Concept Paper

REJUVENATING AND REINVENTING THE DISCIPLINE OF ENGLISH STUDIES IN SRI LANKA: A CONCEPT PAPER[1]

Introduction

Since its inception as a discipline in the country, the various strands of English Studies[2] in Sri Lankan universities have reflected, rejected, complemented and contradicted the historical needs and events of the nation as a whole. Above all, they have engaged with and are significant aspects of the hybrid (Bhabha 1994), if not multibrid[3] history and culture of Sri Lanka. As a teacher, scholar and practitioner of English, it is due to an extreme sense of powerlessness and frustration about the compulsions, tensions and paradoxes of English Studies in the country today that I have felt compelled to write this paper on reinventing the discipline. For instance, the demand to read for a degree in English has increased tremendously yet standards of English proficiency in undergraduates entering English Studies courses have plummeted; not surprisingly, the general knowledge base of undergraduates has contracted yet internationally the discipline has evolved in diverse epistemological

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[1] This paper originated in a speech made by me in honour of Professor Ashley Halpé at the launch of *Arbiters of a National Imaginary: Essays on Sri Lanka - Festschrift for Professor Ashley Halpé* (edited by Chelva Kanaganayakam) by the International Centre for Ethnic Studies (Colombo) on the 9th of December 2008 at the Lakshman Kadiragamar Memorial Centre, which was published in *PostcolonialText*, (2008) Vol 4, No. 3. An early version was read at the 2009 - ASAIHL International Conference on Enhancing Graduate Employment organized by the Association of South Asian Institutions of Higher Learning and the University of Kelaniya at the Pegasus Reef Hotel on the 22nd May 2009. I am grateful for the support and the research leads and resources provided by Prof. Ashley Halpé, Prof. Ryhana Raheem, Prof. Walter Perera, Dr. Lakshmi de Silva, Dr. Carmen Wickramagamage, Dr. Nihal Fernando, Eisha Hewabowala, Dinali Fernando, Marianne Abeysekere and Savithri Hirimuthugoda as well as the comments of two anonymous peer reviewers.

[2] The term 'English Studies' is not the official term used by departments of English; rather, it is used by me to signify the expanding epistemological, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and theoretical reaches of English today.

[3] I use the term *multibrid* (Wickramasinghe 2010) to imply the multiple influences defining culture and history in the country – of being simultaneously informed of the indigenous, as well as the global (Western, Indian, Middle Eastern, Eastern and other cultures), knowledge traditions—though not necessarily uniformly.

directions that span multiple disciplines. While these developments have been taken into account by academics and higher educational institutions, they have not always been formally acknowledged by educational policy-makers and controlling authorities at national levels. My colleagues in the discipline who are aware of the complexity of the situation have expressed their opinions on the evolution and future of the discipline in various fora (see Ludowyk 1979; Ismail 1985; Wijesinha 1992; Halpé 1992; Kandiah 1999). The dominant code of interpretation *vis-à-vis* English Studies has been from a postcolonial paradigm that has problematized the socio-political issues of colonialism, neo-colonial language use, class relations and power within the specificities of the Sri Lankan context. Given the distinctive origins of the English language in Sri Lanka such analyses are inevitable. The reason why I am revisiting these same issues in this paper is because I feel that I am able to provide a somewhat different theoretical take on the situation than these readings. I bring to this article a theoretical and epistemological fusion of standpoints and sites of interpretation/experiences—not only from a postcolonial paradigm but also perspectives that account for modernism[4], postmodernism, feminism, globalization, interdisciplinary studies and policy-making.

Despite purist attempts to see academic disciplines as historically linear, homogenous and changeless, disciplines are living, evolving entities (as they can never be end-products), that need constant revision—if they are to have meaning, relevance and validity to those who are part of them and those who pursue them. Consequently, my attempts at consciously re-conceptualizing English Studies will account not only for the internal developments, cross-fertilizations and advances within the discipline globally but also the socio-political, cultural and economic currents of the ground situation in Sri Lanka. It is from this standpoint that this paper aims to take stock of the contemporary trends and triumphs of the discipline of English within the universities as well as to conceptualize its challenges and possibilities for the future. Yet this paper crosses the boundaries imposed on a

