The English Language in Ceylon

In this article an attempt is made, first, to examine and briefly accoun the extraordinary place English has gradually assumed in the life of Ce culminating in its adoption, in the early years of this century, as the 'm tongue' of a small but powerful section. When a spirit of nationalism b to assert itself about twenty years ago there naturally followed a return to the ver culars, accompanied by a tendency to neglect whatever positive gains have crued from more than fifty years of English education. We are now in the d cult transitional phase, when the vernaculars are struggling into their rig place in the educational system, while English is still being treated, in the secon schools, as the 'mother tongue' and allowed for the most part to look after it In conclusion a plea is made for the consolidation of the benefits English brought to Ceylon, the fullest exploitation of the very valuable contributions Eng can make towards the reinstatement of the vernaculars in the educational sy and towards the revival of native literature, the stabilization of the form of Eng spoken in Ceylon and the development of a technique by which it can be efficie taught.

THE remarkable place occupied by the English language in the so political, and cultural life of Ceylon is one of the many linguistic sults of the spread of the English-speaking peoples, geographically politically, over immense new tracts of the world, which began in the sixte century and culminated in the nineteenth. When Drake, Raleigh and bisher began their voyages in search of wealth and adventure, English the language of the few million inhabitants of England[1] and the Scot Lowlands. It was used in Ireland by the English colonists, it was kn

1. The population of England numbered about five millions in the xvi century.

ishmen, a few Welshmen, a few scholars and merchants on the In England it was only just beginning to replace Latin as the culture and knowledge. In the early sixteenth century Elyot m felt impelled by patriotism to express themselves in their native ut they apologised for its deficiencies.[2] Latin was a more natural r educationists and men of learning. It was not till the end of the at, through the efforts of thoughtful schoolmasters like Richard s the English language began to be regarded as worthy of study ed as the medium of instruction.

s at this time, when English was beginning to be recognised by n as equal in beauty and in suitability for all the purposes of and literature[4] to any language, ancient or modern, and when a

---

n the Dedication of *Toxophilus* (1545) to Henry VIII, Ascham apologises for nglish, when " to have written in another tongue had been both more profitable dy and also more honest for my nature." Contrasting English with Latin and hich " everything is so excellently done . . ., that none can do better," he writes : nglish tongue, contrary, every thing in a manner so meanly both for the matter ndling, that no man can do worse." Elsewhere he says : " Although to have is book in Latin or Greek . . . had been more easier and fit for my trade in study, I have written this English matter in the English tongue for Englishmen."

The *First Part of the Elementarie* (1582) : " I love Rome, but London better ; taly, but England more ; I honour the Latin, but I worship the English." And, , " Necessity itself doth call for English."

Mulcaster (ibid.) : " I do not think that any language, be it whatsoever, is e to utter all arguments either with more pith or greater plainness than our ngue is." Sidney, *The Apologie for Poetrie* (c. 1581) : " for the uttering sweetly rly the conceits of the mind which is the end of speech, that hath it equally other tongue in the world." Since the time of Ascham the English language had rimented with and developed in many directions.

e who are anxious to reinstate Sinhalese and Tamil as the languages of learning re in Ceylon have many lessons to learn from the history of Western European like French and English in the sixteenth century. Some of these will be indi- r in this article. Sidney and Mulcaster were saying about English what du d said about French : " In this connection I cannot sufficiently blame the foolish and temerity of some in our nation who, being in no wise Greek nor Latin, mis- reject with a more than stoical haughtiness all things written in French ; and sufficiently wonder at the strange opinion of some learned men who think that r tongue is incapable of good letters and erudition :" (*The Defence and Illustra- French Language* by Joachim du Bellay, 1549, translated by Gladys M. Turquet, n chapter XII du Bellay exhorts the French to write in their language ; he cites ples of Petrarch and Boccaccio, who " though they did write much in Latin, nains that this would not have sufficed to give them the great honour which they re had they not written in their own tongue. Which knowing well, many s in our time,. . . have been converted to their mother tongue, even Italians greater reason to adore the Latin tongue than we." He concludes the chapter : s to me (reader, friend of the French muses) that after these whom I have ou shouldst not be ashamed to write in thine own language, but that thou if thou be a friend of France, nay, of thyself, give thyself entirely thereto, generous opinion that it is better to be an Achilles among one's own people omede, nay, often a Thersites, among others."

great literature was beginning to appear in this so lately despised lan
that there commenced those processes by which English was dissem
all over the world. The East India Company, organised in the reign
zabeth, began to trade actively in India in the reign of James. Abo
same time England's first colonies were planted by the Cavaliers in V
and by the Puritans in New England. In India there began the proc
which English was to become the language of international
and commerce in the East; in America English took root in
soil. And so, in the course of the next three centuries, the English lan
spread through the world, becoming, on the one hand, the language of
vast areas in which British emigrants settled (the U.S.A., Canada, South
Australia, New Zealand), and on the other, the second language of the p
dominated politically by England and, later, by the United States of Am
India, Burma, Malaya, Egypt, North West and Central Africa, Pale
Hawaii, the Philippines, the Canal Zone, numerous islands in the Pa

