (Interviewee, 43)*

### **Languages policy and procedures in the Administrative Service**

As explained, addressing demographic changes in Sri Lanka is crucial for the government to perform in a new direction. The Administrative Service consists of government Ministries, Departments, Provincial Councils and Divisional Secretariats which have their own

programs for promoting linguistic skills aligned with the OLP. As to the former Chairman, the OLC said:

*'The government should ensure all new entrants to the public service are either proficient or attain an adequate degree of proficiency in the second official language relevant to their functions, and enabling an incentive payment for the public servants who acquire proficiency in the second language'. (Collure, 2008: 38)*

Admittedly, a number of vital government circulars have been issued to ensure the improvement of language proficiency of the public sector officials, that is, no.36/92, no.28/97, no. 03/07 and 07/07 (I, II, III, IV). These have legitimized the need of second language proficiency of officials.

The Table 2 shows the recruitment of the Sri Lanka Administrative Service (SLAS) grade III officers that is, 'SLAS cadets' with reference to mother tongue. The recruitment of SLAS grade III is two-fold. One is the 'open competitive examination' for those between the ages of 22 to 30 with a Bachelors+ Degree, and also meeting other specified criteria. And the second is the 'limited competitive examination' for those who have been in the government services for more than 5 years and meet with criteria and can apply and be selected in the same way as per the open competitive examination. Both these recruitment methods will not take place annually, but yearly recruitment will take place through 'open batch' intake only. However as a special provision of the government in 2012, for the first time there was a Northern and Eastern batch known as the 'special batch' comprising 109 persons, who were recruited based on the ethnicity. The batch consists of a large number of Tamil speaking officers and of 29 Sinhala persons. They were recruited for the purpose of deploying them for Northern and Eastern reconstruction purposes (Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs, Sri Lanka, 2012).

According to Table 2, three types of intakes are noteworthy. Table 2 also shows how, in every intake, 90% of the batch consisted of Sinhala persons, except in the open and limited batch in 2007 that consisted of 82.29% Sinhala and 17.71% Tamil and Muslims. The intake of open, limited and Northern and Eastern batches in 2012 resulted in 78.08% Sinhala and 21.62% Tamil and Muslims.

After the recruitment the officers are promoted to grade III, to grade I and special grade based on their year of experiences and performance. The language competency of the grade III officers is bound with the PA circular 07/2007 (II) for acquiring the required level of second language and link language skills as a pre-requisite within 5 years after the appointment. Such a level of language proficiency stands at three levels, simple pass or above for the second language and (or) optional language examination at the General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level (G.C.E. O/L), pass in the test of secondary

<sup>2</sup> Trincomalee district in the Eastern province shows a vivid picture of the ethnic representativeness of the population. It consist Sinhala 28.97%, Muslims 40.42%, Sri Lankan Tamil 30.55%, Indian Tamil 1.73% and other 0.33% (Census and Statistics, 2012).

**Table 2.** Recruitment of Sri Lanka Administrative Service grade III officers with reference to ‘mother-tongue’ representation.

Batch Type	Year	Sinhala	Sinhala %	Tamil	Tamil %
O	2006	256	90.78	26	9.22
O/L	2007	79	82.29	17	17.71
O	2008	-	-	-	-
O	2009	121	92.37	10	7.63
O/L	2010	172	99.42	1	0.58
O	2011	-	-	-	-
O/L and North Eastern batch	2012	260	78.08	72	21.62
O	2013	155	91.18	15	8.82

O- Open Batch, L- Limited Batch and North Eastern batch in 2012. Source: The Data available at the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs and Sri Lanka and Sri Lanka Institute of Development Administration (SLIDA) on batch-wise in every year.

