



## Speaking Conflict: Ideological Barriers to Bilingual Policy Implementation in Civil War Sri Lanka

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*This article presents a holistic view of ideological barriers to bilingual policy implementation in Sri Lanka, a conflict-ridden postcolonial nation-state. I examine Sinhalese youth and adults' Tamil as a second language (TSL) learning and speaking practices across three contexts: a multilingual school, a program for government servants, and an NGO. Though limited interactional spaces emerge where Sinhalese students speak Tamil, bilingual policies continue to reinforce inequalities between the Sinhalese Buddhist majority and Tamil-speaking minority groups. [multilingual education, policy, language ideologies, ethnic conflict, Tamil, Sri Lanka]*

In postcolonial nations, language rights and access to education are often at the center of violent struggles for power and resources between majority and minority groups. In countries such as Mozambique, Rwanda, and Sri Lanka, language policy reforms in education played a substantial role in national peace-building and reconciliation efforts (Tawil and Harley 2004). I focus on Sri Lanka, a highly diverse postcolonial nation-state, which from 1983 to 2009 was ravaged by a civil war between the Sinhalese-majority Sri Lankan government and a Tamil insurgency group, the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). In the past two decades the Sri Lankan government has attempted to promote national cohesion and integration through bilingual policies in the nation's co-official languages, Sinhala and Tamil (Perera et al. 2004; Sørensen 2008). However, there is a significant gap between the aims of these programs and the on-the-ground norms and expectations of sociolinguistic conduct. Drawing on ethnographic research conducted in an ethnically diverse urban center (Kandy) in Sri Lanka during the last phase of the civil war (2007–2008), I holistically consider the ideological barriers to bilingual policy implementation in a complex and conflict-ridden postcolonial setting. I explore bilingual learning and speaking practices in three distinct contexts: a multilingual school, a training program for government administrators, and a peace-building nongovernmental organization (NGO).

Sri Lankans generally consider the population to be divided into three ethnic groups: Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims (see Table 1). Sinhalese, most of whom are Buddhists, make up the majority of the population. They speak Sinhala, an Indo-Aryan language related to the languages of North India. Tamils are the largest minority group. Mainly Hindu, they speak Tamil, a Dravidian language also spoken in South India. Tamils divide themselves into two sub-groups: North and East Tamils, who are considered to be the historically oldest Tamil group; and Up-country Tamils, who arrived from South India during the British period (1815–1948) to work as plantation laborers in the South-Central highlands. There are also Christian populations among both Sinhalese and Tamils (McGilvray 2008). Muslims, who have roots tracing back to Indo-Arab and Persian maritime commerce across the Indian Ocean over the past millennium, are the second largest minority group (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). Though most Muslims speak Tamil as a first language, they identify themselves as a separate ethnic group from Tamils based on their religion (Thiranaganama 2011). The civil war is considered to have started after the

**Table 1.**  
**Sri Lankan Ethnic Groups**

Ethnicity	Religion	Predominate language
Sinhalese	Buddhism or Christianity	Sinhala
Tamils (North and East and Up-country)	Hinduism or Christianity	Tamil
Muslims	Islam	Tamil

widespread anti-Tamil riots of 1983. Whereas North and East Tamils were directly involved in the conflict, Up-country Tamils and Muslims remained more on the periphery (Daniel 1996).

Following independence in 1948, the Sinhalese Buddhist-majority government instituted discriminatory policies against minority groups (Tamils and Muslims), who they believed had received preferential treatment under the British colonial rule. One of the most significant of these policies was the Sinhala-Only Act of 1956, which declared Sinhala to be the sole official language of the nation (Tamil was declared a co-official language in 1987). This act made Sinhala fluency a requirement for all government jobs. While it negatively impacted Muslims, this act was particularly detrimental for English-educated Jaffna Tamils, who, as a result of scarce natural resources in the Jaffna Peninsula, relied on government and professional employment in the South (Tambiah 1986). In addition, a new university policy that passed in 1972 hurt Jaffna Tamils' status and future prospects (though it benefited other Tamil-speaking groups) (Sørensen 2008). While the complex causes of the civil war are beyond the scope of my inquiry (see Spencer 1990; Tambiah 1986), post-independence language and education policies are widely thought to have increased tensions around ethnic relations (Thiranyagama 2011). While educational policies were successful in improving educational access for all Sri Lankan youth, the separation of students on the basis of language medium (Sinhala or Tamil) heightened feelings of interethnic difference and mistrust (de Silva 1999; Tambiah 1986).

Recognizing the link between the structure of the national education system and incidents of political violence, the Sri Lankan government implemented Tamil-as-a-second-language (TSL) and Sinhala-as-a-second-language (SSL) programs in the early 2000s in government schools. Second-language programs were also implemented in training programs for government administrators. The Sri Lankan government believed that ethnic integration would increase if Sinhalese and Tamil speakers (Tamils and Muslims) could learn to communicate with one another in their additional official language. However, these policies were asymmetrically implemented throughout the Sinhalese-majority South (all areas outside the majority Tamil-speaking North and East). Namely, while Tamil-speaking students often write and speak Sinhala well, Sinhalese students write Tamil but rarely speak it in the classroom or elsewhere. These asymmetries are directly related to the hegemonic role of Sinhala in the South. Despite Tamil's current status as a co-official language on paper, Tamil speakers need to write and speak Sinhala to manage everyday tasks—from shopping in the market, to applying for a job, to getting safely through military checkpoints. Although Sinhalese learn English to increase their employability nationally and abroad and advance their social status (Canagarajah 2005), as members of the majority group they have little political or economic incentive to learn Tamil, the national minority language. This lack of incentive is compounded by Sinhalese' resistance to speaking Tamil, which arises from ideologies that view language (particularly speaking) as the primary marker of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic identities. Sinhalese conflate the Tamil language with Tamil people (whether North and East or Up-country), who may be associated with the Tamil separatist movement, acts of terrorism, or a perceived lower

class, caste, and socioeconomic status (Daniel 1996). Though southern Muslims are most associated with the Tamil language, Sinhalese also identify them as bilinguals given their high level of proficiency in Sinhala as well.