The spread of the English language into countries from which it p
cally ousted the native languages, or in which it imposed itself as the lan
of government and business, in fact of the everyday life of the intellige
has created linguistic situations of many kinds—interesting, novel and di
In the U.S.A. there are three distinct types of American English,[6] an
problem of a common standard, first for Americans and secondly for the E
speaking world, has excited a great deal of controversy. In Canada,
treal and Quebec are practically bilingual, while other places, the C
Victoria for example, are predominantly English in culture, but with a s
colouring from the American Indian and Canadian French populations
the Union of South Africa the official use of two European languages, E
and Afrikaans—the provincial Dutch of the Boers, has caused a compli
language situation. In Australia and New Zealand, isolation from the m
country has produced new dialects of English. Irish-English again is a
tinctive type.

Different, and far more difficult, are the linguistic problems of cou
like India and Ceylon, where English has been imposed on or adopte
peoples who already possessed one or more developed languages of their
(unlike the American Indians or Zulu tribes). In India, and to a less e
in Ceylon, the language of the colonists gradually absorbed many terms
the indigenous languages, describing things that had no equivalent in their
country.[7] But neither the officials nor the business men who made

5. English has also, of course, been studied by people in many other countri
cultural and commercial reasons.

6. "It is vain to pretend that there is a recognised ideal standard of pronunci
for all of the United States and Canada. The West will not bow before the
or the East before the West, and the South has a deep-rooted affection for its own m
of speaking." H. Kurath, S.P.E. Tract No. XXX *American Pronunciation*.

7. Hobson-Jobsonisms. The original form has usually been modified to
English speech habits: e.g. bungalow ≺ Hind. *bungla* 'belonging to Bengal;' ch
≺ Hind. *chitthi* ≺ Sans. *chitra* 'a mark;' pyjamas ≻ Hind. *pae-jama* 'leg-clothing.'

temporary home, endeavoured to learn the languages of the peoples
they had to deal.[8] Instead, such of the inhabitants as were will-
English were taught it, and were used as intermediaries between
ts and those whom they governed. Consequently, in all these
ome form of foreign English has developed (*i.e.*, English as spoken
to whom it is an alien language), which occupies a more or less
l place in the life and culture of the people.

cial and economic advantages of a knowledge of English were in
of time realised, and the language eagerly learnt by those who were
to contact, or who desired contact, with the foreign officials. The
ionaries had devoted themselves to the study of the vernaculars and
velopment of vernacular schools. But from about 1870 more
ucation was demanded and the Missions, assisted by the Govern-
ablished English secondary schools in the larger towns.[9]

rom the beginning there were scholars who were interested in the languages
porary home. The earliest students of oriental languages were missionaries,
of whose work made it necessary that they should know the language of those
om they lived. In Ceylon we have the pioneer work of Chater, Clough and Carter;
ndia, of Beschius, Rhenius, Graul, Caldwell, Percival, and Pope. Still earlier
e pioneer work in Indian languages in the south was done either by the Portu-
nselves. or through the medium of the Portuguese language. The arrival of the
t powers in India in the 18th and 19th centuries interested Dutch, English,
d Danish scholars in the languages and cultures of India. Among laymen one
me is that of Sir William Jones.

When the Rev. James Cordiner arrived in Ceylon, late in 1799, as chaplain to
on in Colombo he was made principal of all the schools in the settlement. In
e were 170 schools which taught in the vernaculars of the respective regions,
lese and Tamil. For giving a better education to the sons of native chiefs and
igh officials and to the European (Dutch and Portuguese) youths, three schools
blished, from which young men were recruited for employment in the Goverment,
serve either as translators, clerks, proponents (i.e. preachers) or teachers. Simi-
s ambitious schools were established at Galle, Jaffna and Trincomalee. These
ere run by the Government. The general educational policy of the missionaries
truct in the vernaculars, but the need for English-speaking missionary assistants
erks in the lower ranks of Government service led to the teaching of English to a
ew. In 1800 North wrote to the Board of Directors of the East India Company:
three superior schools [established in Colombo] are likely to produce in a much
me than I expected a set of well qualified candidates of all the offices which are
by Burghers or by natives. . ." The better prospects afforded by a knowledge
h created a demand for more and more English, and soon English schools were
d in increasing numbers. From 1827 merchants and planters began to establish
es in the colony, and in due course the needs of Government, the trades and
s brought into being a class of Ceylonese with an English education. It was an
class whose numbers were continually being swelled. An ambitious father even
of his sons to India, as Forbes notes with approval in 1840: "our intelligent
e Modeliar [of Avisawella] seemed perfectly aware of the advantages of educatoin,
proved his sincerity of conviction on this head by sending one of his sons to be
at the Calcutta College." (For the quotations from North and Forbes, and also
information, I am indebted to an unpublished thesis on *English and English
in Ceylon* by Dr. Ludowyk, who very kindly allowed me the use of it. I have
nank the Rev. C. N. V. Fernando for having permitted me to read and make
thesis on the *History of Christianity in Ceylon in the British Period*).

