



Development of Restricted Language Varieties in Contemporary English: Social and Technological Influences

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Abstract

The concept of “restricted language,” first introduced by J. R. Firth, refers to language varieties developed for specific functions or communicative contexts. In contemporary American English, restricted language forms can be observed across various specialized domains, each characterized by distinct vocabulary and stylistic features. For instance, professional fields such as healthcare, technology, and finance utilize domain-specific terminology, while online communities and digital platforms have developed their own linguistic conventions. Scholars such as K. N. O. Dharmadasa have noted the emergence of new restricted language forms driven by modern communication practices. Building on this perspective, the present study examines how recent social and technological developments in the United States have contributed to the evolution of restricted language in contemporary English. Data were gathered from digital sources, including websites and social media platforms, to capture current patterns of language use. The findings indicate the rapid emergence of specialized vocabulary linked to public health crises, online media content, social networking interactions, and digital entrepreneurship. Language used in news headlines, YouTube content, social media posts, and online marketing strategies demonstrates features of restricted communication shaped by speed, audience engagement, and platform-specific norms. These patterns highlight how restricted language continues to evolve in response to changing societal needs and technological advancements. Overall, this study demonstrates that restricted language forms in contemporary American English are dynamic and adaptive, reflecting ongoing shifts in communication practices within modern digital and social environments.

Keywords: Restricted language, American English, register variation, social media language, digital communication, specialized vocabulary

1. Introduction:

Restricted Languages

Language use is closely tied to social expectations, identity, and context. Just as certain forms of behavior may be considered inappropriate depending on the situation, the same applies to language. Individuals are expected to use language that aligns with both their social identity and the context in which communication occurs. When language is used in a way that does not fit the situation, it may appear unusual or even invite criticism. As noted by Peter Trudgill, language choice is shaped by social norms and situational appropriateness. A dialect refers to a variation of a language associated with a particular group of speakers. Within any speech community, different groups use distinct dialects based on factors such as region, class, or social identity. However, variation in language is not limited to the speaker alone; it also depends on how language is used in

different contexts. This type of variation is known as a register, a concept developed by M. A. K. Halliday. Registers change according to purpose, audience, and situation, influencing vocabulary, tone, and structure. Among these variations, some forms of language are highly specialized and limited to particular functions. The term “restricted language,” introduced by J. R. Firth, describes language systems designed for specific activities or domains. These forms are closely tied to their context and typically allow little variation. Restricted languages can be found in both every day and professional settings, appearing in spoken and written communication.

Registers are most easily distinguished by their vocabulary, although they may also differ in pronunciation or grammatical patterns. For example, specialized fields such as law, medicine, and digital media often use terminology that clearly identifies their communicative context. In many cases, the presence of specific lexical items alone is enough to signal a particular register. As discussed by David Crystal, restricted language forms are a common feature across languages and serve important communicative functions.

Overall, restricted languages represent a specialized type of register characterized by limited scope and strong contextual dependence. They exist in both formal and informal settings and continue to evolve as communication practices change. Linguists study these forms to better understand how language adapts to social, cultural, and technological demands.

2. Literature Review: Studies on Restricted Language in English

There is no single, universally accepted definition of restricted language within English linguistics. Early perspectives suggest that language variation may occur between written and spoken forms, each exhibiting distinct structural and functional features. Some scholars have argued that these differences can be viewed as specialized forms of language use, particularly when they are tied to specific communicative purposes. Within English, written discourse such as literary writing or scientific communication—often differs significantly in vocabulary and structure, while spoken discourse also includes specialized varieties shaped by occupational or situational contexts.

Research in sociolinguistics has further classified language variation into different categories. Scholars such as J. B. Dissanayake (in broader comparative linguistic discussions) identify regional, social, and situational variations. The situational category refers to differences in language use depending on context, such as formal versus informal communication. For example, the language used in academic lectures or professional presentations differs considerably from everyday conversational English. While these variations are sometimes described as dialects, this classification has been debated within linguistic theory.

A more widely accepted framework is the concept of “register,” as developed in functional linguistics. According to scholars like M. A. K. Halliday, registers represent language varieties associated with specific contexts, purposes, and audiences. Building on the earlier concept of restricted language introduced by J. R. Firth, later scholars argue that highly specialized registers can be considered restricted forms of language due to their limited scope and strong contextual dependence.