or preliminary levels language course at the Official Languages Department (OLD). As to PA circular 03/2007 (03.02) those levels are combined with an incentive payment to enhance the productivity of the officials. In addition, the second language and link language proficiency is tested among SLAS at each 1 and 2 Efficiency Bar Examinations which are held by the Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs. However, one can be exempted from the second language examination if he or she passes second language or optional language in Sinhala/Tamil at the G.C.E. O/L and with successful completion of the preliminary or higher language course of the OLD. Furthermore the proficiency at the English test is exempted when one holds a simple pass or above for English language in the G.C.E. O/L (Sri Lanka, Ministry of Public Administration and Home Affairs, 2014). In order to support language training, SLIDA conducts training for Tamil and English language skills development at every intake of the grade III officers. Some of the trainings institutions such as the OLD and the National Institute of Language Education and Training (NILET) have become important for regular trainings for bi lingual literacy of the public sector. In addition to this the widespread awareness of these trainings and related policy implementation has been constantly encouraged by the Ministry of National Languages and Social Integration of Sri Lanka.

With reference to workplace capacity to support the OLP and use of language for effective customer service, preferably, the PA circular No. 15/90 advocates ‘national ethnic proportions’, at the provincial level with the provincial ethnic proportions and at the district level with the district ethnic proportions at public sector recruitment. The proportion for the Sinhalese community is to be 75% of the total number of vacancies. Tamils, persons of Indian origin and Muslims shall be selected for 12.7, 5.5 and 8% of vacancies, respectively and if there is a difficulty in determining the exact numbers, a variation of

minus or plus 2% is permissible. However, in the *Ramupillai case*<sup>2</sup> the OLC was in an opinion to highlight the importance of effective training for linguistic skills rather than ethnic quota recruitment.

*“Creating an auxiliary service to assist the Administration in Serving the Tamil speaking citizens including with steps to compromise persons proficient in Tamil language is necessary.”* (Collure, 2008: 41).

The qualitative questionnaire conducted in the study for cross validating linguistic skills and administrative functions shows the inter-relationship of both the aspects. Figure 1 explains the linguistic fluency of officers at Ministerial, Departmental, Provincial and Divisional levels. It explicates the high proportion of ‘Sinhala monolinguals’ as the largest group and how English has become a prominent preference. Data reveals an improvement of Tamil literacy among the sample of  $n = 80$  calculating 40%. This is a significant improvement when the sample consisted of 12 officials whose mother tongue is ‘Tamil’. In contrast to the other three institutional layers, the Ministerial level of 35% reading, 25% writing and 20% speaking of Tamil showed the least performance. In addition, with reference to English fluency, except the divisional level other three institutional layers represent above 88%. However, the ability to speak in English at the divisional level remains at 80% as the lowest percentage among all four institutional layers. The percentage summed in Figure 1 show how language training has been effective in developing multilingual skills in administrative officers. However, Tamil still remains a shortcoming. This is explained in the following statement:

*‘I work at the divisional level and I am a Sinhala officer. My DS is largely Sinhala populated. The Tamil and Muslim population is less than 10% of the total population in the area. I normally do not have the opportunity to*