An English system of education, with English as the medium of instructi
established in Ceylon. The indigenous languages, continued however t
the daily needs of the vast majority of the people and even those who att
English schools knew their own language well. There were several news
and journals in the two vernaculars, and vigorous controversies were c
on in the press (see note 12). But at the beginning of the present centu
vernaculars began to lose ground seriously to English, until the grow
a national spirit arrested this development about twenty years ago. E
was adopted by many educated people as their first language. The verna
were used chiefly by simple and illiterate folk, and by the educated only i
simplest and most familiar intercourse, and were even then freely mingled
borrowings from English. The spoken languages adapted themselves t
needs of the new life that Westerners brought with them chiefly by the r
and ready method of borrowing largely from the English vocabul
Obviously the indigenous languages could not, under these circumsta
be the vehicles of modern learning and culture, or the means of coping
a new and increasingly complex civilisation.

The predominance of English in the political and cultural life of a pe
to whom it is an alien language has created curious and difficult lingu
situations. A system of government resembling English prototypes has
developed and so quite naturally Western institutions and Western ideas
become familiar, and have fostered the natural desire to be free ; to thro
the cultural and political bondage to England, and to attempt to restore
national culture by reabsorbing into the new westernised way of life as m
of the ancient cultures as is still relevant in the modern world. Religion
language were naturally the first to be influenced by the nationalist spi
Christian missionaries had done most to disseminate English culture in
east.

The indigenous languages had to be rescued immediately from the infe
social and cultural position to which they had been degraded. But Eng
was already securely entrenched in the lives of the intelligentsia and the nat
agents of British rule, a small percentage of the population, but the rich,
educated, the powerful. From them must come both the struggle to change
old order, and the resistance to change, arising either from the conviction t
"Whatever is, is right" or from sheer inertia. The very difficult task that
faces educationists, and the unenviable position of English in this situat
can be made clearer by a comparison.

10. An English noun can be readily transformed for colloquial use by the sim
process of adapting its sounds to Sinhalese speech habits and, in many cases, suffi
Sinhalese *eka* ' one ' to it : *sōs* (sauce), *birandy* (brandy), *bicycal-eka*, *car-eka*, *gram* (*a*) *A*
one-eka.

e Dark and Middle Ages in Western Europe Latin was the language
n, of learning and science, and of diplomacy ; professional men,
nd doctors, traders and business men needed to know Latin. It
act the international language of the educated. The vernaculars
d, however, to be the language of private life and of creative literature.
ducated man would thus have two languages at command, Latin and
native language. In England the Norman Conquest introduced a third
, Norman French. Latin remained the language of learning, while
became the language of society and of government ; it was the language
ng and his court, of the barons and gentry (both English and Norman),
professions, of merchants and even artisans ; in short, of the upper
nd of those of the middle classes who had dealings with them or who
em and cultivated French as a mark of social distinction. It was used
ament and in the law courts, and it was the medium of instruction in the
ar schools. Naturally it was the vehicle of polite letters. English,
had been the language of official and private life among all classes of
, and in which many works of literature and of edification had been
h, before the Conquest, now lost its social value ; it became primarily
nguage of the illiterate peasants. By Englishmen of the upper and
classes it would still be used, but as an inferior language and chiefly
ir intercourse with the lower classes.[11] At the same time its use by
nt and unliterary people and its escape from the pedantry of the learned
ed the simplification of its grammar and those colloquial tendencies
have made English an analytical language. When the literary use of
h was resumed, it was this spoken language, suppled by popular use
cy of the soil, that was made the basis of the cultivated literary style.[12]

. Many Englishmen continued to use their native tongue in literature as well as
ntercourse, especially in the parts most remote from French influence—the North
e West Midlands.

Will colloquial Sinhalese and Tamil play a similar part in Ceylonese literature,
the pundits succeed in keeping alive the moribund literary forms ? In a recent work
rn Sinhalese Fiction, by E. R. de S. Sarathchandra) it is noted that controversial
g, which began in the middle of the 19th century, suppled the language (p. 7), made
e flexible and vigorous (p. 9); that the style of Koggala Dharmatileka, for example,
simple, direct, and close to the spoken language" (p. 10). But the pundits seem
reasserting themselves : On page 16 the author says that " in the early days of
lism the newspapers and periodicals used a language closer to the spoken than
wspapers and periodicals of today." On page 19 we are told that in the 19th century
nhalese language " had thrown to the winds many grammatical conventions in
of fluency of expression. . . . And this it did to some extent in spite of the infl-
f the grammarians, though today we see signs of the language being stifled owing to
nfluence."