In contemporary English, restricted language forms can be observed across a wide range of domains. Professional fields such as medicine, law, engineering, and finance rely heavily on specialized terminology that is not commonly used in everyday communication. Similarly, digital communication has given rise to new restricted forms, particularly in areas such as social media, online marketing, and news media. For instance, headlines often employ compressed grammatical structures, simplified syntax, and attention-grabbing vocabulary to convey information efficiently.

Vocabulary remains the most prominent feature distinguishing restricted language forms. As emphasized by David Crystal, specific lexical items often serve as clear indicators of particular registers. For example, healthcare professionals use terms like “diagnosis,” “prognosis,” and “comorbidity,” while technology

communities rely on expressions such as “algorithm,” “cloud computing,” and “user interface.” These specialized vocabularies reflect the expertise and functional needs of each domain.

In addition to vocabulary, restricted language forms may involve semantic shifts, where common words take on specialized meanings within particular contexts. For instance, in computing, the word “virus” refers not only to a biological agent but also to malicious software. Similarly, in finance, the term “liquidity” carries a technical meaning distinct from its everyday usage. These contextual meanings highlight how language adapts to specific professional or social environments.

Certain restricted forms also exhibit unique grammatical and stylistic features. For example, news headlines in English often omit auxiliary verbs, use present tense to describe past events, and rely on concise sentence structures to maximize impact. Digital communication, particularly text messaging and social media, has introduced additional linguistic features such as abbreviations, acronyms, and non-standard spellings. Expressions like “LOL” (laugh out loud), “BRB” (be right back), and “DM” (direct message) illustrate how efficiency and speed influence language use in digital contexts.

Overall, studies on restricted language demonstrate that these forms are primarily characterized by specialized vocabulary, context-dependent meanings, and distinctive stylistic features. As communication continues to evolve especially with technological advancement—new restricted language forms emerge, reflecting the dynamic relationship between language, society, and function.

3. Materials and Methods

Language and society maintain a dynamic and interdependent relationship, wherein variations in language emerge as reflections of social incidents, developments, and trends. These linguistic variations are often closely tied to specific events or movements, remaining relevant to particular time frames or contexts. Furthermore, certain variations may be unique to distinct social groups or communities, serving specific functions and purposes within those groups. When examining these variations, a notable characteristic is the distinct vocabulary associated with them. It is apparent that some forms of language variation that arise from current events and trends can be classified as restricted languages in Sinhala. This study will explore several of these forms in detail.

In order to identify new restricted forms in Sinhala, data has been collected from online sources, including websites, YouTube channels, and other social media platforms. A carefully curated selection of samples on the above platforms was made to ensure adequate representation of each identified restricted form. Further, examples were chosen based on the most current data pertinent to the respective categories. For instance, records from the COVID19 period were examined to analyze language associated with epidemic and pandemic contexts, while more contemporary records on social media were examined to identify language relevant to methods of online income generation, which are increasingly prevalent. The selected samples were examined qualitatively to assess their potential to represent a distinct restricted form in the Sinhala language.

4. Discussion and Results

4.1. Language Usage in Epidemic and Pandemic Contexts

The emergence of COVID-19 in 2019 represented an extraordinary global event, as the world had not previously encountered a pandemic of this scale. Speaking communities across the globe needed a new terminology to express ideas related to various aspects, including the transmission of the virus, minimising the spread, and treatments. The English-speaking community used both the existing vocabulary and newly created terms for this purpose. Although these English terms became popular in other speaking communities, too, various language groups began to develop their own vocabularies to convey the ideas related to the pandemic. Research has been conducted to examine COVID-19-related terminology in English (Alyeksyeyeva, Chaiuk

and Galitska, 2020; Akut, 2020; Asif and others, 2020) and other languages (Al-Dala'ien and others, 2020; Cartier and others, 2022; Wang and Huang, 2021).