For second-language policies to promote interethnic integration, they must be symmetrically implemented so that Tamil speakers learn spoken and written skills in Sinhala and Sinhalese learn spoken and written skills in Tamil. To address the problems in implementing bilingual policies, it is vital to gain an ethnographic view of TSL practices inside and outside the classroom. If ideologies associating language and ethnic identities constrain TSL practices, how are these ideologies enacted in different settings and situations? Can teachers and students create interactional spaces where Sinhalese speak Tamil? Studies in the ethnography of language policy have illuminated the struggles and disjunctures that occur when top-down language planning and policy (LPP) is implemented locally (e.g., Hornberger and Johnson 2007; McCarty 2011). Multi-sited approaches that transcend the classroom have been important in demonstrating how alternative or competing ideologies and discourses impact the way the LPP is taken up or understood (e.g., Hornberger 2008; Jaffe 1999, 2011; Meek 2010; Ramanathan 2005). Building on this literature, I investigate TSL learning and speaking practices in a multilingual Buddhist national school (Girls' College), a TSL program for government administrators, and an international NGO (Peace International [PI]) where an ethnically mixed group of Sri Lankan volunteers was encouraged to converse in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. My focus on these three contexts allows me to trace how ideologies that associate linguistic forms with ethnic and religious differences constrain TSL practices in different spheres (from a classroom, to the street, to a bus).

I explore whether youth and adults at Girls' College, the government program, and PI create interactional spaces where Sinhalese speak Tamil. "Interactional space" refers to how social actors draw on ideologies to collaboratively structure language usage in different spheres of practice. This concept is similar to the "third spaces" in which bilingualism thrives (Gutierrez et al. 1999; Ramanathan 2005), but it is even closer to Hornberger's (2002) notion of "implementational space" because it is not limited to the classroom. My focus on the collaborative construction of sociolinguistic norms and practices builds on the literature in LPP and the anthropology of education that highlight teachers' and students' agentive roles in shaping LPP implementation (e.g., Jaffe 1999; Lin and Martin 2005; Wortham 2008). The interactional spaces described in this article do not emerge in the discrete ethnographic moments I detail but are the product of chains of processes occurring over time and space (Wortham 2012). A focus on interactional spaces shows how top-down policies interact with local policies and ideologies to create new patterns of practice.

I first discuss the history of language and educational policies in postcolonial Sri Lanka and then introduce my research site, methodology, and how my positioning as a white American female with a high level of proficiency in Tamil impacted my research. In the first section, I demonstrate how, at Girls' College, the separation of the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams and related pedagogical practices effectively prevented the creation of an interactional space where Sinhalese students could speak Tamil. In the second and third sections, I show how, in the government training program and at the NGO (PI), participants did create interactional spaces where Sinhalese spoke Tamil. But while in the government program this space was limited to the domain of the TSL classroom, at PI it was limited by the style of Tamil spoken. I argue that the recognition of these interactional spaces and their limitations elucidates the practical challenges of using LPP as a tool for interethnic integration in postwar Sri Lanka. My focus on the role of civic educational strategies in conflict amelioration is timely with the high incidence of ethnic and religious conflict in South Asia and elsewhere.

## Language and Educational Policies

The concept of language ideologies is useful in studies of identity by providing an analytical framework with which to understand the relationship between linguistic forms and social identities inside and outside of institutions (Bucholtz and Hall 2005). Irvine (1989:255) defines language ideologies as “the cultural system of ideas about social and linguistic relationships, together with their loading of moral and political interests.” In postcolonial contexts, the regimentation of language, ethnicity, and religion in government structures often has unexpected consequences for the way language indexes identity in practice (Irvine and Gal 2000). In Sri Lanka, as mentioned above, post-independence language and educational policies contributed to mobilizing ethnic differences around language, whether intentionally or not.

In contrast to other postcolonial contexts where English was promoted because it offered economic and educational opportunities, in Sri Lanka, policy makers returned to the vernacular largely in response to the disparities suffered during colonial rule (Canagarajah 2005). From the 1940s to the 1950s, as part of the *swabasha* (vernacular) movement popular among both Sinhalese and Tamils, the government replaced English with Sinhala and Tamil as media of instruction in government schools. However, Sinhalese Buddhist nationalists, who were angered over the overrepresentation of English-educated Jaffna Tamils in the civil service, insisted that *swabasha* mean “Sinhala only.” In 1956, S. W. R. D. Bandaranaike of Sri Lankan Freedom Party (SLFP) won the presidential election on a Sinhalese Buddhist nationalist platform. Shortly after his election, the government passed the Sinhala-Only Act (Devotta 2004). The change in the medium of instruction in state schools combined with the gradual takeover of schools by the state produced a centralized mass-education system where all school-aged children are guaranteed a free education in their first language (Little 2003). In national contexts where segments of the population speak different languages, the availability of education in vernacular languages can enable large numbers of students to get a quality education and preserve their ethnolinguistic identities (Hornberger 2008; McCarty 2011). As a result of the new education system, the national literacy rate increased and the net enrollment in primary school rose to nearly one hundred percent (Sørensen 2008). However, the segregation of students by language medium, which had already existed as a result of the geographic distribution of Sinhalese and Tamil groups, became more systematic and pervasive (Perera et al. 2004). The isolation of the nation’s ethnic groups, in turn, promoted interethnic mistrust and difference (de Silva 1999; Tambiah 1986). Tambiah, describing schools in the post-1956 period, states:

Contact between Sinhalese and Tamil students was reduced to a minimum, and the social distance served in time to convert difference into enmity and confrontation, and to create distrust, dislike, and fear between the youth that had never before been experienced so vehemently in the island’s cities and towns. . . [1986:76]

The national education system was decentralized in 1987, but it remains somewhat centralized by virtue of the standardized Sinhala- and Tamil-medium curriculum (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). The Sri Lankan education system is organized into five levels: primary (grades 1–5), junior secondary (grades 6–9), senior secondary (grades 10–11), collegiate (grades 12–13), and tertiary (university). Students take three national exams: the grade 5 scholarship exam; the General Certificate of Education (G.C.E.) Ordinary-level (O-level) exam, which determines their entrance to the collegiate level; and the G.C.E. Advanced-level (A-level) exam, which is a university entrance exam. Schools are organized on the basis of language medium and religion (Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, and Christianity). By policy, Sinhalese and Tamils study in what is referred to as their “mother tongue”—Sinhala for Sinhalese and Tamil for Tamils. Southern Muslims, who

claim that their mother tongue is Arabic, or that they do not have a mother tongue at all, are placed variously into Sinhala- or Tamil-medium programs. Though a few bilingual schools exist, particularly in urban areas (e.g., Girls' College), most Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students study in separate schools (Perera et al. 2004). The organization of the national educational system thus perpetuates the ideology that ethnic groups, as primarily defined by language, are essentially distinct and should be kept separate.

