

Diglossia versus Register: Discursive Classifications of Two Sinhala varieties

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Introduction

Though Sinhala is the native language of the majority Sri Lankan Sinhalese population, it consists of two contrastively defined varieties commonly referred to as ‘Colloquial’ and ‘Formal’ Sinhala. In categorizing spoken Sinhala into a ‘formal’ and ‘colloquial’ variety, past research (Gair 1968; DeSilva 1974; Paolillo 1997) draws primarily on Ferguson’s (1959, 1991) notion of diglossia where two related languages are lexically and grammatically distinct and prescriptively used in different social domains. Formal Sinhala includes elaborate nominal declensions and verbal paradigms and is the primary medium of bureaucratic and state-funded educational establishments. Colloquial Sinhala is the informal variety used outside of institutional settings with simplified tense, pronominal systems and a distinct lexicon. Problematizing diglossia theory’s reliance on axiomatic grammatical categories and discrete formal and informal social environments as well as prestige values, I utilize Agha’s (2007) recent reworking of register theory (cf. Biber & Finnegan 1994; Biber 1995; Milroy 2001) to move beyond diglossia’s dichotomous, top down classification system, at the expense of more dynamic approaches to language variety classification. Agha’s enregisterment model incorporates the sociohistorical contexts through which diglossic formations emerge, particularly prioritizing the role of discourse in creating, maintaining, or challenging diglossic systems.

The discourse I focus on in this study comes from interviews and ethnographic work with Sri Lankan university youth. While diglossia theory proves insufficient in depicting the way these youth mix ‘formal’ and ‘colloquial’ morphosyntactic features in the same social setting, Agha’s register approach to Sinhala optimally accounts for the specific dialogic effects speakers attach to linguistic features, suggesting such interdiscursive meaning combined with sociohistorical backgrounds of the varieties explains the registers’ composite recognition as divergent.

My work specifically builds on Agha (2007) in understanding diglossia maintenance and change through instances of specific discursive interactions, whereas previous enregisterment studies have relied on evidence from widely available public discourses. Also, I build on Sinhala language studies. While much descriptive linguistic research on these varieties exists, few studies have made use of natural speech samples and no strictly sociolinguistic study has considered the discursive construction of each variety.

1 Diglossia Revisited

Ferguson introduced the term diglossia, borrowed from the French term ‘diglossie’ (Marsais 1930), meaning ‘bilingualism,’ to describe two superposed but functionally differentiated ‘high’ and ‘low’ prestige varieties. Since Ferguson’s initial 1959 study of Arabic, Greek, German, and Haitian Creole diglossia scholars in a diverse range of fields (linguistics, anthropology, sociology, and education) have adopted this concept to study language variation (Bell 1976), language planning and maintenance (Fishman and Das Gupta 1986), language standardization and dialectology (Fasold 1984; Yaeger-Dror 1988), code switching, bilingualism, and language contact (Fishman 1967).

Table (1) below shows the criteria developed in Ferguson’s (1959) study to label ‘High’ (H) versus ‘Low’ (L) varieties. Notably, functional differentiation of H and L varieties is considered to be stable, reinforced through standardization of the H variety in grammars, dictionaries, and canonical texts. In addition, H varieties closely resemble older, written forms of a language as found in literary works. Because of such a resemblance, H varieties are typically more grammatically complex than L varieties (as indicated in the table below) and spoken in what Ferguson calls ‘formal’ settings, such as educational, state, and institutional establishments. L varieties are spoken ‘informally’ among family and friends and are acquired from parents. H varieties are learned in school and are collectively viewed as a more educated, prestigious, or correct way of speaking. Thus, H varieties are the prestigious variety and L varieties are usually not valued by the community, considered ‘bad’ or ‘uneducated’ language (Schiffman 1978).