As COVID-19 was a new experience to the Sinhala-speaking community, too, they needed a new vocabulary to convey the ideas related to the pandemic. As the existing vocabulary did not suffice to convey new ideas, they utilized English terms such as "lockdown", "mask", "sanitizer", "PCR" and "RAT", and sometimes these words were transcribed in Sinhala script. Subsequently, Sinhala translations of some of these words became popular. For example, the term *wasā: dæmi:mə*, which has the meaning of prohibiting entry and exit, was initially used to describe the concept of a lockdown. Over time, the English term "lockdown" was adopted in Sinhala script. Ultimately, this led to the translation of the term as *agulu dæmi:mə*, which means "locking a door." This term has since been established as the equivalent of "lockdown." In the wake of concerns regarding the Nipah virus following the COVID-19 pandemic, the Sinhala-speaking community received communications indicating that there would not be an *agulu dæmi:mə*. This reflects that the process of developing vocabulary during the COVID-19 pandemic not only served as a mechanism for expressing ideas during that time but also marked the beginning of creating a specialized lexicon related to epidemic and pandemic situations.

It is important to acknowledge the semantic shift of words observed during the COVID19 pandemic. During this period, various English terms that convey particular concepts acquired new meanings. This phenomenon is similarly reflected in the Sinhala language, where existing translations also demonstrate a shift in meaning. For instance, the terms 'cluster' and 'wave' hold distinct definitions in the context of COVID-19, and their corresponding translations in Sinhala, referred to as *pokurə* and *rəllə*, adopt different interpretations under these circumstances. In general usage, *pokurə* denotes a bouquet, while *rəllə* refers to a water wave. However, during the COVID-19 context, these meanings diverge significantly.

In circumstances where a speaking community encounters an emergency, particularly when that community is small, there is often a tendency to use existing vocabulary rather than creating new terminology. The urgency of the situation necessitates the swift expression of ideas, which can result in the appropriation of existing words and the evolution of their meanings. Through this lens, language researchers have the opportunity to explore Sinhala terminology associated with the COVID-19 situation, assess its application during and after the pandemic, and identify a form of Sinhala language that is uniquely linked to epidemic and pandemic scenarios.

4.2. Headlines on Gossip Websites

K. N. O. Dharmadasa has identified the language utilized in newspaper headlines as a distinctive form of restricted language in Sinhala (Dharmadasa, 2019, pp. 150-151). He has pointed out several notable characteristics of this language, including the use of colloquial vocabulary and specific grammatical features. In the current media landscape, while traditional newspapers remain prevalent, there has been a significant rise in news websites and gossip platforms that also disseminate news to the public. Gossip sites aim to publish rumours or sensational information rather than to make the public aware of factual news. Therefore, headlines on these platforms are often written with a distinct language style to attract the audience. The following table, which includes the English translations of headlines from a news site and a gossip site, illustrates the two different approaches of presenting information.

News Site (Hiru News)	Gossip Site (Hiru Gossip)
The Kottawa entrance to the highway has been temporarily closed due to an emergency fire incident.	The Kottawa entrance to the highway has been closed due to an emergency situation. Please see further details regarding the incident.
Hurricane Yagi has resulted in the tragic loss of 60 lives.	An extraordinary event unfolded in a matter of seconds.
A cat weighing 17 kilograms has been uncovered.	An intriguing story has emerged concerning a cat that weighs 17 kilograms.
Special mosquito control week declared from the 19th of May.	See what happens over an entire week starting from the 19th of May.
Two girls drown in Galgamuwa lake.	The sad story behind the roses drowned in Galgamuwa lake.
Chamari Athapaththu fined by the ICC.	Chamari Athapaththu fined by the ICC. What has actually happened?
Egg prices drop in local market.	The unforeseen situation happened to egg prices.
Slight decrease in local gold prices.	The location where the gold price halted, leaving everyone in awe and wondering.

When examining these headlines, it can be noticed that they are designed to grab attention and spark curiosity. The choice of vocabulary, distinct tone and unconventional grammar are the main features of that language. The headlines often lack direct information related to the news, but are designed to engage readers with compelling language. Terms that have the meanings such as "extraordinary," "intriguing," "unforeseen," and "wondering" are frequently employed to pique interest. For instance, the decline in egg prices has been presented as an unforeseen situation related to egg prices. Additionally, more sensitive terminology, such as "roses," is sometimes used to describe tragic events, such as the drowning of two young girls in a lake.