English, like Sinhalese and Tamil in Ceylon today, was still, there the language of the great majority of the people. There were, first, the sants who probably knew a few French words (like the illiterate Sinh and Tamils who know a few English words) ; the bilingual Englishmen the bilingual Sinhalese and Tamils) ; and the Normans who gradually le the language of the country (unlike the British, few of whom do so, and unlike the Normans, are not a permanent part of the population). Bu was inevitable that French should be the language of everyone of consequ or who desired to be of consequence. " For unless a man knows French is held of little account ", wrote Robert of Gloucester in 1298. Ralph Hig writing about 1350, tells us that noblemen's children are taught French f the time that they are rocked in their cradles ; and even country folk will gentlemen and try to speak French to be thought well of.

The position of English in relation to French was thus in many ways that of Sinhalese and Tamil in relation to English. But there are vital di ences. In the first place, as Normans and Englishmen became welded one nation the Norman-French language began to lose its prestige and Eng became the symbol of the rising spirit of nationalism. It might seem an e thing to have done to give back to English its rightful place in the life of nation. But the process was slow. Beginning about the middle of the t teenth century it was completed only at the end of the fourteenth, when the first time since the Conquest, one could speak of " the King's Englis Henry IV (1399)was the first king of England, since the Conquest, to wh English was his mother tongue. In Ceylon, English cannot be merely discar like French in fourteenth century England. A majority of politicians as as educationists would probably wish to retain English as a second langua Englishmen in the fourteenth century recognised a loss in the discontinua of French in the grammar schools where "children now-a-days know no m French than does their left heel, " because they would be at a disadvanta when they " cross the sea and travel in foreign countries " (John de Trevi 1387). How much more would Ceylonese regret the loss of a language kno in every part of the world. Some place has obviously to be found for Engl in our educational system.

The change over from French to English took place in England imme ately before the earlier Renaissance and England was able to profit by the discovery of the ancient classics and the intellectual awakening of Euro Literary movements in all parts of the country accompanied the general placement of French by English. At the same time " Standard English began to emerge, and Chaucer appeared at exactly the right moment to enha the prestige of this type of English and accelerate its adoption as the standa literary language. Ceylon, one must hope, will profit by the Renaissa of Oriental learning and culture in India. But the reinstatement of the nati

and the cultural renaissance must be preceded by radical changes cational system. The English literary tradition had been reduced, the language, to political and social inferiority but not destroyed rman Conquest. English ceased, for a time, to be the language of ers, but it continued to be used uninterruptedly for the edification tainment of the common people, and this popular literature derived from older literary forms. Above all, the continuity of English d never really been broken. The French culture introduced by the modified but did not oust the native culture. In Ceylon the native mong the educated, has been all but effaced by the very thorough westernisation in the English schools; it is chiefly among those who he vernaculars that the traditional culture has preserved its continu- intelligentsia may be able to appreciate the ancient or modern litera- Europe, but have lost the ability to read the literature of their native Popular literature exists, but its quality and efficacy are limited by aratively low standard of culture of the vernacular speaking people he absence of communication between the vernacular literates and the ducated. In brief, our educated men and women are for the most glish educated ' and therefore incapable of either producing or ting native literary works.[13] Those who attend the Vernacular Schools ly literate enough to read or write anything valuable in their anguage. The new system of education must in the course of vide the poet or playwright or novelist both with his technique and public.

at is valuable in the life and thought of the past has to be made avail- he present, and the instrument of language, long left to the use of those e incapable of adapting it to the needs of a changing world, and put to nest uses only, has to be polished and reshaped. That Sinhalese and Tamil e the place now occupied by English in the lives of the Ceylonese is a y accepted view. How this is to be effected is not so generally con- and when it is, the simple solution of making the indigenous languages ory subjects in the schools and for examinations, and of using the nother tongue as the medium of instruction 'as soon as the change can duced ' is the vague programme envisaged. Least of all is the part to d by English in the period of transition, and after, given any attention. , there can be no doubt that English must play an important part in tion of a suitable technique for making the vernaculars the media of on, and probably a predominant part in any literary Renaissance one sage for Ceylon.

[13] This refers to ' the common reader ', and not to specialists and scholars.

The small percentage of educated Ceylonese are 'English educat
they know English, and, for the most part, they know it well. It is by
that the preliminary work of translating and adapting suitable foreign b
and of writing new ones must be done, before Sinhalese and Tamil can
their natural place in the educational system.[14] If these English educ
scholars know no Sinhalese or Tamil, or do not know them sufficiently we
is likely to be the case at first), they will have to collaborate with Sinhalese
Tamil scholars. But the ideal is that there should be, as soon as possib
stage of complete bilingualism in the English schools. It is only the sch
who knows English and Sinhalese (or Tamil) almost, if not quite, as well,
will be able to bring the thought and feeling, the learning and creative lif
ture of other nations[15] to his countrymen; or translate the terminolog
modern science or mathematics or linguistics into the vernacular; or a
the technique of modern scholarship to local needs.[16]

Before considering the place of English in the educational system of
present and of the future, I shall indicate briefly the process (as I see it)
which the vernaculars can once more be brought to play their natural par
the life of the island. First the standard of education in the Vernacular
Anglo-Vernacular Schools must be raised by every available means, and c
pulsory education strictly enforced. Simultaneously, the teaching of
vernaculars in the English Schools must be entrusted to teachers thorou