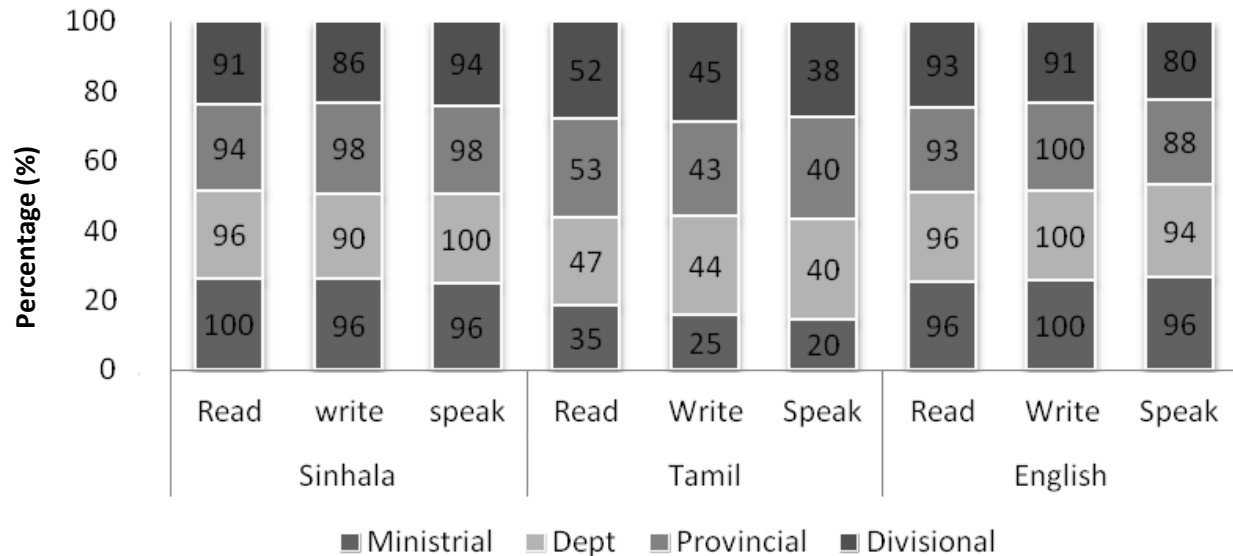


Figure 3. % of linguistic competency of officers in different government institutions.

*speak in 'Tamil' or in 'English'. My knowledge of both 'Tamil' and 'English' is weak. I think my working environment does not force me to learn any language other than Sinhala (laugh). But I do believe in the importance of learning a few other languages at this level. If I work at ministerial level, I think I will encourage myself to learn a language, but not at this divisional level'. (Interviewee, 26).*

The percentage value for the level of satisfaction regarding the sufficient number of officers with trilingual skills' has duplicated the findings explained in Table 3. It is evident that administrative officers are satisfied with having a sufficient number of trilingual officers larger among all four institutional layers calculating 35.39 to 76% in average. In spite of this Tamil literacy in all four institutional layers yet remains at an average of 50%. To reasonably justify such an occurrence, one may look at 'organizational culture' and the type of 'public audience' engaged with these institutions. The reality indicates the citizens that often come to these institutions are either Sinhala or Tamil with fluency in Sinhala. The OLC language audit explains 'what matters is not how fluent the officer is in the three languages but getting the job done' (OLC, 2009: 34).

The answer regarding the question on 'whether an officer agrees on mandatory implementation of the OLP', there were 41% responding as 'negative'. The reasons they have chosen 'English' as an alternative language, their customers are often being monolinguals, therefore no need of learning the second official language and more interestingly the choice to be a monolingual. However, majority of them have answered the protection for non-discriminatory provisional establishments in

Administrative Service. The idea is further elaborated when examining the following quote.

*'We have no obligation to implement languages policy although we consider it a valid initiative for removing language barriers. The language trainings we get are useful but what is more fruitful for society is our genuine concern and interest in learning languages other than the mother tongue. I find 'English' is more useful for my career persuasion and easy to learn. Therefore, I may concentrate on learning 'English' than learning 'Tamil'. (Interviewee, 70)*

In addition, by regularizing the chapter IV (on language) and Article 12 of the 1978 constitution on the 'non-discrimination' principle monitored by the OLC strict functioning of the OLP will include other aspects. The steps taken for all public institutions including Administrative Service to maintain signboards, name-boards and direction-boards in three languages are amongst the effort to develop linguistic friendly artifacts as a core administrative function aligned to the OLP. It aims to enable administrative functions pragmatically towards the OLP. However as to OLC, the situation related to signboards has not been so appalling (OLC: Language Survey, 2009). There was only an achievement of 55% in maintaining trilingual direction boards whereas 40.4 and 20.4% signboards and name-boards were done, respectively in Sinhala and Tamil. With reference to the findings of this study, it shows how 'satisfied' and 'fully-satisfied' with respect to all four institutional layers in maintaining signboards, name-boards and direction-boards. Conversely, the 'least-satisfied' percentage remains quite low. However, institutional wise, the least

satisfied percentage is still high at divisional level obtaining 26.09%.