[4] I use the term modernism not in reference to the late nineteenth century Modernist cultural movement in Europe but to dominant understandings of the world predominantly centred on assumptions relating to logical reasoning, rationality, coherence, stability, objectivity, realism and empiricism that are founded on positivism. I take postmodernism to refer to understandings of 'realities' from perspectives that are anti-foundational, pragmatic, pluralistic, contingent, local and provisional. Usually, these are taken to be conflicting standpoints; however, I have argued (Wickramasinghe 2010) that given the postmodern characteristics in modernist ontologies and modern facets in postmodern ontologies, it is possible for the subject to subscribe to these multiple understandings simultaneously.

conventional academic paper by presuming to offer pragmatic suggestions for redressing the situation; hence its subtitle, 'a concept paper' (that imagines a future for English Studies in Sri Lanka).

I have used transdisciplinary research methods in researching/writing this paper. They included a selective literary review of material related to English Studies in Sri Lanka (and globally); an internet search of English Studies courses, the analysis of qualitative responses to unstructured email interview schedules by nineteen academics employed (or who were employed) at the English Departments and the English Language Teaching Units (ELTUs) of the universities of Batticaloa, Colombo, Jaffna, Sri Jayawardenapura, Kelaniya, Peradeniya, and the Open University; and references to experiential evidence of working at the English Departments of the universities of Peradeniya and Kelaniya during the last nineteen years. The random internet survey of English Studies courses included universities from Asia, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Given that this paper is a qualitative research study, the data generated from email interview schedules are not used for purposes of generalization or discourse analysis; rather they are employed to identify and provide nuances to the perceived issues, interpretations and impasses within the discipline. The respondents were selected based on strategic/theoretical sampling which in qualitative research is understood as 'selecting groups or categories to study on the basis of their relevance to your research questions, your theoretical position and analytical framework, and most importantly the argument or explanation that you are developing' (Mason, 2002: 124). The fifteen women and four men respondents were assured of confidentiality *vis-à-vis* their responses so as to encourage frankness in airing their opinions. They have therefore been anonymized (through the use of pseudonyms) and all identifying markers erased in this paper.

Given my grounding in the research methodologies of both the Humanities and the Social Sciences, I have subscribed to a degree of reflexivity in writing the paper[5]. This is because of my epistemological understanding of knowledge generation as requiring the explicit articulation of a scholar's subjectivity and standpoint as a means of providing validity; as opposed to striving for scientific objectivity that is ontologically arguable.

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[5] Reflexivity refers to the conscious and continuous process of monitoring and reflecting on all aspects of the research and writing process—from the formulation of research ideas to the publication of findings, and when this occurs, their utilization (Jupp 2006). It involves reflecting on the subjectivity of the researcher in researching (Ramazanolgu and Holland 2002) as well as the methodological problems of researching. This is argued as giving validity, methodological rigour and credibility to a research study. Yet, given the word limitations of writing to a journal, my subscription to reflexivity is limited here.

This paper highlights what has been identified by academics of English (including myself) as some of the salient characteristics of contemporary disciplinary practice, the challenges to departments of English as well as possible ways of reinventing the discipline to complement future needs. Its primary concern is with the future rather than the past or the present. It is principally dependent on the output of my interview schedules and the therefore the goodwill of my respondents (in wanting to contribute to this study). It makes no pretence of providing an all-inclusive understanding of the issues pertaining to the praxis of English Studies. Rather, the knowledge that it generates/constructs is, as all knowledge, partial (in that it is subjective, incomplete and provisional), as well as located in time and place (Haraway 1988).

Generalizing / Particularizing the Discipline of English

A history of the birth of a discipline should include traces of the past that comprise:

> salary disputes, professional conflicts, highly problematic programmatic needs and demands, conflicting pedagogical visions, territorial rifts, professional threats and jealousies, the rising awareness of British racial distinctions and British imperial power, the question of institutional credibility, economic constraints, the marketing of books, the idiosyncrasies of committee formulations, unwritten committee and department agendas, degree requirements, academic factionalism, political demagoguery, pressures from privileged social and religious sectors, colonialism, campaigns for national literacy, academic one-upmanship—in essence, determining factors that, though they may not be included in accounts of literary history or histories of academic institutions, and though they may not get mentioned in commencement addresses, are still very much in existence. Course selections and programmatic changes, even at present, result as much from various forms of political cronyism and economic opportunism—especially where universities depend for survival on government money, as they do from altruistic visions about the principles and objectives of higher education.
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> (Court 1992:4)

However, it is not my mandate in this article to construct the genesis and evolution of the discipline of English Studies. Furthermore, tracing origins is a questionable venture (Foucault 1972) especially from a post-modern understanding of the world.