(1) Table 1: Ferguson’s Diglossia Rubric

	High Variety	Low Variety
<i>Functional differentiation across social spheres</i>	Spoken in formal settings: educational, state, institutional, certain types of media	Spoken informally: among friends, family, outside of institutions
<i>Prestige</i>	‘High’ prestige value	‘Low’ prestige value

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<i>Literary Heritage</i>	The language of a large body of classical literature including canonical religious texts, ancient poetry, public speeches	No written records or literary cannon supporting this variety; much changed from written language
<i>Acquisition</i>	At school through education	Learned first at home from parents
<i>Stability through Standardization</i>	Standardized through grammars, dictionaries, canonical texts	Rarely standardized
<i>Structure (grammar, lexicon, phonology)</i>	More complex grammar; different lexicon (possible overlap); shared morphophonemics or comprising a Superset	Less complex grammar, different lexicon (possible overlap), shared morphophonemics or subset of H variety

Now revisiting some of diglossia's classification principles, I will focus on the issues of functional differentiated language use among 'formal' versus 'informal' social settings, prestige value of H and L varieties, and the limits of morphosyntactic repertoire categorizations. First, diglossia theory's prescriptive use of dichotomous formal/informal social settings, where formal settings predict the use of an H variety (Formal Sinhala) and informal settings predict the use of an L variety (Colloquial Sinhala) cannot account for the code mixing that speakers in my study exhibited. As Wilce (2010) notes, code mixing under Ferguson's model may either be interpreted as impossible, or unlikely due to the fact that codes are designated for fixed speech environments where violations would be so negatively valued, they would never, or rarely occur.

Moreover, approaching language with this initial taxonomic view of speech setting, formal versus informal, cannot explain differences in social meaning of the varieties cross-generationally. In other words, Ferguson's prestige scale conflates prestige with functional differentiation of varieties (including use across different settings), where institutionalized language is automatically labeled as more prestigious, overlooking speaker demographics, instances of covert prestige, and counter-valorizations of varieties. For certain groups of speakers, such as the youth I interviewed in this project, speech will indicate that the L variety, or Colloquial Sinhala, is in fact prestigious, valorized by youth who denigrate the formal, 'High' variety.

As the topics of social setting and prestige scales have been defined, by Ferguson (1959) and in subsequent studies, they also reflect a narrow methodological labeling that overlooks the crucial sociohistorical narratives and ideologies surrounding ‘varieties’ or ‘registers.’ Particularly, researchers have failed to treat what Agha (2007) calls ‘reflexive’ semiotic processes, processes that depict how linguistic units are valued, and which create and reinforce boundaries between use of H and L varieties (cf. Silverstein 1996; Agha 2002; Irvine and Gal 2000; Haeri 2003). Within the Sinhala literature especially the formal/informal division led researchers to identify and name two varieties of Sinhala as ‘Formal’ and ‘Colloquial.’ These quantifier free names depict a stereotypical assumption that the varieties are universally used in either a formal or colloquial setting. Without giving details on what counts as formal or colloquial, who uses which variety and when, the names also assume social settings fit into neat compartmentalized categories and that these categories apply across a range of locales. The names reify a false dichotomy for researchers as well as speakers. Without substitute names, for the present, I will continue to call each variety *formal* and *colloquial*, though the names of Sinhala varieties will be something I consider for future research.

2 The Sinhala Language: Morphology, Syntax, Lexicon

In addition, past Sinhala studies (DeSilva 1974, 1979; Gair 1968, 1998; Fairbanks et al 1986; Paollilo 1992, 1997) detail in abundance how the Colloquial variety is distinct from Formal Sinhala in several morphosyntactic ways (Table 2). Colloquial Sinhala nouns have a less complex declension, fewer cases, differences in semantic and syntax of cases, lack of subject/verb agreement, and simplified tense, mood, and voice when compared with Formal Sinhala. Formal Sinhala maintains subject/verb agreement in person, number, and gender and has complex nominal declensions reminiscent of the written, literary variety. Formal Sinhala also has a different lexicon than Colloquial for prepositions, conjunctions, pronouns, and deictics (Gair 1968). Additionally, because Formal Sinhala has evolved from an older, literary tradition which is closely related to the ancient Indo-Aryan languages of Sanskrit and Pali, many of its lexical items are not used in Colloquial Sinhala or are used in a changed form.

