Intimidation and Strategic Shielding: Exploring the Role of English as "Kaduwa" in the Professional Experiences of a Selected Group of Sri Lankan Lawyers

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This study aims to explore the complex role played by the English language as a form of intimidation, and a strategic shield in the lives of a group of selected Sri Lankan lawyers. It focuses on how English, popularly conceptualized as "*kaduwa,"* is experienced, interpreted, and negotiated in non-English-dominated courtroom contexts. Using purposive sampling, ten lawyers belonging to different levels in terms of their English language fluency were selected as the research sample. Data was generated through semi-structured interviews and questionnaires, allowing participants to reflect on and share their lived experiences of language use in legal forums. The data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The study reveals that lawyers who are fluent and who use English in non-English dominated legal forums such as District and Magistrate courts (outstation), and sometimes Colombo courts, are always looked upon as trying to oppress and intimidate the lawyers who are not fluent in the language. In addition, lawyers who are less fluent, but who try to make legal applications in English in non-English based legal forums are also branded as trying to rise above the level of their colleagues or showing off. It creates feelings of enmity among fellow colleagues practicing in the same bar. The results reveal that, despite the standard of the language and the proficiency level of the user, due to the cultural baggage associated with English as the '*kaduwa'* which positions the language as a symbolic instrument of power, the use of English is detrimental in particular forums, among a majority of Sinhala-speaking lawyers. It is perceived in a negative light despite the fluency and the intention of the user. The results further indicate that some fluent lawyers use English strategically as a means of masking perceived gaps in legal knowledge, with the impression that lack of legal competence can be compensated through linguistic proficiency. The study concludes that English as "*kaduwa"* does not retain a fixed or uniformly powerful status. Instead, it is a dynamic and context-dependent construct that generates tension and misunderstanding in non-English dominated courts, often producing more negative than positive outcomes in the professional lives of the selected lawyers.

Keywords: English, *kaduwa*, intimidation, strategic shielding, legal professionals