14. A beginning has already been made: Several books used in the verna
schools are adaptations of English books, and some important books have recently
translated into Sinhalese and Tamil:-e.g. *Our Heritage* (Parts 1 and 2), and *The*
History of Ceylon are available in English, Sinhalese and Tamil versions; *The New Geogr*
in English and Sinhalese; and there are books on other subjects too, in one or both of
vernaculars. But, on the whole, the tendency in Ceylon has been to press for the a
tion of the mother tongue as the medium of instruction without previously or simult
ously providing the necessary materials and technique. Contrast the procedure of
state of Hyderabad: Conjointly with the building of the new university in which
instruction was to be imparted in Urdu, a publication bureau was set up by Governm
to translate and compile the necessary text books.

15. Not of course, of England alone; both Western and Oriental learning and li
ature can be read in English translations. A certain amount of Western and Orie
literature has, apparently, been translated into Sinhalese (see *Modern Sinhalese Fic*
passim), but in the absence of a critical Sinhalese-reading public it is difficult to a
the value of this work.

16. In England, in the sixteenth century, simultaneously with the attempts m
by intelligent educationists, like Mulcaster, who "perceived in due course the arbit
ness and remoteness from life of the education of their day, and the unreasonablene
the neglect of English," to give the English language its natural place in the educati
curriculum, scholars were at work adapting the language to every modern need, ch
by the work of translation from foreign languages, ancient and modern, into Eng
Poets and writers of all kinds experimented with the language, and by the end of the
century there could be no doubt of the capacities of English for every kind of art
use.

nt both in their native language and in English. Many such teachers
be immediately available. But the present policy of gradually making
dy of the mother tongue compulsory in the English Schools, together
e study of the indigenous languages at the University of Ceylon, will
e such teachers in increasing numbers. When Sinhalese, Tamil, and
have an equal status in the school curriculum, there will emerge from
hools a thoroughly bilingual intelligentsia. These will not only add to
nber of teachers, now woefully small, capable of teaching the mother
in schools which use English as the medium of instruction, and provide
holars to do the work of preparing the way for the change over from English
vernaculars in all schools, but will form a nucleus of readers for new
written in Sinhalese and Tamil.[17] The number of such readers will
lly increase as the standard of education in the Vernacular Schools
d, and as the whole population of the island is brought within the edu-
l system. There will thus grow up together scholars capable of trans-
the best of foreign literatures into the indigenous languages, and readers
e of profiting by these books. What is valuable in the ancient cultures
island will be revitalised by contact with what is of worth in other
s, ancient and modern; and to give expression to this new synthesis
pear the now voiceless artists.

ut those who are planning our educational system of the future will
l to remember that the problem is not so much a scholastic one as really
e practical one. The anxiety to learn English, which beginning in the
ears of British rule, has spread ever more widely is the result of the great
ement of opportunities, of the economic benefits, which this knowledge
. Similarly, if you can give a greater cash inducement, so to speak,
study of Sinhalese and Tamil, standards in both will improve.

hat of English now and hereafter? No one who has thought at all of
atter will deny that the present linguistic situation is in the highest
unsatisfactory. In the English Schools the vernaculars were treated
bout twenty years ago as alien languages, and not merely neglected:
ucational authorities at one time even sought to banish their use from
cial intercourse of the school and the home[18]. English, in the big schools,

The reviewer of a recent book: *Modern Sinhalese Fiction*, by E. R. de S. Sahra-
a, asks very appositely: "What is the author's purpose in writing a criticism of
Sinhalese fiction in English?" and points out that, if it is intended to guide and
e writers of Sinhalese fiction, it should have been written in Sinhalese, that neither
be intended for the Sinhalese-reading public. It must be addressed to the En-
ading public and yet how many of these can read a Sinhalese novel? (The Ceylon
News, June 4, 1943).

When Sir (then Mr.) Brandis Denham the Director of Education, formulated
an "English, more English, better English." In England the neglect of English
e use of Latin as the medium of education till the end of the 17th century led to
ns curiously like those due to the neglect of the vernaculars and the use of English
medium of instruction in Ceylon. Many schoolmasters had a better command of
han of English. "English was a penal offence; the Grammar School statutes
16th and 17th centuries provided as a rule not only that the master should speak
o the scholars, but that the scholars should speak Latin to each other both within
ool and without." *Report* on *The Teaching of English in England* (see note 20), § 34.