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(2) Table 2: Colloquial and Formal Sinhala

	Colloquial Sinhala	Formal Sinhala
<i>Nouns: Declension</i>	SG/PL	SG/PL MASC/FEM ANIM/INANIMATE
<i>Case</i>	NOM, ACC, DAT, GEN, INSTR, LOC	+ ABL, VOC, AUX
<i>Semantics of case</i>	1) LOC: place 2) ACC: patient subjects	1) LOC: time and place 2) INSTR: patient subjects
<i>Syntax of Case (Argument realization)</i>	INSTR: object/oblique	INSTR: subject/object/oblique
<i>Verbs: SV AGR</i>	-	+
<i>Tense</i>	NPRES, PRES	+ FUT, PER, IMPER
<i>Mood</i>	IND, IMP, OPT	+COND
<i>Voice</i>	Active	Active/Passive
<i>Word Order</i>	SOV	unfixed

While these structural differences are noteworthy, such a ‘repertoire-based’ perspective, a categorization of grammatical lexical, phonetic, and other structural ways the two language varieties differ (Agha 2007: 148), remains incomplete. These analyses fail to consider sociohistorical evidence, natural speech data, or the discursive construction of each variety. Without an initial sociohistorical study, they cannot explain how widespread functional differentiation contributed to the evolution of structural divergence or how such structures became associated with social practices at all. In answer to this, I give a brief introduction of the macro-social narratives identified with each variety in Section 3, followed by an analysis of natural speech samples in Section 4.

3 Sociopolitics: Cultural Preservation Versus Modernism

The story of the Formal and Colloquial varieties begins with past struggles of nationalism versus current moves for the state’s upward economic mobility. Ideologically, I characterize this as cultural preservation through Formal Sinhala versus modernism as attached to Colloquial Sinhala.

Formal Sinhala became an essential part of nationalist identity in the decades surrounding the country’s postcolonial independence (1930’s-1940’s). Sinhala

nationalists made policies targeting students as a vital demographic for cultural preservation in the face of modernism; and Formal Sinhala the vehicle of purism through which students could regain this idealized, pre-colonial way of life. Born from efforts to gain majority rule, such policies promoted discourses of ethnic nationalism, valorizing Formal Sinhala through a series of ‘Sinhala –only’ campaigns. These campaigns promoted Formal Sinhala as the premier language for all aspects of the newly formed, democratized and bureaucratized state. Throughout the 1940s, voices like future prime minister J.R. Jayawardene called for change in the official government language rallying before the State Council for Sinhala to replace British, Colonial English as the primary medium of government and state institutions. In 1956, Congressman Bandarnaike won the presidency on the ‘Sinhala-only’ platform, utilizing language policy as a way to cross cut class lines and unite the people with visions of a unified Sinhalese state (DeVotta 2003). Promising Formal Sinhala language instruction would lead to recovery of a lost culture and strengthen the bonds of statehood, the 1960s parliament began to fund schools where Formal Sinhala was the primary medium of instruction (Kearney 1967; Sharma 1988). These schools, unlike pre-existing, British- founded private schools, were made publically accessible to all demographic groups, and currently comprise the majority of primary and secondary educational institutions on the island. Thus, with increased government job opportunities and education institutions backing this variety, there has been a rise in country wide proficiency in Formal Sinhala and institutional proliferation of ideological associations between this ‘pure’ variety and cultural preservation.

However, while Sinhalese nationalists have repeatedly valorized Formal Sinhala, proclaiming student education in this variety essential (Dharmadasa 1993; DeVotta 2003), the Colloquial Sinhala variety has continued to make up a fundamental part of everyday language including use in casual conversations, social encounters outside of institutional settings, use on the internet (facebook pages), in media (i.e. TV dramas, pop radio shows), and particularly as a fundamental part of present day youth identity. Particularly, the state has allotted funds in the last 10 years to supplement Formal Sinhala medium classrooms with English language instruction in an effort to become more competitive in the global market and lend support to the country’s growing economic crisis. Thus, while more youth are gaining skills in English, this is at the expense of Formal Sinhala. In many ways the new cosmopolitan, youth student is associated not only with English, but with Colloquial Sinhala usage where a lack of Formal Sinhala education has robbed her of knowing any better.

