

**LANGUAGE ACQUISITION AND MOTIVATION AMONG LEARNERS
OF ENGLISH FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ADMINISTRATION PURPOSES:
A LINGUISTIC AND SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY**

**BY
MINOLI SAMARAKKODY (B.A. Hons.)**



**A THESIS SUBMITTED
FOR THE DEGREE OF MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY
FACULTY OF ARTS
UNIVERSITY OF COLOMBO
2001**



Abstract

The target population of this study comprises the largest group of bilinguals in Sri Lanka who clamour to learn English for professional and administration purposes. In order for these bilinguals to effectively discharge the duties associated with their position as at present and progress beyond the position they currently occupy on the social and occupational scale, they will need to achieve a level of competence in English that will enable them to engage in the kind of thinking and associated praxis which modern administration requires. This study attempts to investigate why the majority of them, in spite of the demand for English and the opportunities available for learning it, generally fail to achieve this level of competence in the language.

The study seeks to investigate the acquisition of English, among this particular group of bilinguals, in terms of social psychological factors such as motivation and attitudes to learning English. It attempts to establish the social psychology of second language acquisition as a crucial dimension by explaining how the tremendous socio-historical-linguistic-political changes that have taken place in Sri Lanka, in terms of the status of English from colonial times to the present and the resulting inter-group dynamics, have developed clusters of attitudes which can be identified as a particular type of very complex integrative motivation to learning English. In doing so, this study further seeks to ascertain that it is reasonable to hypothesis that the more ambivalent or negative the informant's integrative motivation, the less positive the linguistic outcome is likely to be.

Research studies on attitudes/motivation towards learning English have been criticized in recent times for not dealing with complex issues such as the socio-historical and inter-group aspects of second language acquisition. A major reason has been the strong initial

influences of quantitative social psychology on language learning motivation, which is necessarily limiting given the intricate and multilevel construct of motivation, especially in multilingual contexts. A qualitative approach has been found to be more appropriate to uncover the complex interaction of social, cultural and psychological factors within the individual learner. This study adopts such an approach in order to describe, but more importantly explain, that in multilingual contexts such as Sri Lanka, where English holds a historically determined 'outsider' status, but continues to be the de facto language of prestige and power, a simple dichotomy of 'integrative' and 'instrumental' motivation is not feasible. Further, the complexities and ambiguities of this integrative motive make the straightforward relationship that is claimed to exist between second language achievement and attitudes/motivation, a far more complex one in the Sri Lankan context.