was regarded as the mother tongue ; it is still treated as such and consequ
also neglected.[19] In all countries there is a tendency to take one's m
tongue for granted. It is learnt first at one's mother's knee, and then,
one just picks it up. Foreign languages, mathematics, science must be ta
by specialists. But one's native language can be allowed to look after i
When the baneful results of this attitude began to force themselves on
attention in England, educationists began to examine the place
function of the native language in the curricula of the schools,
at the universities.[20] In 1921 George Sampson, in *English for the En*
(a wise and practical approach to the problem) wrote (p. 25) : "And
peculiarity of English that gives it special importance is that it is the me
of instruction in school—as, indeed, it is the medium of all intercourse, s
and commercial, public and private. What should have been its streng
school has been its weakness. As the medium of instruction it has been e
body's business, and has, therefore, become nobody's business. Teac
seem to think that it is always some other person's work to look after Eng
But every teacher is a teacher of English because every teacher is a teacher in
lish." (Author's italics). Every word of this applies to the English sch
in Ceylon. Sampson is referring to the teaching of English in the Elemen
Schools to boys and girls in whose case English is not quite the same thin
the mother tongue. For these children come from homes in which debe
forms of English are spoken. "The teacher's hardest struggle", he
on page 24, "is not against pure ignorance but against evil knowledge.
hopeless does the struggle seem that many elementary school teachers giv
up, and say that the attempt to teach good English to children who live
move in an atmosphere of degraded English is sheer waste of time."
parallel with conditions in Ceylon schools is, therefore, closer than it may
first seem to be.

19. See Mr. H. S. Perera's *English as Adopted Language*, p. 7 : "These teachers
to regard English either as mother tongue or as foreign language. . . . It was clearly
altogether a foreign language to them. The only alternative left was to regard a
mother tongue." English was indeed the 'mother tongue' of most children who atte
English schools (i.e. schools in which the medium is English, the sense in which the
is used throughout this article), until a couple of decades ago, when the growth
national spirit reintroduced the native languages into the familiar intercourse of the h
Children were usually bilingual, speaking to their parents and relations in English, a
the servants in Sinhalese or Tamil. But the language they gradually grew less profi
in was not English but their native tongue. The Burghers (Ceylonese of Portuguese
Dutch descent) spoke 'Ceylon Portuguese' or Dutch at home till a couple of genera
ago, when they almost universally adopted English.

20. *See the Report of the Departmental Committee Appointed by The President*
Board of Education to inquire into the position of English in the Educational Syst
England. (May 2nd, 1919.)

medium of instruction in Ceylon is English in all secondary schools,
al colleges, in training colleges for teachers, and in the University.
e not a good command of this medium our whole education suffers.
m the subjects on the school time table, we suffer in the capacity
d intelligent living. Language commands in the modern world new
ich have great potentialities for good and evil : the Film, Broadcast-
rtising and Propaganda, the Best Seller. Our only means of dis-
ng is through the study of language. If we do not know how words
shall be at their mercy. This situation, as Dr. I. A. Richards has
ut, is the outcome of our modern heterogeneous civilisation. A few
ns ago men were born into more or less homogeneous cultures, and
acquisition of language through intercourse with his fellows was suffi-
ive a man a good command of it. But now our everyday reading and
tion handles elements from diverse cultures : "we are forced to pass
as and feelings that took their form in Shakespeare's time or Dr.
's time to ideas and feelings of Edison's time or Freud's time and back
More troubling still, our handling of these materials varies from column
n of the newspaper, descending from the scholar's level to the kitchen
(*Practical Criticism*, Dr. I. A. Richards, p. 339.) If, therefore,
English language we use, we must be able to understand it when we
r hear it spoken, to speak it clearly and correctly, and to write it with
n and grace. Every teacher, therefore, in those schools in Ceylon
se English as the medium of education, should be able to distinguish
good and bad English, should know something of the physiology of
nd of the psychology of language ; and should himself be a model in
of the English language. Of how many teachers is this true ? If in
spects there is cause for complaint in England, how much worse must
Ceylon ?

the schools which use English as the medium of instruction the teachers
re almost entirely Ceylonese, to whom English is a foreign tongue.
s this come to pass ? When schools were first established by the
in Ceylon, English was taught first to a few, then, as the demand
ncreased, to ever increasing numbers. When a sufficient number of
se had mastered it, more or less, they were regarded as capable of
g the language to others, or at any rate, of using English in the teaching
r subjects. These English-speaking Ceylonese gradually adopted
as their language. The next generation of children would thus hear
nglish than Sinhalese (or Tamil or Portuguese or Dutch) in their homes,
glish could be used more and more in school. In the course of time
ole English system of instruction, text books and all, was introduced
ylon. And so, more and more Ceylonese learnt to think and express
ves in a foreign language, and to do this for the most part remark-
ell. As the school-going population increased, more natives of the

country were required as teachers. English, which had originally been ta
by those whose native language it was, gradually came to be taught al
entirely by Ceylonese. At the same time increasing numbers of those w
home language was Sinhalese or Tamil went to English schools. These
developments acted together to affect slowly but surely the standard of En
used in the schools. The worse (from a linguistic point of view) the ho
the better should be the teaching in the school. But really the reverse
the case, and this is roughly the situation today.