Moreover, youth are using and engaging in Colloquial Sinhala in an increasing number of new media. With the spread of the internet, for example, and need for efficient transliterations of Sinhala text, youth have relied on the colloquial variety, adding inventive slang forms to its repertoire. Newer, youth-oriented TV and radio stations are competing with older, more established news stations and

news shows, broadcasting music videos and talk shows with youth speaking Colloquial Sinhala.

Such usages of Colloquial Sinhala are a hot topic for conservative nationalists who discuss youth proficiency in Formal Sinhala on radio and televised debates, suggesting how the government can continue to uphold this endangered, ‘pure’ language. Additionally, cultural sections of Formal Sinhala newspapers often host commentary with Sinhala scholars commenting on the way these usages ‘pollute’ the Formal Sinhala language that has survived seemingly unchanged for so many centuries. The colloquial language is charged with leading to the endangerment and extinction of the true Sinhala language and the heritage it carries with it (Dharmadasa 1993).

4 Nationalist Parodies: ‘Formal’ Usages in ‘Colloquial’ Encounters

Moving on to some examples of how you use Formal and Colloquial Sinhala, the following data comes from youth speakers in informal, conversational interactions. For the present study, I am tentatively labeling use of ‘formal’ language in **bolded font**, where surrounding *italic segments* constitute ‘colloquial’ language (as per past Sinhala morphosyntactic studies discussed in Section 2).

(3) Example 1

(a) Jayantha

<i>Mang</i>	<i>eyaaTə</i>	<i>MahindaTə</i>	<i>‘hi’</i>	<i>kiyanna</i>	<i>kiyuwa.</i>
1SG.	3SG.	Mahinda.	hi	say.	say.
NOM	DAT	DAT		IMP	PST

‘Tell him to say ‘hi’ to Mahinda for me.’

(b) Chathura

(voicing	<i>Ou</i>	<i>eyaa</i>	<i>kiyənəwa</i>	<i>ehe</i>	<i>iddi,</i>
Kavan)	yeah	3SG.NOM	say.NPT	there	stay.PST

‘Yeah, he says there,

(c) Chathura

(voicing	“Ayubowan	gauruwuniya	puthrəyaa.”
Kavan)	greetings	honorable	son

‘ “Greetings honorable, son.” ’

(d) Jayantha

(voicing the	“Bohoma	istuthi	<i>MAGE</i>	puthrəyaa.”
President	many	thanks,	1SG.GEN	son

‘ “Many thanks, MY son.” ’

Here Jayantha and Chathura engage in a casual conversation, constructing a dialog between their friend Kavan, newly appointed to a government post, and the president of Sri Lanka, Mahinda Rajapakse. The speakers use the realm of the state as the common component hypothetically linking the two characters. As Chathura plays the voice of Kavan, he parodies his friend's misuse of the formal variety. Meaning to greet the 'President' with a formal word equivalent to English *sir*, 'Kavan' instead calls the 'President' *puthrayaa* 'son' in line (3c) (an unlikely mistake since the 'colloquial' word for *son* is *puthaa*, a shortened version where the final morphology is dropped). Jayantha responds in line (3d), with the voice of the 'President' who points out 'Kavan's' mistake by calling 'Kavan' *puthrayaa* 'son.' With emphasis on the word *mage* 'my', the 'President' not only draws attention to 'Kavan's' misuse of a formal term, but uses a colloquial pronoun that contrasts with the surrounding formal speech, thus suggesting that Kavan requires a colloquial insert to understand his mistake.