In the decades following the Sinhala-Only Act, the government made several attempts to improve interethnic relations by incorporating the Tamil language into the government. In line with the 1987 Indo-Sri Lankan Peace Accords, the 13th amendment to the constitution called for the devolution of power to the Tamil-speaking-majority northern and eastern provinces and passed the Official Language Policy, declaring Tamil a "co-official" language and English an interethnic "link language," though this role was ill defined (OLC 2006). Despite the fact that English had an unofficial role as a link language in the British period among elites, English policies were not pursued because English was seen as foreign. Just as the devolution of power was never achieved, Tamil's co-official status with Sinhala remained mostly on paper (Devotta 2004).

Recognizing the significant gap between the content of the Official Language Policy and its implementation, the Official Language Commission (OLC) issued a referendum in 2005 calling for full realization of the policy's content. At this time, Sinhala still functioned as the sole administrative language in the South, and Tamil served as the *de facto* language of administration in the North and East. The OLC pointed out that there was a significant dearth of government officials in the South who could communicate with the Tamil-speaking populace. It also noted that although public signboards were supposed to be in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, most were in Sinhala only (OLC 2006). The OLC and other government bodies were charged with expanding knowledge of Sinhala, Tamil, and English among government servants, as well as implementing SSL and TSL programs throughout the island. Government servants who passed competency exams in these languages were given financial rewards and preferences in promotion. Emphasizing the government administrators' need to acquire oral and written skills in their additional official language, TSL textbooks were organized into three volumes: level 1 (spoken Tamil) and levels 2 and 3 (written Tamil). Though the long-term goal of English proficiency was implied, priority was placed on government servants learning Tamil to meet the needs of the Tamil-speaking populace and, by doing so, reduce the potential for unrest (Rajandran 2009).

The violence the nation faced in 1987 spurred language policy reform not only in government administration but in education as well. In the 1990s the government, also influenced by an emerging global agenda for education, began planning education reform. The National Education Commission (NEC) drew on earlier reports to introduce a new reform program in 1997. In addition to curriculum reforms that stressed a multicultural perspective, a language policy was introduced that dictated that SSL and TSL be offered as required subjects at the junior secondary level (grades 6–9) and elective subjects at the senior secondary level (grades 10–11) (Perera et al. 2004; Sørensen 2008). By 2006, SSL and TSL programs were implemented across the island, albeit with poor urban and rural schools often lacking sufficient teachers to offer them.

The OLC's and NEC's initiatives in the 1990s and early 2000s were undertaken under President Chandrika Kumaratunga's People's Alliance (PA) government, which came to power under a mandate to promote peace and interethnic justice. However, Sri Lanka's political climate shifted significantly with the election of President Mahinda Rajapaksa in 2005, who subsequently started a campaign to eradicate the LTTE by military means (Thiranagama 2011). After the army's May 2009 victory, Rajapaksa emphasized the importance of trilingualism in Sinhala, Tamil, and English to promote national unity in the reconciliation process (Government of Sri Lanka 2012). It is possible that the government's

promotion of a multilingual and united Sri Lanka may have been mere strategy to divert attention from its refusal to find a political solution that would meet the needs of the nation's minorities.

In my analysis, I explore how language and educational policies are enacted in local practices. My examination of TSL practices at Girls' College is highly relevant to bilingual reform, as it is one of few government schools to combine Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams. It is a model for an integrated education system, as well as a testing ground for the efficacy of bilingual programs. Although my examination of TSL practices at Girls' College considers how youth and adults ideologically associate language with ethnicity in an educational setting, my exploration of the training program and the NGO considers these ideological associations in various Sinhala-dominant public spheres. In these spheres, the issue is not with the way language policies and practices regiment language medium and ethnicity but the respective values of Sinhala and Tamil when so unequivocally ethnicized.

### **Ethnographic Context, Methodology, and Researcher Positioning**

Kandy is a large town in the tea plantation region in the South-Central highlands. It was the site of the last independent Sinhalese Buddhist kingdom, which the British took over in 1815. Though a symbolic center for Sinhalese Buddhism and the Buddhist state, it is also a multilingual and multiethnic urban landscape (Tambiah 1986). My research period (2007–2008) coincided with the Sri Lankan army's campaign to gain control of the last LTTE-held territories in the North (Thiranagama 2011). Though Sri Lankans living in Kandy and elsewhere in the South were far from the battle zones, they lived in fear of civilian-targeted violence, arrest, and disappearance. Large numbers of Sinhalese men were employed in the army, causing hardships to families throughout the island. Ethnic tensions among Sinhalese, Tamils, and Muslims infused everyday interactions. The presence of Tamil-speaking groups in this Sinhalese-dominated social space made Kandy a relevant site in which to study the implementation of SSL and TSL programs. Before addressing the details of my research, I describe relevant Kandy social groups.

Sri Lankan scholars point to the impact of colonial rule in fixing stable ethnic labels to what were much more fluid religious, caste, regional, and linguistic categories (see Thiranagama 2011; Wickramasinghe 2006). During the 19th and early 20th centuries, Sinhalese defined themselves as Kandyan, who came under British rule relatively late, or Low-country, who lived in the southwest coastal region and had more sustained contact with colonial rulers. These regional differences were de-emphasized in favor of a common language-based Sinhalese ethnic identity in the 1930s, though sociocultural, linguistic, caste, and class differences among these groups remain relevant (Daniel 1996). Kandy's Tamil population consists of North and East Tamils and Up-country Tamils. Though they generally accept a common language-based Tamil ethnic identity, there are significant differences between these two groups as related to language, religion, level of education, caste, and class (Davis 2012). As McGilvray and Raheem (2007:13) explain, Muslims are considered to have an anomalous place in Sri Lankan ethnopolitics because "they have defensively constructed an ethnic identity that is neither Sinhala nor Tamil, distinguishing themselves categorically from the island's two ethnic adversaries." While Muslims first distinguished themselves as a racially separate group from Tamils in the struggle for separate representation in the late 19th century, in the 20th century they gradually constructed a pan-Islamic ethnic identity, which allowed them to stay aloof from the Sinhala-Tamil conflict. This identity also fit with southern Muslims' strategic political alignment with the Sinhalese-majority government in the post-independence period. After the outbreak of the war, Muslims' ethnic and political identities fused with the formation of

the Sri Lankan Muslim Congress. However, many southern Muslims continue to support mainstream parties. Though they have features in common with other southern Muslim groups, Kandy Muslims share a unique history. In the 16th and 17th centuries, the Kandyan Kingdom provided Muslims with protection from persecution by the Portuguese and the Dutch (McGilvray and Raheem 2007). Currently, most Kandy Muslims speak Tamil at home, but as mentioned above they differentiate their linguistic practices from Tamils by speaking a distinct variety of Tamil, one marked by Perso-Arabic loan words and unique grammatical patterns, and by their bilingualism (Davis 2014; Nuhuman 2007).