As schools were staffed more and more by Ceylonese, the standard
English (especially spoken English) varied considerably from school to sch
and from teacher to teacher. A very good mathematician might have a p
command of English. English, treated for so long as the mother tongu
the pupils (and where it was not, recommended to be adopted as such), be
to be entrusted to anyone who was willing to teach it, or had a spare per
to give to it.[21] Hence the present state of affairs: the standard of spo
English especially, but also of written English, has deteriorated even am
those who use only English at home or who use both English and their na
language equally. In the case of those who speak one of the vernaculars
home and English in school (the majority) the result has been pretty nea
disastrous. They receive little training in the use of their native langu
and are compelled to translate their thoughts and feelings into the idiom
an alien tongue, with the peculiarities and idiosyncrasies of which only th
born to the tongue (and not all those) or habituated to it by long study a
constant use become familiar.[22]

It is certain that for a good many years to come English cannot be
placed by the vernaculars as the medium of instruction in the present Engl
schools. Meanwhile Sinhalese and Tamil will become more and more
home languages of the educated. A period of thorough bilingualism is like
in fact inevitable. Except by the Burghers, English will cease to be regard

21. Not many years age there came to my knowledge what, I hope, is a rather extre
case. 'English Conversation' was taught in the Special Class (consisting of children w
had transferred from Vernacular or Bilingual Schools to this English school) by the scho
boxing instructor, whose very amusing, but far from idiomatic English, used to be publish
in the school magazine, along with the current school-boy howlers.

22. See J. R. Firth, *Speech* (Benn's Sixpenny Library) p. 40. "The characteri
feature of all spoken languages is that native speakers make the fullest use of the percei
situation and of the assumed background of common contexts of experience." "Babu
is not by any means confined to India. It is the common danger lurking in all pur
literary education, and especially perilous if the languages are alien to the social life of
learners." The kind of English often written by undergraduates offering English a
subject is a terrible commentary on the present language conditions. The conditi
in India are similar. "Mr. F. K. Clark, Educational Commissioner with the Governm
of India, in his report on Education in India states: 'the use of the vernacular for instr
tion and examination purposes is increasing and will continue to do so. . . . . Also with
change the use and application of the English language have deteriorated.' Cited
W. E. J. Beeching in "The Vernacular as the Medium of Instruction", *Modern Langu*
Vol. XVII, No. 2, p. 40.

se as their 'dame's tongue'. What is to be the position of English
s period? One of two attitudes can be adopted: let English go on
ng while the vernaculars are being developed and gradually rein-
general use, or attempt to teach English systematically, as a foreign
To regard English as a foreign language is, for many Ceylonese,
matter. And if English is to be taught as a foreign language, other
questions have to be answered: What spoken form of it should be
"Standard English"[24] or the "Modified Standard"[25] used by the

This view is taken by the authors of a book on the teaching of English in India,
ast year: *The Teaching of English* in India by Thompson and Wyatt (Humphrey
A technique is available, developed by West, Palmer and others; and there is
's Basic English, which is of some limited use.

Standard English is very difficult to define. It is often described in terms of
y, but as Lloyd James says (*The Broadcast Word*, p. 116): "there are so many
ures in speech apart from sounds; there is voice, there are grammar, choice
rhythm and intonation. . . ." And it must be remembered that "The general
of any type of speech is as much contained in the configuration of its phonetic
s in these elements taken singly." Professor Daniel Jones, in the introd. to his
g *Dictionary*, defines Received Pronunciation as a local (Southern) and class
y and Public School) dialect. So Fuhrken (*Standard English Speech*, p. 15):
form of it employed by educated people in the home countries, . . ." Others,
Palmer for example, define it purely as a class dialect. See Wyld *The Best*
S. P. E. Tract No. XXXIX, p. 605: ". . . the type spoken by members of the
lic Schools, and by those classes in society which normally frequent these."
r *The Teaching of English*, p. 65f. At best it is a vague term. Kennedy (*Current*
p. 24) describes it as "the language generally used by the most intelligent and
nglish speakers", and enumerates certain criteria by means of which it can be
d. But Lloyd James (*The Broadcast Word*, p. 162) says: "It is very clear
ducated people of this country do not all speak the same sort of language, or
the same pronunciation, and if we are to accept the usual definition of Standard
tion as being that of the educated then we must either define the generation
hat our Standard is a very vague one." J.R. Firth (*Speech*, Benn's Sixpenny
istinguishes between 'Standard English' and Educated English,' The former,
with Wyld, is a class dialect: "Professor Wyld holds this view. 'It may be
says,' good English, well-bred English, upper-class English, and it is sometimes,
ly, referred to as standard English.' (p. 63). "Educated English shows a
e of permissible variation. Speakers of this kind of English do not necessarily
all signs of social or geographical origin. . . .Educated English is spoken by all
people all over the English-speaking world. This is the only kind of English
he remotest chance of universality even in Great Britain itself. It must be
ed that even a high degree of education is not in itself a mark of class. Educated
not form a class in England, or in the English-speaking world." (p. 62).