Where diglossia research predicts resolute 'colloquial' speech, here youth are violating theoretical expectations by shifting into 'formal' features in an informal setting. Such code mixing seems to be directly related to how each variety is discursively constructed and representative of different ideologies. In other words, these speakers use the two varieties to achieve specific dialogic affects. They construct Formal Sinhala dialog in the midst of a Colloquial Sinhala conversation to parody the way a youth speaker uses the variety, which both detaches it from a youth character type and connects it to older, authoritative politician.

In Example 2, Priya, Sharmilla, and Buddhika discuss a friend who's father was a diplomat and knew the former Prime Minister, whom they think attended their friend's sister's wedding.

(4) Example 2

(a) Priya

<i>Oyaa</i>	<i>eyaage</i>	<i>thatha</i>	<i>diplomat</i>	<i>kennek</i>	<i>dannawa-də?</i>
2SG.	3SG.	father	diplomat	person	know.
NOM	GEN				NPT-Q

'You know his dad was a diplomat?'

(b) Priya

<i>Eyaa</i>	<i>Ranilwə</i>	<i>dannawa.</i>
3SG.NOM	Ranil.ACC	know.NPT

'He knows Ranil.'

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(c) Shar-

milla	<i>Mang</i>	<i>hitannə</i>	<i>Ranil</i>	<i>eyaa-</i>	<i>nana-</i>	<i>man-</i>	<i>aavə.</i>
				<i>ge</i>	<i>gige</i>	<i>galeyə</i>	
	1SG.	think.	Ranil.	3SG.	sister.	wed-	come.
	NOM	NPT	NOM	GEN	GEN	ding	PST

‘I think Ranil came to his sister’s wedding.’

(d) Buddhika

<i>Ou,</i>	<i>macho</i>	<i>doorə</i>	<i>langa</i>	<i>hitəgənnə</i>	<i>hitəyə.</i>
yeah	dude	door	near	stand.NPT	stay.
				.PART	PST

‘Yeah, dude was standing near the door.’

(e) Buddhika

(voicing	“ Karunawen	aathuləTə	<i>ennə,</i>	<i>sir.</i> ”
Shehan)	respectfully	inside.DAT	come.NPT	sir

‘ “Respectfully come inside, sir.” ’

(f) Buddhika

(voicing	“ <i>Buffet</i>	<i>ekəTə</i>	<i>meheng</i>	<i>innə.</i> ”
Shehan)	buffet	DEF.DAT	way	come.NPT

‘ “Come this way for the buffet.” ’

(g) Buddhika

(voicing	“ <i>Ah</i>	tharunayan	nithərəmə	ba-	
				laaporo<th>thuwa</th>	thuwa
R.W.)		youth	continue	expectation	

‘ “Ah, the youth continuously...

(h) Buddhika

(voicing	...vinaashə	<i>kəranəwa</i>	<i>naeae.</i>
R.W.)	destroy	do.NPT	NEG

...cease to disappoint.” ’

In lines (4e-h), Buddhika plays the voice of both his friend and the former Prime Minister of Sri Lanka, Ranil Wickremasinghe (R.W.), creating a scenario where his friend welcomes Mr. Wickremasinghe to a wedding. Similar to Example 1, here a youth speaker’s Formal Sinhala is being parodied where lines (4e-f) represent the voice of the friend and fellow classmate, Shehan. In line (4e), we see formal lexical items *karunawen aathuləTə* ‘respectfully inside’ being paired with a colloquial verb *ennə* ‘come.’ In line (4f), Shehan switches completely to Colloquial Sinhala, the humorous crux of this line resting on the word *buffet*, which

stands out amongst formal speech both because of the English usage, and Shehan's social faux faux of openly admitting that food is the way to the wedding guest's heart. Since in lines (4g-h) 'Mr. Wickremasinghe' expresses pleasure in Shehan's welcome, however, Shehan is excused for his 'rough' colloquial language that did not offend the 'Prime Minister' as evidenced by his reassurance using the expected Formal Sinhala in lines (4g-h).

Again, youth discourse is characterizing Formal Sinhala as the language of politics, characterizing a well-known political figure as the stereotypical speaker whose proper use of Formal Sinhala indicates this variety is not the language of a younger speaker, whose usage fails in comparison.