Moreover, the official correspondence in all three languages that is, the correspondence received in anyone's preferred language of communication to be responded in the same language is preferred. The good performance is resulted at the Ministerial, Departmental and Provincial levels. In contrast at Divisional level performance remains low.

Furthermore, with regard to the availability of translation facilities, the performance is weaker at the divisional level with 34.78% of organizations having translation facilities. In the same scenario the 'satisfied' answers are highlighted by obtaining an average of 40 to 60% in all four layers. However, overall statistics show the 'fully-satisfied' is relatively low among all layers. In this regard, one senior SLAS officer says:

*'Are we encouraged to use machine-based translation tools in the administration system? I do not think we have much involvement to that. We simply use linguistically competent officer at difficult communication. We have cadre positions for language translators. Many of us take action to recruit a language officer than keeping our hands on the computer for translations. This is not only a question related to how much we are keen on protecting language provisions but also our mind-set change to use technological tools'. (Interviewee, 67).*

With a deeper analysis, the translation facilities used in the Administrative Service are seen as not merely institutionally generated but acquired with the facilitation provided by government institutions that enforce the OLP. These are the OLC certified sworn translators and combined service translators recruited island-wide and other instrumental resources, that is, typewriters, computers and software. Also, the e-government Sri Lanka which focuses on promoting OLP by proving bilingual software applications has enabled language translation in public institutes. More interestingly, as to the OLC in their survey of 50 public intuitions states:

*'The offices within the bilingual divisions lack minimum translation facilities such as typewriters and computers and if these resources are given, there is a high possibility that there would be better performance. Yet it is also important that these offices have sufficient human resources skills to work with these physical resources'. (OLC, 2009: 16-20)*

It is apparent that low levels of linguistic skills impact negatively on translation obligations. However, creating an auxiliary service to assist the administration for serving Tamil speaking citizens is considered a necessary step for bi-lingual administration (Collure, 2008: 41).

Importantly, the level of satisfaction on complaint management related to language rights violation indicates

a different viewpoint. In the performance, the fully-satisfied and satisfied levels remain significantly low and 'not-satisfied' increases up to an average of 47 to 60%. During the OLC regular supervision and monitoring of language violations in the public sector were less (OLC, 2013) and according to Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka there were only 80 recorded complaints at State level in year 2012 which were largely on monolingual name boards and public announcements in transport service (Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, 2012). Those reports have not highlighted Administrative Service 'language violations' separately. As to the OLC, the low level of public awareness on language rights (OLC, 2009) and critic on insufficient use of 'rights-based' approaches to claim language rights have reduced the number of claims from the public and also the lesser interest on 'language rights' constituted at institutional levels.

The OLC claimed 'language rights' argument simply highlights the subjective opinion of the individuals rather than a valid claim of injustice. The arguments also argue how the OLC's recommendations to the administrative leadership for better implementation of the OLP and facilitation for resources development become more important rather than mere complaints handling.

### Policy implications

The paper reveals the need for further improvement of both linguistic skills of administrators and facilities related to functioning of the OLP. This requirement is the single most important factor that directly impacts resolving issues on implementing the OLP. Some of the drawbacks identified in this study are the lack of proper execution of administrative functions related to language rights, prevailing negative public opinion and insufficient focus for up-skilling the linguistic competencies.

Therefore training of administrators should be given paramount importance. The proposed five-year period for acquiring a 'reasonable knowledge and skills' in the second official language is a valid proposition supported by research. However appropriate training and other support must be provided during the five years which is crucial for realistic achievements of linguistically competent administrators. Also, re-evaluating the skills within the five years incorporated with institutional commendation for those better performances should be encouraged. The training must constitute a hands-on-approach for language development and a series of supplementary professional development opportunities for capacity building, including change in attitudes to facilitate positive ethnic relations and effective communications.