This investigation of bilingual policy was part of my doctoral dissertation research in linguistic anthropology at the University of Michigan (June 2007–August 2008). The broader study considered multilingual language practices and ideologies of difference among Kandy Tamil-speaking youth inside and outside of schools. I spent seven months conducting research at Girls' College (January–August 2008). I gave back to the school community by teaching English to grades 9 and 10. I studied the Tamil-medium stream and observed and recorded SSL and TSL classes among grades 6 to 10, and I interviewed teachers about the bilingual policies. To contextualize my research, I conducted a survey of SSL and TSL practices at other Kandy government schools and interviewed teachers, principals, and policy makers. My discussion of TSL programs at government training centers is based on my observations of several TSL courses run in Kandy and Colombo over the course of my fieldwork. In order to understand TSL speaking practices outside these pedagogical contexts, I also observed them at different locations, including an NGO in Kandy, PI. To protect the identities of my research subjects I use pseudonyms for all personal names and institutions.

As a foreigner conducting research on politically contentious issues, I was careful to behave in an unbiased manner toward Sri Lankans of all social backgrounds. However, my status as a white American and my language skills impacted what I was able to observe. Though I had come to Girls' College through the introduction of my Sinhala teacher, my high Tamil proficiency after a decade of Tamil language study in the US and in India enabled me to become fast friends with the Tamil-medium teachers and students. Conversely, my lack of full Sinhala competency made it harder to form relationships within the Sinhala medium. I discovered early in my research period that because of my proficiency in Tamil and interest in the Tamil-medium stream, some Sinhalese teachers were suspicious of my research intentions. I alleviated these concerns by clearly explaining my academic background and research project with Sinhalese teachers in Sinhala and English. However, as a result of my greater contact with the Tamil-medium stream, my understanding of language policy implementation at Girls' College is from a Tamil-medium perspective. The situation was rather different at the government training program and at PI, where my positioning as an American TSL speaker spurred Sinhalese students to try out their Tamil with me. Because I fell outside their ethnic milieu, they could speak with me and not face the ideological implications that ensued from speaking Tamil with a Tamil or a Muslim. However, as I show in my discussion of the government program, I quickly learned to avoid initiating Tamil conversation with Sinhalese in Sinhalese-majority public spaces because it could invite suspicion. In the following section, I look at the implementation of bilingual language programs at Girls' College. In this context, I examine a TSL class to see if teachers and students created interactional spaces where Sinhalese spoke Tamil.

### **Context 1: Girls' College**

Girls' College is a multilingual Buddhist national school funded and administered by the Ministry of Education and located in the center of Kandy. One of the leading girls'

educational institutions on the island, it offers grades 1 through 13; it is also one of a few Kandy schools to combine Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams. It recently started offering English-medium classes at the secondary level. As a multilingual school, Girls' College has the potential to meet the NEC's goals by using trilingual programs as tools for increasing interethnic communication and mutual understanding among students. However, the strict separation of the Tamil-medium stream from the Sinhalese-Buddhist mainstream of the school prevented this from occurring.

Consistent with Kandy demographics, the Sinhala-medium stream comprises three-quarters of the school. All Sinhalese study in the Sinhala medium, and Tamils study in the Tamil medium. Though most Muslims study in the Tamil medium, some are placed into the Sinhala medium. In its official publications and public events, Girls' College projects a multicultural image. The school celebrates multiethnic holidays, such as Sinhala and Tamil New Year. However, despite these efforts to project such an image, the Sinhalese Buddhist identity of the school is dominant in practice. As is general practice for schools that have a Sinhalese majority, the principal is a Sinhalese Buddhist and the administrative language of the school is Sinhala. Sinhala is used in all school-wide functions and on the intercom system (with some content in English). All school-wide programs are conducted in Sinhala and often incorporate Buddhist religious practices. The Tamil-medium stream is not just separated from the Sinhala-medium stream for academic subjects (which is necessitated by the separate curricula and exam structure) but for all extracurricular activities as well. Tamil is rarely used outside the Tamil-medium stream, and all Tamil-medium instruction takes place in a separate building. This building also houses a Tamil-medium staff room, with a main staff room located elsewhere.

Though teachers could potentially use SSL, TSL, and/or English classes to bring Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students together, this was not the case in practice. Students studied these subjects in their home classrooms and never interacted. Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students were admitted into the English-medium stream on the basis of the grade 5 scholarship exam. The designated English-medium classroom comprised students who had transferred from the Sinhala-medium stream. Students who had transferred from the Tamil-medium stream only joined this classroom for the subjects offered in English. They remained in their Tamil-medium home classrooms the rest of the time. The separation of Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams in academic and extracurricular subjects was mirrored elsewhere. I rarely observed Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students interacting with one another. Though ethnic tensions were at issue, this lack of interaction was also due to their unfamiliarity with each other because there were few joint activities through which they could have become acquainted (Davis 2012).

Despite its status as a multilingual and multiethnic school, Girls' College reinforces the view present in the structure of the national education system that Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic groups, as defined by language, should be kept separate. Though the presence of Muslims in the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams seemingly complicates the ideological link between language and ethnic identity, teachers and administrators viewed them as an exception to a rule. However, although SSL and TSL programs were not used as direct tools of interethnic integration as suggested by the NEC's policies, they still have the potential to positively impact Sri Lankan society by teaching communication skills that students could use elsewhere.

### *TSL Classes*

Linguistic practices in SSL and TSL classrooms were impacted by language teaching norms and students' existing competencies. Sinhala and Tamil are both diglossic languages, meaning that there are significant differences between literary and colloquial

varieties (Suseendirajah 1999). The SSL and TSL syllabi included both literary and colloquial forms. However, in line with the language-teaching norms in South Asia, at Girls' College, classroom instruction emphasized reading and writing to the exclusion of speaking (with the exception of formal oratory, which is in the literary variety). This approach was consistent with the focus of classroom instruction on national exam preparation, which only tested written competencies (Kumar 1986). However, because most Tamil-medium students could already speak Sinhala, SSL teachers (who were all Sinhalese) could teach classes entirely in Sinhala. By contrast, TSL classes were also taught in Sinhala. I observed classes taught by the two TSL teachers: Faiza, a Muslim, and Sachi, an Up-country Tamil Hindu. In the following analysis, I detail Faiza's interactions with the students and myself during and after a TSL lesson.