Looking briefly at one last example, we see that Formal Sinhala is not always used as the voice of politicians but can also be more generally associated with older, authoritative speakers:

(5) Example 3

(a) Manjula

<i>Nah, machang.</i>	<i>'Abey'</i>	nithərəmə
No	dude	Mr. Abeygunawardana
		say.PST.
		PRG

'No dude. 'Abey' used to say...

(b) Manjula

(voicing	"Mehe	enda,	mehe	enda,	mehe	enda."
Mr. A)	here	come.	here	come.	here	come.
		NPT.IMP		NPT.IMP		NPT.I
						MP

... "Come here, come here, come here." '

(c) Kenneth

(voicing	<i>"Aiyooooo,</i>	<i>umba</i>	<i>poda</i>	<i>sir."</i>
Mr. A)	EMP	2.SG.NOM	small	sir

' "Ooooh, you are a small one, sir." '

(d) Kenneth

(voicing	<i>"Ou,</i>	<i>mang</i>	<i>ithing</i>	<i>kallu."</i>
himself)	yes	1.SG.NOM	EMP	black

' "Yes, I am unworthy like that." '

(literally 'I am black')

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(e) Kenneth

(voicing *Nah machang. Mr. Abeygunawardana, sir...*
 Manjula) no dude Mr. Abeygunawardana sir
 ‘No, dude Mr. Abeygunawardana, sir...’

(f) Kenneth

(voicing **nithərəmə** “*Miina, miina, miina, miina.*”
 ki:u:wa,
 Manjula) say.PST. here here here here
 PRG come. come. come. come.
 NPT.IMP NPT.IMP NPT.IMP NPT.IMP
 ...used to say, “Com’ere, com’ere, com’ere.” ’

(g) Manjula

Me ithing.. umbage kallu ammi. Mang-
 well EMP 2.SG. black mommy 1.SG.NOM
 GEN
 ‘Well, this thing..your mother was unworthy. I-’

(h) Kenneth

Dhang ‘mang’? Dhang ‘mang’. Hella Basa, no?
 now 1.SG. now 1.SG. ‘true’ no
 NOM NOM language
 ‘Now you say ‘I’ (informally)? Now ‘I.’ (informally). Formal Sinhala, no?’
 (i.e. What about Formal Sinhala?)

In this example, Kenneth and Manjula are discussing an old school teacher. Manjula begins in line (5a-b) by correcting Kenneth’s impersonation, introduces his voicing of the teacher with the Formal Sinhala quotative *nithərəmə kiuwa* ‘used to say’ (5a), then using the Formal Sinhala that the teacher would have addressed them with. Kenneth responds in lines (5c-d) by continuing his impersonation, but note he is still using mostly Colloquial Sinhala. Then in line (5e-f), Kenneth turns to mocking Manjula. Using the formal morphology on the verb ‘say’ in (5f), he repeats Manjula’s *nithərəmə kiuwa* ‘used to say’ from (5a). Kenneth draws attention to the formal usages through elongated initial and medial vowels (*ki:u:wa* ‘say’). Asserting that Mr. Abeygunawardana would have said *miina, miina, miina* ‘com’ere, com’ere, com’ere,’ Kenneth mocks Manjula’s voicing of the teacher in Formal Sinhala (*mehe enda* ‘come here’) using an elongating vowel [i] to combine the Sinhala for ‘come here’ so that it becomes *mina* ‘com’ere.’ Manjula responds in line (5g) with an insult to Kenneth based on his

low birth not only mentioning his mother, but mirroring Kenneth's use of the pronoun *umba* 'you' in line (5c), which is a slang term used in derogatory social deixis (Tilakaratne 1988). Ignoring the insult, in line (5h), Kenneth instead highlights Manjula's use of the colloquial 1st person pronoun, *mang* 'I,' asking him why he is no longer speaking *Hella Basa*.