Nevertheless, I have undertaken the following sketches of the inception of English in the USA, the UK and India solely to contextualize the proposals contained in this paper[6]. This is because different motivations for the establishment of English Studies in different parts of the world, though somewhat contested, become important when considering the dialectical relationship between education and society; especially in rationalizing a project aimed at reinventing the future of the discipline.

In US universities, the formal study of English literature as a subject was begun in the 1860s as a means of teaching a unifying language and a common cultural fund of reference for the many migrant citizens of that country (Durant and Fabb 1996). By the 1890s the discipline had undergone changes from its earlier focus on composition, pronunciation and speech to the professionalization of language teaching and the inclusion of literary topics in order to gain 'access to the higher parts of the human body and soul, creating taste and artistic discernment .... in opposition to industrialization and urbanization' (Durant and Fabb 1996: 21). By 1869, in the UK, the British school inspector, poet and critic Matthew Arnold, along with other intellectuals of the period, saw the discipline as a cultural bonding agent in a culture weakened by the scientific treatise and developments of the period. The reasons for the establishment of English as a subject for study in the UK were many. They include aims of ideologically enslaving the working-classes to bourgeoisie values via English literature (by targeting working-class men in Mechanics' institutes and colleges), providing a soft option for early women in higher education institutes, and later on, as a means of providing a humanist education for the many officers destined to serve the British Empire in the colonies and as a means of disseminating war ideology during World War I (Eagleton 1983; Court 1992). The extents to which these multiple aspirations were successful are debatable. In India, the study of English literature paradoxically began much earlier than in the UK as a complicit method of 'civilizing the natives' by creating 'a class of persons Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals and intellect' (Macaulay: 1835). Given that English was instituted to consolidate administrative and political power by the British, Viswanathan (1989) argues that the contents of English literary education in India were tailored to exerting/legitimizing ideological control over colonial subjects by reinforcing the 'superiority' of English and by denigrating local literatures as immoral, intellectually inferior, and impure. It also allowed for the insidious introduction of Christian ideas and assumptions into understandings of life (Durant and Fabb 1996). Thus, the study of English in India

[6] These countries were selected on the basis of my having access to information on their particular histories. Given my stated standpoint of reflexivity and a fusion methodology, I believe that it is important to aspire/admit to the motivations for generating research data.

ironically permitted the humanistic ideals of the Enlightenment to coexist with anti-liberal aspirations, and sanctioned education for social and political control (Viswanathan 1989).

Tracking the roots of the discipline in Sri Lanka is an exercise predominantly dependent on the historical tracings already made by several leading academics in the field (see Wickramasuriya 1976; Ludowyk 1979; Kandiah 1984; Halpé 1992; Kandiah 1999: 2008). As was the case in India, English became an issue of vigorous public interest from the late 19th century onwards due to the colonial government's policy of preference for English educated employees for government vacancies. Wickramasuriya (1976:16) records the clash between the resultant popular 'craze' for an English education (including its grammar/literature and as an exclusive medium of instruction) on the one hand, and the demands of intellectuals, nationalists, political leaders and missionaries for a more prominent place for the indigenous languages and literatures of Tamil and Sinhala on the other. Those who fought against an exclusive English education resisted on the grounds of the limited scope for the English educated within the government service (as they were usually relegated to the lower echelons of the service). They critiqued the institution of a new class/generation of Ceylonese who did not possess knowledge of the vernacular languages and who were alienated from their cultural roots and their Sinhala/Tamil-speaking parents. The complex impulses and dialectics of assimilation and resistance between the English language/discipline and Sri Lankan society have been theoretically framed in postcolonial terms by Thiru Kandiah (1999) and other scholars.