I met Faiza in the Tamil-medium staff room, and we headed over to the grade 8 Sinhala-medium classroom, where there were 43 Sinhalese girls and three Muslim girls. Faiza wore a sari and a hijab. She walked into the classroom and greeted the students with "*vaNakkam*" (a Tamil greeting), and they immediately repeated back to her, "*vaNakkam maDam*." As I would discover, this greeting was the only instance of Tamil being spoken in the classroom. She began the class by copying a series of Tamil sentences from the textbook onto the blackboard. As she wrote, the students quietly chatted with one another (only Sinhala was audible). I present these sentences below with English glosses:

1. *naan annacip pazham saapiTTeen* (I ate pineapple.)
2. *ennudaiya paaDasaalai kaNDiyil amainduLLadu* (Our school is located in Kandy.)
3. *ammaa sandaikkup poonaar* (Mother went to the market.)
4. *idu panguni maadam* (This is "panguni" [the third Tamil month of the year] month.)
5. *aNil saaduvaana piraani* ([The] squirrel is a gentle animal.)
6. *tambi paadasaalaikku poonaan* (Little brother went to school.)
7. *emadu naaDu ilangai* (Our country is Sri Lanka.)

When Faiza finished writing the sentences, she read each sentence aloud in Tamil and then instructed the students in Sinhala to translate each of the sentences into Sinhala. Students raised their hands and called out the meanings in Sinhala, and every student gave a correct answer on their first try. She then told the students in Sinhala to copy down the sentences and write down the Sinhala translation. When they started the task, she sat down at a desk on one side of the classroom and invited me to join her. With some of the students in earshot of our conversation, she told me in Tamil that the students dislike it when she teaches the class in Tamil because they say they cannot learn it that way. Because of this, she said, she teaches the class entirely in Sinhala. She commented that Sinhalese cannot speak Tamil, but the Muslim girls in the class can speak it very well. She explained that all Muslims can speak Tamil because they speak it at home. When I asked her the difficulties of teaching the class, she laughed, saying that sometimes she did not understand the *sutta* (pure) Tamil words in the textbook. She then explained that she uses Sinhala words for foods and spices and Arabic words for things like prayer times.

As the students started to complete the assignment, they came up to her desk to have their work corrected. Faiza went through their notebooks with a red pen, correcting errors in the Tamil spelling and the Sinhala translation. When most of the students had finished the assignment, a large group of girls gathered around us. Faiza suggested to me that I try to chat with the girls in Tamil. I directed simple questions to a few girls standing in front of me, including "*kaalaiyila enna saapiTTiinga?*" (What did you eat this morning?), but they did not respond. Faiza then pointed out a Sinhalese girl who had recently won a Kandy-wide TSL competition (which likely involved reciting Tamil poetry in the literary variety), saying that her Tamil was excellent. The girl sat upright in her seat and looked over at us

nervously, but Faiza did not invite her to speak. Next, Faiza called over a group of three Muslim girls she had referred to before, who all regularly sat together, and told them in Tamil to speak to me. After talking for a few minutes in Tamil, they switched to English. Faiza commented to us in Tamil that she disliked it when this happens because she does not know English and gets excluded from the conversation.

This class focused entirely on translation, but in other classes I observed, Faiza led elocution exercises, in which students practiced pronouncing Tamil words from the textbook. However, I never observed her giving students any instructions in Tamil or initiate any Tamil conversation. When Faiza covered colloquial usages, she had the students write them rather than speak them. The other TSL teacher, Sachi, like Faiza, taught her classes entirely in Sinhala and did not speak to students in Tamil. Though my access to the Sinhalese students was somewhat limited, I never witnessed any of them speaking Tamil outside of in-class elocution exercises.

My presence in the classroom as a foreign TSL speaker likely made Faiza feel obliged to initiate a question-and-answer session in Tamil. Although she prompted me to ask questions in Tamil, she did little to encourage the students to respond to me. They may have been shy, reluctant to talk to a foreigner in Tamil, or they may not have known how to answer basic spoken Tamil questions. While it was the norm for Girls' College teachers to de-emphasize speaking, it was striking how little expectation Faiza had that her Sinhalese students would speak any Tamil at all. In her metacommentary to me, Faiza equated linguistic practices with ethnic identities. She distinguished Muslims from Sinhalese by their ability to speak Tamil. But by referring to her own inability to understand the "pure" Tamil words, she also distinguished Muslims from Tamils, again on the basis of linguistic practices. While Tamils are often associated with speaking what is considered a pure Tamil free from foreign borrowings, Faiza emphasized the heterogeneity of Muslims' linguistic practices, especially the use of Perso-Arabic and Sinhala words. Her correlation of students' ethnic identities with their linguistic practices rationalizes the fact that Sinhalese students did not speak any Tamil in the classroom. This rationalization, in turn, can contribute to naturalizing or stabilizing a sociolinguistic practice (Irvine and Gal 2000).

Despite its status as a multilingual school, at Girls' College, the strict separation of the Sinhala- and Tamil-medium streams prevented bilingual programs from being tools for interethnic integration. In addition, Faiza, in her pedagogical practices (the lack of expectation that Sinhalese students would speak Tamil) and her rationalization of these practices in the earshot of students (equating linguistic practices with ethnic identities), prevented the opening of an interactional space where Sinhalese students could speak Tamil. Her classes instilled the view that Sinhala-medium students should acquire written TSL skills only to pass their national exams and for nothing else. This perpetuates a vicious cycle in which Sinhalese students do not have the skills to speak Tamil because they do not have to speak it. In the next section, I explore whether interaction spaces where Sinhalese might speak Tamil existed outside the national education system. I explore TSL practices among students in a government training course, considering interactions that occurred in the classroom and other spheres. In this context, it is important to observe that the students' adult status, their existing levels of proficiency in Tamil, their mixed gender, their linguistic competencies, and the setting impacted linguistic practices.

## **Context 2: TSL for Government Administrators**

From 2007 to 2008, I attended numerous government-funded TSL classes for government administrators and police officers taught by Mr. Ramakrishnan (Mr. R.), an Up-country Tamil Hindu. Mr. R. was the principal of a Tamil-medium Hindu school in

Kandy. Trilingual in Sinhala, Tamil, and English, he had started teaching TSL classes to supplement his income. Below I describe a TSL class Mr. R. taught to government administrators in July 2008. In his classes in 2007, he taught students mostly in Sinhala, rarely deviating from the textbook. In this more recent class, his teaching practices and interactional style with his students had changed.