In contemporary society, operating a gossip website has emerged as a viable income generation method. To attract and retain a substantial audience, these websites often employ targeted vocabulary and distinctive language patterns. This approach is essential for maximizing audience engagement and, subsequently, advertising revenue. Considering these facts, it is beneficial to identify and examine the restricted language form emerged based on Sinhala gossip sites.

4.3. Thumbnails and Titles on YouTube

YouTube is currently becoming popular in the Sinhala-speaking community too. Individuals are creating YouTube channels across various themes, including cooking, sports, entertainment, technology, education and psychological well-being, not only to share information, but also to earn an extra income. Therefore, attractive thumbnails and titles can be seen on YouTube channels that help to attract the audience. The following are the English translations of Sinhala video titles related to cooking a dhal curry.

Dhal Curry Made Without Coconut Milk

Preparing Dhal Curry: Enhancing Flavor and Shelf Life

Essential Techniques for Achieving a Flavorful Dhal Curry

A Unique Approach to Making Dhal Curry That Lasts Longer

To attract the audience, creators are using a language form distinct from the standard language use and the specific vocabulary, different sentence structures, and specific tone can be identified as the features of this language. Additionally, there may sometimes be discrepancies between the titles and the actual content. Efforts

to attract a larger audience often focus on enhancing visibility and generating revenue. It is important to recognize that conventional language may not always suffice in achieving these objectives. Therefore, tailoring language to meet the specific needs of the audience is essential for effective communication. It is beneficial to explore this linguistic phenomenon as a restricted form within the Sinhala language.

4.4. Language Utilization on Social Media Platforms

In addition to YouTube, the younger generation engages with a variety of social media platforms, including WhatsApp, Messenger, and Telegram, which facilitate both private and group conversations. An analysis of these conversations reveals that users consider the simplicity and ease of typing in the language they utilize. This is illustrated in the following table.

Conventional Language	Usage on Social Media
<i>tijənəva:</i>	<i>ti:nəva:/tinəva:</i>
<i>tijənəvadə</i>	<i>ti:də/tidə</i>
<i>kəranə</i>	<i>kərano</i>
<i>kəranəvadə</i>	<i>kəranodə</i>
<i>janəva:nam</i>	<i>janonam</i>

Although the aforementioned formats offer convenience in typing, the rationale behind some modifications may not be easily justified. It can be seen that the younger generation adopts these language patterns as a form of self-expression. This approach appears to reflect their desire to differentiate their communication style from the conventional language. Eg: Substituting the letter *m* for the first letter in double consonants (*komla:* for *kolla*, *lamsənə* for *lassənə*)

Replacing the letter *m* for the letter *n* at the end of the words (*itim* for *itin*, *gom* for *gon*)

Using the sound *i* instead of *e* at the ends of the words (*kəranəvani* for *kəranəvane*, *dannəvani* for *dannəvane*)

The young generation engaging with social media platforms represents a distinct linguistic community. Within this context, they often adopt varied styles, either consciously or subconsciously, to differentiate their language usage. This phenomenon results in the emergence of a unique linguistic form that is specific to social media environments. Due to these distinct characteristics that differ from standard language usage, it is valuable to examine this language as a restricted form in Sinhala.

4.5. Language Relevant to Online Income Generation Methods

Currently, methods of generating income online are becoming popular relative to traditional employment. Therefore, there is a growing need for a specific vocabulary to express new concepts and practices associated with online employment. As a result, new terms are often coined, or existing English words are adapted to fit the evolving context. Non-English speakers frequently adopt these English terms directly, translate them into their native languages, or create entirely new words. Notably, in the case of the Sinhala language, various approaches have emerged to develop vocabulary that accommodates these modern trends. Initially, the Sinhala-speaking community used English terms or incorporated Sinhala auxiliary words alongside English terms to express new concepts. Over time, this practice evolved to include the combination of Sinhala suffixes with English words, allowing for the adaptation and localization of these terms within the linguistic context.