The use of this term specifically references nationalist language ideology. *Hella Basa* historically refers to a variety of literary Sinhala from the 13th century A.D. which was resurrected by nationalist discourses in the 1950s to refer to 'the true, heritage language' and is now largely interchangeable with Formal Sinhala (Dharmasada 1993). Kenneth's use of this term connects Manjula's Formal Sinhala to past nationalist discourses at the same time framing Formal Sinhala as the language of an older generation (with nationalist political leanings) to be mocked when used by younger speakers.

As in Example 1 and 2, Example 3 clearly shows that mixing of the two Sinhala registers occurs. Thus, the most straightforward question becomes *why?* Or, how are linguistic forms associated with readable ideologies? As suggested in Examples 1 and 2, these speakers are borrowing formal speech to parody other speakers using Formal Sinhala, more specifically their peers' shaky confidence in the variety. Distancing themselves from this variety, speakers portray authoritative figures, teachers and politicians as the voice of the formal variety, characters of the older generation who hold positions where they must comfortably use formal language and as such are stereotypically associated with the nationalist rhetoric. In Example 3, we saw that just as youth mock their peers' poor usage of Formal Sinhala, they can also denigrate their peers' proper usage, aligning themselves with the Colloquial variety. Kenneth's parody of Mr. Abeygunawardana, forcefully injecting colloquial speech into his mouth, not only rejects Manjula's correction, but also rejects Formal Sinhala.

These parodies, then, exhibit reflexive processes that indicate Formal Sinhala holds a different prestige value for different social groups. Judging from sociohistorical evidence (Section 3) where Formal Sinhala was widely esteemed in politics, the media, and educational institutions, by favoring Colloquial Sinhala, these youth are reanalyzing ideologies associated with registers of Sinhala. Such a cross-generational counter valorization, expresses the gap between older nationalists who were pushed to learn Formal Sinhala and youth who identify with the Colloquial variety. Contrary to widespread state institutional policies, these examples select Colloquial Sinhala as the prestige variety where use of 'formal' features results in parody or mocking.

5 Conclusion

What do these parodies of Formal Sinhala mean for diglossic classifications of Sinhala varieties? Straightforwardly labeling such parodies as either 'formal' or 'colloquial' based on diglossia's clear cut social settings with attributed prestige

values fails to accurately depict how youth operationalize 'formal' grammatical features as a speech type to characterize oppositional personas.

With the loss of social setting as a definitive classifier of H and L variety, diglossia's top down categorization of linguistic features is also questionable. Indeed, while labeling features 'formal' and 'colloquial,' I have maintained labeling based on past morphosyntactic studies, but come across speech which is not easily identifiable as formal and colloquial (see also Paolillo 1997). Documenting shared features between the varieties, then, is an important topic for further study which may additionally update diglossia theory. Expecting that some linguistic features are present in both varieties, speakers repeated use of 'formal' phrases in 'colloquial' settings can bi-directionally signal and cause the insertion of Formal Sinhala grammar into the colloquial variety. Such usage reclassifies and blurs the lines of grammatical classification for each variety, even if mixing begins only as limited register representation of certain stereotypical speakers.

By extension, researchers may be more accurate in considering that Formal and Colloquial Sinhala exist along a continuum. Clearly, the way speakers and listeners recognize and discursively assign value to linguistic features indicates the need for a less dichotomous, more dynamic model of classification than diglossia theory presently provides. Attention to sociohistorical ideologies and interactional reflexive language behavior reveals dynamic, emergent meanings which are as equally important as considering social setting and morphosyntactic categorization. Beginning with such a bottom up discursive approach recognizes language ideology as a motivating factor for variety classification where language can be reanalyzed and regrouped cross-generationally and in the name of ethnic or political identity, as is the case when this Formal Sinhala register is employed by this specific set of youth (Agha 2007). Thus, reframing methods of language classification to include discursive interactions speaks to central issues in the study of language variety, especially the traditional 'diglossic' classification of older, written linguistic forms versus newer, colloquialisms (c.f. Egyptian/ Modern Standard Arabic: Haeri 2003; Spanish/ Catalan: Pujolar 2001; Javanese/ Indonesian: Errington 1998).

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