Mr. R. and I rode the public bus together from Kandy to a nearby village district office in a Sinhalese-majority area. Entering the small classroom, we found a group of 20 Sinhalese male and female administrators (ages 25–50) waiting. The class followed the TSL written (literary) textbook (level 2). As on previous occasions, Mr. R. asked me to introduce myself to the students and prompted them to ask me questions in Tamil. The students asked me basic questions in Tamil regarding where I was from, how long I planned to stay in Sri Lanka, and how I learned Tamil and Sinhala. A young man named Herath, obviously comfortable in his spoken Tamil, asked most of the questions. Though the students were instructed to speak in Tamil, they used both Tamil and Sinhala to formulate questions and make sense of my answers.

When Mr. R. announced that the lesson would start, the students diligently readied their notebooks and pens. Mr. R. started reading a passage from the textbook (an administrative scenario) for the students to transcribe in Tamil. The friendly rapport in Tamil and Sinhala between Mr. R. and the students continued. When one student suddenly put his head down during the transcription, Mr. R. asked him in Tamil what was wrong. The student replied in Tamil, "*suhamillai. kaachchal*" (I'm not feeling well—fever). Mr. R. immediately retorted with a toothy grin, "*enna kaachchal?*" (What [kind of] fever?), implying that his fever could be sexual in nature. The class laughed. In addition, in several instances students' clarification questions led to metalinguistic discussions of spelling and lexical differences between Sinhala and Tamil. For example, one student asked how to write the president's name. When Mr. R. wrote it on the board in Tamil, the student questioned whether or not it was correct, playing on the idea that a Tamil may not know how to spell the president's name. Later, in reference to me, Mr. R. and the students discussed the differences in the spelling of "America" in Tamil (*amerikkaa*) and Sinhala orthography (*amerikaawa*). In the next part of the lesson, Mr. R. wrote Tamil terms on the board and gave their meanings in Sinhala. When he hesitated on one of the Sinhala glosses, Herath quickly provided the correct Sinhala word, prompting students to discuss the differences in the Tamil and Sinhala administrative terminology.

When the class was finished, I spoke with Herath briefly in Tamil. He was a village headman. When I asked how he knew Tamil so well, he said that the area to which he went for job training was mostly Tamil speaking (Muslim). I asked him if he ever spoke Tamil outside of class, and he replied, "*konjam tamil teriyum*" (I know a little bit of Tamil). While this could be interpreted as an expression of humility, it discounted his strong Tamil proficiency.

As Herath and his classmates cleared out of the classroom, Mr. R. invited me to have tea at a stand outside the building. With only the Sinhalese tea vendor present, we sat down on some plastic chairs and discussed the class in Tamil. I commented that the students seemed very enthusiastic about learning Tamil. He said that this was true but that their Tamil writing was poor. When I asked him why the students were studying Tamil, he said they were doing it only to get a raise. I asked him what he thought about TSL programs. He said that the programs were well implemented throughout the island but that Sinhalese were starting to teach TSL. He explained that now this is another reason for the government to give jobs to Sinhalese over Tamils. As evident here, our discussion about his class transitioned into a political discussion about employment inequity for Tamils in the government. We finished our tea and headed to the bus stand. As we approached it, I noticed Herath waiting for the bus with a small group of people. I asked Herath in Tamil

if he was heading home. He replied in confident English that he would take the bus home. Deciding to give him some distance, I turned away from him and stood in silence with Mr. R., who did not acknowledge Herath's presence.

In contrast to his previous classes, it was apparent that Mr. R. and these students had developed a comfortable interactional rapport. Rather than treating the students as passive recipients of the lesson, Mr. R. and the students collaboratively created their own interactional space. In this space, students freely drew on Tamil and Sinhala in joking exchanges and as they discussed the lesson material. In addition, Herath's helping Mr. R. with a Tamil–Sinhala translation indicated just how collaborative the class had become, an active learning exchange. The moments when students showed the most enthusiasm for learning Tamil were metalinguistic—when they compared the Tamil and Sinhala lexicons and spelling conventions. Students' free use of their diverse repertoires and their metalinguistic engagement are techniques consistent with Hornberger's (2003) discussion of biliterate learning media, content, and contexts in her "continua of biliteracy" approach. These emergent interactional patterns significantly contributed to creating a space in the classroom where Sinhalese spoke Tamil. It is also significant that most of the students who initiated Tamil conversation were male, indicating that gender is a relevant factor in Girls' College students' lack of use of TSL.

But once the class was finished, there was a subtle ideological shift in my interactions with Mr. R. and Herath. Mr. R.'s negative comments about the students' self-serving motives for learning Tamil and discrimination against Tamils in the government presented a strong contrast to his apparently comfortable interaction with the students in the classroom. Mr. R. may have had issues on his mind he wanted to discuss, or he may have wanted me to understand the inequalities and politics that underlay teaching TSL to Sinhalese students. After the lesson, Herath's dismissal of his Tamil language abilities was in immediate contrast to his confident use of Tamil during the lesson. At the bus stand, Herath may have answered me in English because he wanted to demonstrate that he knew it. However, as I realized, I should not have addressed him in Tamil in a Sinhalese-majority public space where others could potentially overhear us. While within the TSL classroom Sinhalese students spoke Tamil in the context of their participating in a government program, outside the classroom, Tamil speech is a direct index of Tamil ethnicity. Unaware of Herath's status as a TSL student, bystanders might question the motives of a Sinhalese speaking Tamil (especially with a foreigner), possibly even thinking it was an expression of a political stance in relation to Tamil ethnic groups or the ethnic conflict.

The subtle interactional shifts that occurred after the TSL lesson indicate how the interactional space where Sinhalese adults spoke Tamil did not extend beyond the TSL classroom. While my conversation with Mr. R. outside the classroom revealed the political inequalities in TSL teaching, my interaction with Herath indicated how speaking TSL can have uncomfortable social and political implications in the Sinhalese-majority public space. While I did not see this myself, these administrators might well be more comfortable speaking Tamil in Tamil-speaking majority settings, such as in tea plantation areas or Muslim villages. To more fully understand the ideological barriers to TSL learning and speaking, I now look at whether interactional spaces where Sinhalese speak Tamil existed outside of an explicitly pedagogical context, among an ethnically mixed group of volunteers at a Kandy NGO, Peace International (PI). I explore their multilingual linguistic practices in several Sinhala-dominant public spheres.