English Term (+ Sinhala Auxiliary Word)	English Term + Sinhala Suffix
token <i>ekā</i> entry	<i>to:kānājā enṭrija</i>
<i>ekā</i> bounty <i>ekā</i>	<i>bavunṭija</i>
traders	<i>tre:dā:sla:</i>
freelancer <i>kenek</i>	-
profit <i>kāraṇava:</i>	-

In addition to the previously mentioned methods, there are instances where English words are integrated with Sinhala terms. Typically, the Sinhala word either aligns closely with the meaning of the English term or serves to enhance its clarity. Eg:

exchange - exchange *ginumā* (*ginumā* = account) AMA - AMA *sæsijā* (*sæsijā* = session)

scam - scam *vaṇca:vā* (*vaṇca:vā* = scam) dropshipping - dropshipping *vja:pa:rājā*

(*vja:pa:rājā* = industry) halving - halving *krija:vālijā* (*krija:vālijā* = process)

Furthermore, members of the Sinhala-speaking community occasionally engage in direct translations of English phrases into Sinhala, which can result in literal interpretations. Eg:

freelancing - *nidahas se:vākā* (freelancing = *nidahas se:vākā*) forex market - *vide:fā vinimājā*

veleḍāpolā (forex = *vide:fā vinimājā*, market = *veleḍāpolā*)

decentralized money - *vike:ndritā mudal* (decentralized = *vike:ndritā*, money = *mudal*)

virtual currency - *atatjā mudal* (virtual = *atatjā*, currency = *mudal*)

initial coin offering - *mu:likā ka:si nikutuvā* (initial = *mu:likā*, coin = *ka:si*, offering = *nikutuvā*)

Beyond these direct translations, established Sinhala equivalents for English terms may also be utilized to express concepts related to online earning methods. In such cases, one can observe a semantic shift in the meanings of these existing translations. Eg:

address - *lipinājā* (A distinctive alphanumeric string that functions as a digital identifier on the blockchain)

wallet - *pasumbijā* (A secure location for the storage of cryptocurrencies) blocks - *kutti* (A repository of

information on the blockchain) bag - *bā:gājā* (An individual possessing a substantial quantity of

cryptocurrency) coin - *ka:sijā* (A specific category of cryptocurrency)

In the context of online income generation within the Sinhala community, individuals are progressively cultivating a specialized vocabulary that facilitates the expression of their ideas and the education of newcomers. Similar to the group that engages in social media, this group also exchanges ideas and perspectives through online platforms. To facilitate effective communication, they require a specific vocabulary. While English terms may be utilised in colloquial Sinhala, a distinct set of terminology is necessary for written communications in Sinhala. As these online methods gain traction, it is anticipated that this vocabulary will continue to grow, potentially leading to the emergence of new linguistic features. Therefore, the language associated with online income generation methods can be considered a restricted form in Sinhala language.

5. Conclusion

Based on specific functions and contexts, various registers can be identified within a single language. According to the British linguist J. R. Firth, registers designated for limited purposes can be considered 'restricted languages'. The main characteristic of the restricted forms in the Sinhala language is the distinct vocabulary. Notable examples include the language utilized in traditional agricultural practices and the vernacular of the fishing community, which illustrate the diversity of restricted forms within the language.

Language variations are often context-specific, arising in response to particular movements or historical periods. K. N. O. Dharmadasa has previously identified the language forms utilized in newspaper headlines and short message services as new restricted forms within the Sinhala language. This study investigates the

emergence of new restricted forms arisen from recent developments and trends within the Sinhala-speaking community. The research highlights vocabularies associated with epidemics and pandemics, headlines from gossip websites, titles and thumbnails on YouTube, social media interactions, and online income generation methods. The increasing popularity of certain restricted forms within the Sinhala-speaking community has contributed to improved mutual intelligibility among the members. However, while widely recognized situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic have gained attention across the broader speaking community, language pertaining to online income generation methods remains confined to groups within that specific field. The emergence of popular restricted forms in Sinhala language is poised to facilitate a significant advancement in language development. As ongoing developments in the several fields progress, the associated vocabulary will also continue to evolve. Furthermore, new restricted languages are likely to emerge in response to shifting social trends. Future research can be conducted to identify and explore these restricted forms within the Sinhala language. The study also encourages scholars to investigate the emergence of restricted forms in other languages as a result of social developments and trends.

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