The origin of the discipline of English in Sri Lanka is more recent in comparison with the US, UK and India, and seems to be linked to the general objectives of establishing the University College in 1921. Students at the University College Ceylon offered English as a subject for the BA external examination conducted by the University of London. English was pursued by a number of male academics like H. A. Passé, E. F. C. Ludowyk, and Doric de Souza at the University College in the 1920s under Leigh Smith and David Hussey (Ludowyk 1979). As 'the child of University College' (*ibid.*) the Department of English then became part of the newly-instituted University of Ceylon in 1942. With the establishment of the new university, the Ceylon Medical College and the Ceylon University College lost their separate identities and were absorbed into the new institution. The Department of English moved to the newly-built campus at Peradeniya along with the Faculty of Arts from 1951/2 onwards where a new generation of academics read English literature. The critiques of English as taught at the time as being UK-centric and

founded on elitism, privilege and alienation have been defended by Kandiah (1999)[7] as being located in the dominant realties of a time and place; to which I would also add the dominant epistemologies and theories[8] as well as the personal interests of the scholar.

In 1956, as a consequence of the democratization of university education and the institution of Sinhala as the official language, there was a sudden swell in the admission of students and the need for language courses in English as the majority of university students were not proficient in English. The English Department responded to these changes by teaching English as a second language—initially through a sub-department in Colombo. The establishment of other universities in the country (Kelaniya and Sri Jayawardenapura in the 1950s, Jaffna, Moratuwa and Ruhuna in the 1970s as well as a number of others from the 1980s onwards) eventually led to several autonomous departments of English. Today each of the fifteen universities in the country has an English Language Teaching Unit (ELTU) irrespective of whether they have a department of English. Furthermore, the ELTU of the University of Kelaniya is currently in the process of upgrading itself as a Department (of English Language Teaching) with the primary objective of training English teachers.

Thus the politics associated with the colonial project of establishing English as a discipline during specific historical moments in specific countries cannot be ignored when discussing the future of English Studies. These socio-political tensions convey the dialectical relationships between society and the epistemological, theoretical and methodological directions taken by the discipline over the decades.

I now pause to examine the current state of English Studies worldwide so as to strengthen my arguments for disciplinary change in Sri Lanka. This is done by compiling/constructing a list of contents of English Studies courses from an internet search to give an idea of some of the theoretical and thematic strands of the subject worldwide[9]. The list also reflects/constructs the multidisciplinary[10],

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[7] The same argument was made by Passé in the 1960s *vis-à-vis* his work on Ceylon English (cited in Kandiah 1999: 36).

[8] The scholar who engages with a historical trajectory of an issue does so from a vantage of hindsight as well as personal prioritization. When applying political/ideological critiques, a scholar needs to be reflexive about the political and ethical research dilemma of making the dominant epistemological/theoretical impulses of her/his time-period the yardstick by which to measure past scholarship/pedagogy/methodologies—as these may not have been available to the scholars of the past. This is why literary scholarship requires multiple approaches of reflexivity, period-related contextualizations and contemporary critiques.

[9] I did not confine my search solely to postcolonial or Asian countries given my understanding of Said's (1983: 226-7) 'travelling theory' *vis-a-vis* knowledge which argues that 'like people and schools of criticism, ideas and theories travel—from person to person,

interdisciplinary[11], crossdisciplinary[12] and transdisciplinary[13] interests of English Studies in contemporary times. By implying a parallel to the Sri Lankan situation, this list is presented to justify the need to reconceptualise the discipline in Sri Lanka.

In Britain, from the eighteenth-century, literature as a concept meant the whole body of valued writing in society that included philosophy, history, essays, letters and poems (Eagleton 1983). As implied by the following list[14], English Studies today encompasses not only reading/researching an assortment of texts but also other artifacts, cultural phenomena, social events, political experiences, etc. Thus the boundaries of what constitutes a text have been expanded as never before. The extensive contents of contemporary English Studies give testimony to several different tracks. They can be loosely categorized as founded on studies relating to literature, language/linguistics, theory, culture, sociology, education, the arts and the media.

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from situation to situation, from one period to another...' and may be resisted, accommodated or accepted according to the time and place in question.

[10] Multidisciplinarity refers to an approach that joins together two or more disciplines without integration (Tress *et al* undated). For instance, one can study globalization from perspectives relating to English literature, English language, economics, the media, politics and spirituality.

[11] Interdisciplinarity refers to an approach that integrates two or more disciplines—leading to an evolving field of study or an entire new discipline through assimilated analysis (Tress *et al* undated). Take for instance, studies on feminist research methodology, the self and identity or war mentalities or the evolution of women's studies and cultural studies.

[12] Crossdisciplinarity refers to an approach of explaining one subject in the terms of another, foreign subject or method (Tress *et al* undated). Examples form English studies include the politics of literature, the psychology of reading or the sociology of writing.