### **Context 3: NGO (PI)**

During my research period, I spent time with a group of Sri Lankan youths who volunteered at the Sri Lankan branch of an international NGO, PI, whose focus is peace

building. The NGO leadership (Muslims and Sinhalese), influenced by global peace initiatives, stressed communication “in all three languages” (Sinhala, Tamil, and English) to improve interethnic relations. At this time the regular membership consisted of four Muslims (all males) and six Sinhalese (three males and three females), ages 18–23. They had all recently finished their A-level exams. As consistent with elsewhere in Kandy, the dominant language among these volunteers was Sinhala, with English frequently used, especially when foreigners were present. One of the senior volunteers was Arshad, a 22-year-old Muslim male from a nearby Muslim village, who spoke Tamil as a first language. He credited PI with teaching him to respect other ethnic groups and improving his Sinhala and English. Echoing the ideology I had heard from Faiza at Girls’ College, he frequently emphasized his own heterogeneous linguistic practices, particularly his free mixing of Tamil, Sinhala, and Perso-Arabic words and phrases. But while he spoke to the Sinhalese volunteers in Sinhala and English, as part of the trilingual aims of the NGO, he often tried to get them to take an interest in speaking Tamil (they had all studied TSL in school to some extent). He frequently sang Tamil film songs, translating the lyrics into Sinhala and English. However, as I show with two brief examples, when the interactional space opened for Sinhalese volunteers to speak Tamil, it was often in a jocular or mocking sense.

On one occasion I traveled by public bus with the volunteers to participate in a social service project near Colombo. Crowded into the back of the bus, they were excited and jovial. They blasted Sinhala songs from a portable radio while they chatted and ate snacks. At this time Sri Lankans were careful about their conduct on buses, but the volunteers seemed oblivious to the presence of the other passengers. As we neared Colombo, a Sinhalese male, Nelith, stuck his head out the window of the bus pretending to be the bus conductor and yelled “airport, airport, airport” in a nasal tone, potentially confusing people who wanted the airport bus. For most of the trip I held a quiet conversation in Tamil and English with Arshad, who was seated directly behind me, about his childhood. Interspersed with banter and jokes in Sinhala, Nelith and the two other Sinhalese boys periodically yelled out Tamil phrases in a gruff voice, which seemed to be directed at Arshad and me. These included the phrase common among male peers, “*enna Daa*” (what?), as well as an incomplete phrase pertaining to a wedding, “*ennappa mapillai vandu*” (what father/elder, bridegroom come). My Up-country Tamil research assistant noted that these utterances seem to mimic sound bites from Tamil film dialogue or songs (films from Tamil Nadu, India, were regularly broadcast on Tamil TV channels). Nelith’s gruff voice parodied the “typical” voice of the uneducated village characters common in Tamil films. As usual, Arshad nervously laughed at their Tamil phrases but said nothing in response.

A few weeks later, Arshad invited Ruvi, a 23-year-old Sinhalese female; Janu, a 19-year-old Sinhalese male; and me to his village before attending a PI-sponsored event at a local Muslim school. While we sat and chatted in Sinhala and English in the living room, Arshad’s mother prepared us tea in the kitchen. In an effort to look appropriate at the Muslim school, Ruvi was wearing a *shalwar*, a long tunic with pants and a scarf that in Sri Lanka is typically worn only by Tamils and Muslims. She kept readjusting her scarf, explaining that she had never worn this kind of dress before. Arshad’s teenaged brother walked into the room and said a few words to Arshad in fast Tamil. Ruvi asked Arshad’s brother in Tamil, “*payaNam poovomaa?*” (Will we go on a trip?). He smiled at her correct and appropriate question but did not say anything in response. In the course of our continuing conversation in Sinhala and English, Ruvi started interjecting random Tamil phrases, seemingly parroted from Tamil films, such as “*kalyaaNam kattu*” (get married). As she struggled to say “I’m pregnant” in Tamil, Arshad glanced toward his mother in the kitchen as if concerned about what she would think of our conversation. Feeling the urge to say something about her Tamil usages, I commented to Ruvi in English that she spoke

Tamil like Nelith. Using a pedagogical tone, Arshad explained to us in English that Nelith's Tamil is very good, but the voice he uses is too rough. He said that Ruvi and Nelith both tended to use Tamil in a joking way. He used a phrase I had heard before, namely, that when Nelith is being serious, he can "actually speak Tamil." Ruvi recounted in English that one time PI took a trip to Batticaloa, a majority Tamil-speaking town in eastern Sri Lanka. When they stopped at a tea shop, a Tamil girl asked them in Tamil to change a thousand rupee note. Ruvi said that Janu had a lot of difficulty talking to her, but Nelith had managed well. As they chatted, they learned that she was from the Up-country and spoke Sinhala fluently. Ruvi said they had all laughed at Nelith's well-intentioned but unnecessary effort to "actually speak Tamil."

As these two examples demonstrate, when a space opened up for PI volunteers to speak Tamil it was often in a jocular sense. Jane Hill (2008) describes how white speakers in the United States use jocular forms of Spanish she refers to as "mock Spanish." Though the users may think they are being light, humorous, or displaying their knowledge of the Southwest, these usages indirectly reinforce negative stereotypes about Spanish speakers. This, in turn, propagates covert forms of racism. Because the PI volunteers had all studied at single-sex schools, PI provided a rare opportunity to interact in a co-ed environment away from their parents' homes. Their jocular Tamil usages could be interpreted as part of their playful, sexually charged behavior. As similar to the government training program, most of the TSL speakers were male. In addition, Ruvi's use of Tamil could be interpreted as a way to flirt with her male peers. However, it is also significant that these Sinhalese members rarely spoke Tamil outside this mock genre. I also did not observe them cite profanity or joke about risqué topics in English. In addition, Tamil speakers' (Muslims) lack of response to these usages indicates they found them inappropriate or at least not worthy of encouragement. Sinhalese PI volunteers, through their use of "mock Tamil," indirectly reinforced already existing ideological associations of the Tamil language as rough, rude, and vulgar. These characteristics relate to wider views of Tamil speakers in Sri Lanka and India as uneducated and lower class. Though mock Tamil usages were not specifically associated with Sri Lankan Muslims, they are implicated as Tamil speakers.

