**LANGUAGE CHOICE AND MUSIC VIDEOS: AN ANALYSIS OF TRANSLANGUAGING IDEOLOGY IN SELECTED WORKS OF IRAJ WEERARATHNE**

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**INTRODUCTION**

Language choice, including switching between languages, is a pervasive phenomenon and is encoded in multilingual social practices. Language choice (e.g.translanguaging) in a multilingual society is a means of discursive practice, and almost always is a means of shaping, negotiating, constructing and performing social identity. In a country like Sri Lanka, language choice in particular contexts is never an innocent act, but constitutes performances of power and/or solidarity. As Heller (1992) put it, language choice is "a political strategy". It is now widely accepted that language choice is a key aspect of identity construction in multilingual and bilingual communities. While language choice in the context of the bilingual classroom, and the English as a second language (ESL) classroom has been studied extensively, only a few studies (e.g. Senaratne, 2009) have investigated language choice outside the classroom; there is a dearth of research into the phenomenon of code switching or translanguaging in Sri Lankan music. As such, this study is an investigation into the social practice of translanguaging in the music videos of a popular and controversial hiphop / rap artiste performing in Sri Lanka. Although a significant study in the area of music and language mixing was conducted by Ekanayake (2011), who investigated the phenomenon of language mixing in contemporary Sri Lankan music, Ekanayake's study was limited to the audio component of music. The focus of this study is language choice in *music videos* because "music video is a significant and interesting form of contemporary popular culture, one which is widely circulated, complex and important" (Railton and Watson, 2013:1) and "music video has never been so culturally visible and accessible as it is in this historical moment" (Railton and Watson, ibid:5). Other studies of language choice and hiphop around the world position artistes' choice of English as an expression of multicultural identity and their choice of local languages as a glocalization process. For example, Perullo and Fenn (2003) say that the language choices made by Tanzanian rappers whether English, Swahili, or a combination of the two, reflect particular ideologies held by hip hop musicians. "English language rap tends to borrow from popular, American hip hop that emphasizes life’s pleasures and the prowess of individual rappers...about parties, friends, or praise for the...individual rappers in the group" (p 21). Perullo and Fenn (ibid:21) also point out that rap in Swahili instead focuses on "social problems pertinent to Tanzanians, such as government corruption, lack of jobs and opportunities for youth, police violence, and health concerns such as HIV/AIDS" (p21). This dichotomy between 'real issues' confronting the country being in the local language and the issues relating to pleasure and prowess being sung/performed in English is explained by Perullo and Fenn (2003) as serving two functions and two different types of audiences. They posit that singing in Swahili means "addressing [the vast majority of youth] in a language that is understood throughout the country" (p 24) , and allowing artists to believe that they are educating their fans and listeners.

Although English in its many varieties pervades the language of hip hop music around the world, and therefore it may seem like English in hip hop is being merely part of cultural globalization, such a facile stance ignores the micro-politics of English within the local community. Hence, attempting to interpret language choice in relation to English in local hiphop is important.

**OBJECTIVES AND SCOPE**

The objective of this study is to investigate the discursive use of English in primarily Sinhala language music videos as articulated in a selection of contemporary Sri Lankan hiphop music, by analyzing Sinhala-English translanguaging practices. A fundamental premise of this study is that language is not a representation of the world, but constitutes social action (Wittgenstein, 1953/2009) and hence, that translanguaging is a discursive practice, "the construction and reflection of social realities through actions that invoke identity, ideology, belief, and power" (Young,2008:1). I employ Davies and Harré's (1990) definition of discursive practice, "all the ways in which people actively produce social and psychological realities" (p. 45) and their social identity "positioning" theory, which is a discursive process whereby participants of a discourse locate themselves and each other in relation to values, qualities and social categories (i,e, social identities) in jointly produced storylines. Thus, one way in which this hiphop artist engages in the positioning of himself and his characters is via the use of language choice / language mixing. Ochs (1993) also devised a framework for systematically tackling how social identities are constructed linguistically through social acts and stances, i.e. how are social identities (parent, teacher, middle class person etc) constructed linguistically. Hence the aim of this paper is to uncover the language ideologies of Sinhala and English as constructed by discursive practice.

Although there is a vibrant Tamil language hiphop culture in the country, it is outside the scope of this study which is limited to Sinhala music videos. As Ekanayake (2011) points out, the dominance of Sinhala in contemporary Sri Lanka is obvious in the fact that it is the principal language of the country’s audio-visual, audio and print media

**METHODOLOGY**

The sample of music videos selected includes three compositions/performances by Iraj Weeraratne, a Sri Lankan hip hop artiste whose music is both controversial and popular. The three works were selected to represent broad themes of his music videos. *Sil Bindagaththe* (approximately translated as "I compromised my morals") hereafter "SB" - revolves around love and sex, a frequent theme in his work, while *Lion Nation* - is an example video of his expression of patriotism, and was the official music video and song for the 2011 Cricket World Cup. *Gemak Deela* (roughly translated as "having schemed and plotted") hereafter "GD" is an example of his social criticism music videos. On the YouTube channels, SB has had 9.9 million views as of June 2020, GD had close to 3/4 million views and *Lion Nation* videos have close to 400,000 views.

The methodology used in this study is an interpretive approach, and the analysis is carried out using Discourse Analysis (Gee, 2005). His understanding of the relationship between discourse and identity matches the social constructionist view of identity.

"The social constructionist defines that the identity (1) takes place in concrete and specific interaction occasions, (2) yields constellations of identities instead of individual monolithic constructs, (3) does not simply emanate from the individual, but results from processes of negotiation, and contextualization that are eminently social (4) entails discursive work" (Fina et al 2006, cited in Kang, 2008).