[13] Transdisciplinarity refers to an approach that transcends disciplinary boundaries by consciously transgressing disciplinary rules so as to provide new insights (Tress *et al* undated). This is based on postmodernist understandings of the compartmentalizations and specializations in knowledge as being arbitrary, subjective, conditional and provisional. Take for instance, the integration of reflexivity or Marxist theory to literary production or postcolonial theory to texts, the use of diaries in content analysis or oral histories in discourse analysis or experiential evidence in writing. What is considered as data may not conform to established research criteria

[14] The list excludes contents of syllabi related to specific literary writers and literary periods.

Contents of English Studies Syllabi

African English literature
African American English literature
American English literature
Anthropological linguistics
Applied linguistics
Antiquity
Art
Asian English literature
Australian English literature
Autobiography
Bilingualism
British English literature
Business English
Canadian English literature
Cinematic narratives
Classics in English
Comparative English literature studies
Computational linguistics / Natural language processing
Composition studies
Conflict
Country-specific English
Creative writing
Creative non-fiction
Critical theory
Culture
Cultural materialism
Cultural theory
Cultural studies
Cyber English writing
Development
Diaspora / migrant / expatriate writing
Discourse analysis
European English literature
Empire
Feminism
Fiction writing
Film and text
Gay
Gender
Genres
Globalization
Gothic
Historical linguistics
History of linguistics
Identity
Ideology
Indian English
Indian English literature
Interlinguistics
Intertextuality
Journalism
Language policy planning
Latin American English literature
Lesbian
Literary journalism
Literary theory
Literary criticism
Management
Marxism
Media
Medieval English literature
Metaphysical
Modern English usage
Modernism
Morphology
Nation
Naturalism
New historicism
Non-fiction writing
Oral history
Partition
Peace
Pedagogy
Philology
Phonetics
Phonology
Playwrighting
Poetics
Poetry composition
Politics
Post-colonial literature
Post-modernism
Post-modern literature
Post-structuralism
Power politics
Practical criticism
Pragmatics
Projects and presentations
Psychoanalysis
Queer writing / theory
Race / ethnicity
Realism
Representation
Research methodology
Rhetoric
Romance
Screenwriting
Second language
Self
Semantics
Semiotics
Sexuality
Society
Sociolinguistics
South Asian literature
Spiritual
Sri Lankan English
Sri Lankan English literature
Stage & performance
Standard English
Structuralism
Subaltern
Syntax
Teaching methodology
Textual analysis
Translation
Visual culture
War
Women in literature
Women's studies
Women writers
World classics in translation
World Englishes
World literatures in English
Writing skills

Further internet surveying show that new multidisciplinary subject/thematic studies have also sprung up from the perspectives of a) language, literature, linguistics, reading and writing studies; b) social, cultural, historical, psychological, theoretical and epistemological studies; c) science, technology, health, and medicine studies d) visual, spatial, arts and performance studies. A range of interdisciplinary studies (such as cultural studies, gender/women's studies, development studies, peace and conflict studies, literacy studies, and postcolonial studies) is also in evidence. These fusions within the discipline have supported a plethora of literary, critical, cultural, sociological and other disciplinary theories. The existence of such diversity and interdisciplinarity deconstructs colonial/postcolonial claims of English literature studies as being symbiotic of 'Englishness' or English culture[15]. In fact, it may be surmised that the divergent strands of English Studies are based on the personal interests, specializations, and the country-specific needs of each department within the dialectics of globalization/development processes and the multibridity in knowledge-making in contemporary times[16]. Such a reading does not deny postcolonial English practices but expands it to include other ontological / theoretical crosscuts.