It is significant that these instances of mock Tamil occurred while Tamil was being otherwise used in the interactional space. In the first example, Nelith's shouting out Tamil phrases in the Sinhala-dominant public space (a bus) seemed to provide a metacommentary on my separate conversation with Arshad. While our conversation in Tamil was fairly serious, Nelith's mock Tamil turned it into something light and ridiculous. In the second example, Ruvi may have been prompted to address Arshad's brother in Tamil as she wanted to act appropriately in a Tamil-speaking home. But at the same time, the setting was more complicated as the visit was part of an official PI activity. Ruvi's use of mock Tamil was likely spurred by Arshad's failure to answer her Tamil question. Her utterances treated Tamil not as a communicative code but as something laughable and vulgar. The moments when Tamil became prevalent in the interactional space were ideologically fraught for the volunteers because of the competing narratives available to them. The use of Tamil by Muslim members during PI activities (whether at the NGO center, a bus, or a home) challenged the hegemonic status of Sinhala among NGO members and in the South more generally. At the same time, the limited vocabulary and grammar as exemplified in their mock Tamil usages pointed to their lack of full multilingual competency at an international NGO that values trilingual communication. Thus, there was a palpable uncertainty among Sinhalese members about appropriate linguistic interaction during PI activities, as related to its orientation both to the Sinhalese-majority South and the NGO. Sinhalese volunteers' use of Tamil provided a metacommentary on this ideologically fraught use of Tamil in interactional space, playfully undermining it as a code while also protecting themselves from any negative evaluation.

In the interaction at Arshad's home, Arshad and Ruvi, in their metalinguistic commentary, acknowledge the difference between using Tamil in a "joking" way and "really speaking it," or using it in a way that facilitates communication. Ruvi's story indicates that in other contexts, such as traveling in Tamil-majority areas in the East, some of the volunteers did use Tamil in a nonmocking way. It also shows her acknowledgment that mock Tamil is not a productive or ideal use of the Tamil language. I witnessed similar usages of mock Tamil among an ethnically mixed group of students at Peradeniya University, which indicates that it may be a more widely occurring phenomenon. Mock Tamil usages may have some benefit in familiarizing Sinhalese with Tamil sounds and grammar. However, by perpetuating negative stereotypes about the language and its speakers, it reduces the positive value of learning and speaking Tamil. It sustains the idea that Tamil is not a language that is worthy of serious study; it is only fit for jokes and discussing topics, particularly among mixed gender groups. Thus, this example illustrates that when an interactional space opened up where Tamil can be spoken, it was limited to a mock style.

Building on studies in the ethnography of language policy (Hornberger and Johnson 2007), I have explored TSL learning and speaking practices in a multilingual school (Girls' College), a TSL program for government administrators, and an NGO (PI). A careful look into the possibility for collaborative interactional spaces where Sinhalese speak Tamil reveals the practical challenges of using language planning and policy (LPP) as a tool for interethnic integration. Despite Girls' College's status as one of the island's few multilingual schools, the constant reinforcement of linguistic, ethnic, and religious divisions, as well as Faiza's equation of linguistic practices with ethnic identities (the view that only Tamils and Muslims speak Tamil), prevented the development of interactional spaces where Sinhalese students spoke Tamil. My description of the government program showed how Mr. R. and his students collaboratively produced an interactional space where Tamil could be spoken. This case in fact demonstrates the effectiveness of techniques discussed in the "continua of biliteracy" approach (Hornberger 2003)—the free use of Sinhala and Tamil and an emphasis on metalanguage. But as my interaction with the teacher and a Sinhalese student (Herath) after class indicated, this interactional space did not transcend the TSL classroom. That experience highlighted how, because of the ideological association of Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic identities with language, it may be considered unnatural or even suspect for a Sinhalese person to speak Tamil in Sinhalese-majority public spaces. My investigation of TSL practices at PI showed that when an interactional space opened up for the Sinhalese volunteers to use Tamil, it was invariably in a mock context, which reinforced the unequal status of Tamil speakers in relation to Sinhalese. Like the government training program, this example also underscored the use of Tamil as a perceived threat to Sinhalese-majority public space. Thus, while positive interactional spaces can open up where Sinhalese speak Tamil in the confines of the TSL classroom, in spheres outside the TSL classroom (a street, a bus, or even a home), the act of Sinhalese speaking Tamil is highly conflicted and ideologically fraught.

## **Conclusion**

In Sri Lanka, national bilingual policies, rather than promoting interethnic integration, reinforce inequalities and differences between the Sinhalese majority and Tamil-speaking minorities. Whereas Tamil speakers struggle to learn to read, write, and speak Sinhala to survive in the Sinhalese-majority South, Sinhalese acquire minimal skills in written and spoken Tamil to pass exams, qualify for promotions, or obtain coveted government jobs. Sinhalese' resistance to speaking Tamil is related to ideologies that link linguistic forms, speakers, and different kinds of spheres. The association of language (particularly

speaking) with Sinhalese and Tamil ethnic identities is profuse both inside and outside of government structures (including the national education system). However, it is in public spheres where the implications of being a TSL speaker are most deeply felt. In spaces like the street or a bus, the act of speaking Tamil is not just a direct index of Tamil (or Muslim) ethnic identity or political stance, but it is also a threat to the dominance of Sinhala in the Sinhalese Buddhist-majority nation-state.

The ideological barriers to a bilingual or trilingual Sri Lanka cannot be diminished through LPP alone; LPP must be combined with broader social and political changes (Wickrema and Colenso 2003). However, pedagogical reforms can help destabilize the ideological link between the Tamil language and Tamil ethnic identity by opening up more interactional spaces for TSL to be spoken both inside and outside the classroom. First, as mentioned in my discussion of the government TSL program, language teachers should encourage students to compare and contrast Sinhala, Tamil, and English in terms of their lexicon, grammar, and orthography, which would spur them to appreciate these languages as equally complex and diverse codes (Hornberger 2003). Second, language classes should be combined with programs that encourage Sinhalese, Tamil, and Muslim students to draw on written and spoken Sinhala, Tamil, and English to collaborate in shared activities (such as roundtable discussions, plays, and debates). These programs would encourage students to conceptualize these languages as communicative resources and not markers of ethnicity. Although such a program is more feasible at multilingual schools like Girls' College, single-medium schools could organize multilingual days, where Sinhala- and Tamil-medium students visit each other's schools. Finally, multilingual language learning should be extended into the local community through outreach programs (Hayes et al. 2007). Through such programs, collaborative interactional spaces created in the classroom could transition into nonclassroom environments, easing the tensions around being a TSL speaker in Sinhala-dominant public spaces. In conclusion, improved pedagogical practices in combination with social and political changes can contribute to reducing the ideological barriers to a bilingual or trilingual Sri Lanka, allowing Sri Lankan citizens to be multilingual in Sinhala, Tamil, and English.

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