The data analysis via DA focused on Translanguaging, (for the purpose of this study, used interchangeably with Code switching (Myers-Scotton, 1993) because the author 's position is that translanguaging is a political stance), found in the lyrics of the music video, both as part of the song as well as the spoken discourse (non-musical) of the 'characters' in the videos (wherever the music track is interspersed with a visual narrative), in order to ascertain and unpack the language ideology and discursive use of English.

The analysis of visual (non-verbal) discourse is beyond the scope of this study. However, it was noted in the interpretation of data whenever it reinforced identities made salient by verbal discourse, for the purpose of providing a rich description of data.

The music videos were watched multiple times by the researcher, and subsequently all the verbal discourse (both in the song as well as spoken language interspersed) was transcribed. Since the matrix language is Sinhala for all three soundtracks in the music videos, the lyrics in Sinhala were translated for the purpose of analysis and presentation. Coding was done in relation to grammatical and sociolinguistic perspectives of code switching, positioning, social acts and stances (Ochs, 1993) and accent.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Findings reveal complex language ideologies in operation, and Irvine and Gal's (2000) semiotic processes of Iconization, Fractal Recursivity and Erasure emerge from the data. According to Irvine and Gal linguistic ideologies are held not only by the immediate participants in a local sociolinguistic system; they are also held by other observers. There is no "view from nowhere", no gaze that is not positioned. (p.35-36). Linguistic features are seen as reflecting and expressing broader cultural images of people and activities. Irvine and Gal identified three important semiotic processes by which this works: Iconization involves linguistic features that index social groups or activities, appearing to be iconic representations of them, as if a linguistic feature somehow depicted or displayed a social group's inherent nature or essence. Fractal recursivity involves the projection of an opposition, salient at some level of relationship, onto some other level. Erasure is the process in which ideology in simplifying the sociolinguistic field, renders some persons or activities (or sociolinguistic phenomena), invisible. Facts that are inconsistent with the ideological scheme either go unnoticed or get explained away (Irvine and Gal 2000:37-38)

The analysis demonstrates that Iraj positions his characters in relation to class-identities by means of language choice and code-switching. For example, in SB, it is possible to see the emergence of the semiotic process of iconization. The idea that English is indexical of the English speaking/ bilingual upper-middle class is apparent due to the dialogues between the wealthy middle class couple speaking to each other only in English in the spoken discourse that is interspersed via a visual narrative as a background story to the main discourse i.e. the lyrics of the music track of the video. However, in this spoken discourse the wife in this narrative and the young man she is having an extra marital affair with, speak to each other only in Sinhala. The iconization here is that while English is the legitimate and formal language indexical of institutions (e.g. marriage), Sinhala is positioned as 'illegitimate' but also it is the language of affective stances (Ochs, 1993), emotions and solidarity.

In GD, unlike SB the theme is political and relates to social justice. It is satirical rather than personal and the entire visual narrative and background news clips as well as voice over which talks about how the country has been taken over by thugs and criminals, is in Sinhala. In this video the lyrics related to the visuals of the underworld thugs include heavy exaggerated intersentential code switching and code meshing, with a pidginized English used in a way that is indexical of 'street language' and the gangster world. Thus we see the semiotic process of iconization here. Standard language ideology views mixed code as inferior. Previous research has shown that although code switching is a common linguistic practice among bilinguals and multilinguals, attitudes towards it are often negative and at the most, ambiguous. The extent to which Sinhala is mixed with English in GD positions it as

both pidginized and comic. Thus the semiotic process of fractal recursivity is salient here, where one set of oppositions (good vs. bad) is applied on another level (unmixed language vs. mixed language). In addition, the semiotic process of erasure emerges in this context, since Iraj is positioning mixed code as the language spoken by underworld drug dealers, he renders speakers in non-specific communities' bilingual practice of code-mixing, invisible.

In *Lion Nation,* English punctuates the song with the regularity of a refrain, and the song is effectively in Sinhala but structurally framed by English in terms of the chorus. Here, the process of iconization is in the indexing of English as the language of power and success, since this song is about Sri Lanka and cricket, a video produced way back in 2011 when winning the world cup was still in the realm of the possible for Sri Lanka. The use of English as the chorus indicates a positioning of the country as cosmopolitan and able to communicate with the rest of the world, on an international stage. The accent and variety of English used in the video interestingly, is an imitation of the variety spoke in the West Indies, which positions Sri Lankan cricket as 'cool', a process of iconization. Interestingly Jamaican English has been called the lingua franca of hiphop music.

**CONCLUSION**

Even though translanguaging is the current political stance of looking at languages, viewing multilinguals as having linguistic repertoires for mulitlingual linguistic practice, rather than separate and distinct languages, it is apparent that different codes/languages are utilized in articulating various ideologies related to language in cultural products such as music videos. The semiotic processes of iconization, fractal recursivity and erasure are very apparently manifested in the music videos of Iraj Weeraratne. The ambiguous attitudes towards English -

-- at once a language of prestige and at the same time a language that lacks authenticity of feeling and solidarity, and when mixed in a particular manner with Sinhala, a 'pidgin' indexical of the language of the underworld--. in Sri Lanka manifest themselves in the music videos, demonstrating that English can no longer be viewed simplistically as a 'Kaduwa' (e.g. Kandiah, 1984) - the weapon of the upper class elites with which socially and economically disadvantaged groups are cut down but as a language and a repertoire from which different identities can be shaped.

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