See Wyld, S. P. E. Tract No. XXXIX, 604-5: "This term is intended to
he various types of English, many of them spoken by highly educated people,
os, while they adhere, on the whole, to the Standard, especially in accidence
x, are nevertheless more or less deeply affected, either by *provincialism*, or by
but the uncandid would hesitate to call *vulgarism*, in pronunciation. . . . . These
lieve to be an attempt to speak the 'best' or 'standard' English by those who
had the advantage of hearing and speaking it from childhood up. It is indeed
gone wrong, and 'modified' either by a provincial or as I prefer to call it,
dialect, or by an inferior *Class dialect*." Cp. also Wyld, *A History of Modern*
English, pp. 3, 4, 7, 11. Perhaps it is simpler to regard Ceylonese English as a
nglish dialect. See Kennedy, *Current English*, 55ff: "Sometimes the English-
ttempted to foist his language upon a conquered people, and the result has been
rm of English, such as that spoken in India, South Africa, or the West Indies."

best Ceylonese speakers? What are the characteristics of Ceylonese
how does it differ from what is commonly called "standard" or "
English? Can a distinction be made between permissible variatio
those which vitiate the language? Is English to be taught in all sc
English, Bilingual, and Vernacular, and by whom is it to be taught, by Ce
or by Englishmen?

There has grown up in Ceylon a form of English speech with a
flavour of its own in regard to pronunciation and intonation, and, in t
of most speakers, idiom, grammar, and vocabulary as well. The expla
of this form of English would include the investigation: (i) of th
and educational background of those who first taught English to the Ceyl
(ii) of the extent to which the sounds of Sinhalese and Tamil (and also, p
Ceylon Portuguese) have influenced the pronunciation of Ceylonese E
(iii) of the prevalence of 'translation errors', *i.e.* of the importation of
idioms and grammatical usages into Ceylonese English; (iv) of the ex
which words from the indigenous languages (and from Indian dialec
Portuguese) are commonly used in this form of English.

All but a negligible minority, who for special reasons can speak St
English,[27] use a form of English showing these peculiarities, much m
course, in the spoken than in the written language. In the written
divergences due to 'translation errors' would practically disappea
local words would only be used in the case of special subjects. There are
gradations between those who speak almost exactly like educated E
people, and whose written English is indistinguishable from Standard E
and those who speak a very mixed and impure form of English. But
is a kind of English spoken by English educated Ceylonese, chiefly tho
have used English as their only or their first language for several gener
(including Burghers, Sinhalese and Tamils), in which the sounds va
slightly from those of Standard English—no more than a Northern bor
cated Englishman's might,—in which the melodies or tunes are not ma
different from those of Standard English, if exhibiting a smaller compa
less variety, and from which local idiom and grammar are practically a
This form of English is thus in general unobjectionable and can be t
provided there is a careful selection and training of teachers in modern m
of teaching English to foreign students (which involves among other
a knowledge of the native language of the pupils).

26. Cp. *Indian English*, S. P. E. Tract No. XLI, by R. C. Goffin: "A real d
confronting the Indian perfecting himself in English, but one often over looked, is
the dialectical variations to be found in the speech of his 'English' official superi
teachers themselves. . . ."

27 Education in England; frequent association with English people.

her alternatives present themselves. One need only be men-
teaching of Standard English speech to Ceylonese by those who
k it themselves, but can tell you what it is, and play gramophone
you to illustrate what they mean. This seems too ridiculous to
ut is not absolutely unknown in Ceylon If Standard English is
t in Ceylon, then, there is no alternative to the importation of
lish men and women. The greatest objection to this method of
nglish is at present political. But there are also practical difficul-
st of them the cost of employing a sufficient number of such teachers
iculty of getting suitable persons.[28]

actical and other reasons the almost certain course will be the
the Ceylonese variety of 'Modified Standard' English. It is one
cated English (note 24) and affords "a reasonably practical standard
ic and social intercourse" (Firth speech p. 65). If we accept this
le, and also recognise that English has a practical and cultural
two things are necessary: The best type of local English must
and its deterioration must be arrested by every possible means.
ust be taught only by those who have made a special study of its
nd literature.[29]

H. A. PASSÉ.

is worth noting, too, that Ceylonese who speak 'Standard English' are general
r. There are several reasons for this: those who now speak St.E. either be-
oured social class, with long purses which can take them to the English Public
Universities, and so are disliked too much to be imitated, or have rather pain-
d this kind of speech for social reasons and so are regarded as the apes of
; they are singular in speaking English as the majority of their countrymen
l not speak it. Children of mixed English and Ceylonese descent also general
E., but they are a special case. Standard English has thus rather unpleasant
when it is spoken by Ceylonese.

e reviewer of *Britsh Rule in Eastern Asia* by Lennox A Mills, in *Oversea Edu-*
XIV, No. 1, Oct. 1942), writes: "The many problems arising from the wide-
atural demand for instruction in the English language are shrewdly discussed
or's acquaintance with similar problems in the Philippines and Java enables
useful suggestions. His assumption that English can be taught effectively
lish teachers is not confirmed by experience in India and in several colonies,
ent local teachers have been obtained by carefully planned training. (The italics