With reference to the findings, the inefficient functioning of the 'bilingual' position of the divisional secretariats can be gradually rectified by expanding the language skill

based recruitment of auxiliary staff. To this end appropriate financial resources should be directed for establishing a consistent management of such initiatives. Within a restrictive range, selected translation software may be useful in supporting in managing linguistic deficiencies. More importantly, regular reviews must be placed at middle to senior management levels to ensure effective implementation of the OLP. Such reviews lead to open dialogues gradually removing the 'implicit' practices that hinder progress in policy implementation. It is worthwhile to note that the under-developed status of administration functions which are evident is largely not due to procedural errors but because of the administrator's skills and unawareness for grasping the real need of the service.

## Conclusion

The renewed interest in the OLP in Sri Lanka in the recent years appears to have made significant improvement in the policy framework and overall administrative infrastructure within the country. The findings highlight the influence of linguistic skills over physical assets for better administrative functions and vice versa. The progressive measures in language training have contributed to improved communication between administrators and the public by reducing language barriers. More collaboration between administrators has also been the result of the recent changes and which have benefited both Sinhala and Tamil monolingual citizens. The findings also reveal how the psychological affirmation of an individual becomes more important in any lasting reconciliation to take place. Hence it would appear that 'social integration' has relevant applications for facilitating the functioning of plurilingual societies to ensure stability and lasting peace.

On the findings pertaining to the three institutional layers that is, Ministerial, Departmental and Provincial levels – the use of both bilingual skills and 'English' as an alternative to monolingual practice is an innovative step for language pluralism which has emerged in the Administrative Service. The strengths of the OLP are several folds. As mentioned, the linguistic skills and the mind-set change, that is, 'language ideology' has positively contributed to policy adaptations and policy performance. However, the monolingual culture yet prominent at the divisional level was found to be attributed to a low level of physical assets and linguistic skills of officers. Decisively, the ethnic segregation at some administrative divisional territory (ies) propagates this issue and ambiguity pertaining to the OLP and was another major factor forefront in ineffective policy implementation.

In addition, lack of performances of administrators in a bilingual division, as a result of their inability to implement initiatives communicated through official circulars, can be

mitigated by an appointment of a 'bilingual' officer and the provision of resources. Overall, the results found that insufficient prominence given to complaints management on language rights and languages policy review needs to be addressed critically in future policy dialogue.

Given the enormous body of literature for understanding the comprehensive nature of the evolution of the OLP in Sri Lanka, the timely importance of the Administrative Service to support social cohesion is indisputable. As a result, for effective communication between people whose mother-tongue is different, the 'link' language is the best alternative. The paper limits its scope to understanding Administrative Service based on two themes. Nevertheless, the body of knowledge produced on how the Administrative Service supports the country's linguistic unity is critical and timely. The paper presents a significant theoretical and practical dialogue on how both linguistic skills and administrative functions conjointly are important in post-war Sri Lanka. Further progress can be expected to coincide with significant ideological shifts and avoidance of circular movements.

## Conflict of interest

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest

## End notes

1. *Sri Lanka Administrative Service* (SLAS) previously known as the *Ceylon Administrative Service* (CAS) is appointed as the permanent decision-making body for executive functions in the central government and the provincial councils of Sri Lanka. The officers are graded under four levels: grade III, II, I and special grade according to service experience recruited island-wide. Their responsibilities and roles are multiple in administrative aspects. When Ministry of Public Administration established in 1969 the responsibilities within Administrative Service has identified as a) enhance the efficiency of public service management, b) provide the state service for the satisfaction of the public and c) empower the public service to achieve development objectives set by the government.
2. The legal issue raised in the *Rampillai case vs. Fetus Perera*, Ministry of Public Administration, Provincial Councils and Home Affairs and Others, 1991 1 Sri LR 11 (SC).

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