Focussing on English Studies in Sri Lanka

Attempts at re-writing histories (from a modernist understanding) of English in Sri Lanka have led to the discipline being recollected, assessed, critiqued, attacked, and re-visioned (see Ludowyk 1979; Ismail 1985; Wijesinghe 1992; Halpé 1992; Kandiah 1999). These scholars of English (*ibid.*) have attributed causality and blame for the state of English and re-conceptualised the discipline primarily as struggles in overcoming the ambiguities of postcolonial practice in English Studies as detailed by Kandiah (1999). I came across Kandiah's (1999) re-visioning / revisioning of English practice in Sri Lanka after I had more or less completed this paper. Yet, the way that some aspects of his work resonated with my thinking called for a reviewing/resituating of my paper *vis-à-vis* Kandiah's work in 1999. At the time, Kandiah (engaging with a critique made by Ismail in 1985) correlated/re-visioned the required disciplinary changes in English to Thomas Kuhn's (1970) understanding of a shift in a knowledge paradigm (when scientifically unexplainable anomalies in scientific traditions and practices lead to the conceptualization of new foundations for that scientific practice)[17]. New methodological foundations are forwarded to explain and resolve the existing anomalies in a particular discipline. I enter the debate ten years later, in 2009, with the privilege of a writer armed with the hindsight of the historical developments as well as my own prioritized theoretical/epistemological interests and the situatedness[18] in ontology. Consequently, I am arguing for another shift in paradigm or for the possibility/construction of an episteme (Foucault 1972) given the often contradictory and

[15] Raymond Williams (1989) has argued strongly against the idea of English literature signifying Englishness or the creation and expression of the nation—especially on the grounds that until the 19th century a vast majority of people in the UK were illiterate.

[16] The term globalization is not only used here to indicate the economic standardization of methods of production, marketing and branding; but also to infer cultural and knowledge transferences, conformity as well as the transformation, fusion (Jeffress and Gikandi 2006) and multibridity that arise from international economic migration, trade, travel, information technology, knowledge economies and the media (not only from the West to the East but also from the East to the West – though asymmetrically).

[17] A paradigm is not a distinctive action undertaken by a specific knowledge maker, but rather, an extended break–comprising new (multiple) knowledges and cross-fertilizations in epistemology. This for a time ignites the collective intellect of a particular epistemic community. When such a process is conceptualized as taking place from a postmodernist viewpoint, its origins may not always be clear and its history and progress discontinuous and nonlinear. Furthermore, like in Foucault's (1972) episteme (a similar concept to a paradigm), it may be necessary to make allowances for contradictory and opposing theorizations to co-exist within a paradigm (Wickramasinghe 2010).

[18] This is a point also made by Kandiah (1999) in his article.

opposing epistemologies, theories and methodologies in English Studies today. While I would like to offer this article as taking off from where Kandiah left off, I do not wish to regurgitate some of the (now arguably) tired, old, postcolonial arguments; rather I take them for granted (no doubt that such a presumption could be heavily contested when this article sees the light of publication). One reason for this is that, as argued by Gikandi (Jefferess and Gikandi 2006), there have been important changes that have taken place at the level of cultural expression due to transformations in people's epistemological attitudes despite the continuation of colonial structures. For instance, analysis from within the postcolonial condition/paradigm has become a dominant 'institution of interpretation', 'a mark of difference' and 'a descriptive figure' as opposed to earlier understandings of postcoloniality as a transitional state (Jefferess and Gikandi 2006).

Therefore, I do not situate my own re-visioning from entirely within the postcolonial paradigm. On the contrary, my aim is to consider the future of English Studies from within a developing new paradigm arising from the changes taking place in the local ground situation. This can be constituted as being located within epistemological understandings and theoretical intersections of not only postcoloniality but also interdisciplinarity, gender, postmodernisms, sociology, globalization, education, institutional and participatory policy studies—despite the contradictions implied[19]. As a reflexive researcher, it is a strategic act on my part to briefly consider some of the key disciplinary developments in English Studies between the original institution of the discipline and now. Take for instance, the contents of English syllabi. Undergraduates who read English at the University College in the 1920s sat for the London External degree:

> with its Old English, its Middle English, its History of the Language, its Gothic (if one did the honours course), the dreariness of Sri Garwayne as Tolkien and Gordon put him across, Chaucer – slightly less dreary, but bedevilled by etymology and the dull posts of M. E. grammar. All of this to be literally crammed; the only mitigation was Shakespeare and English literature which stopped dramatically in 1880.
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> (Ludowyk 1979: 2)

As one of the students of University College, Lyn Ludowyk's boredom and dissatisfaction with the narrow limits set by the London syllabus is clear in the above extract. Yet given the handful of students (sometimes a single student, as in the case of Ludowyk) working with professors Leigh and Hussey, there were no restrictions on what was read outside of the syllabus (*ibid.*). When the department was moved from Colombo to Peradeniya as part of the University of Ceylon, the emphasis in the new syllabus was placed on literature, language and phonetics as well as the student's own evaluation in both Part A and Part B of the Tripos syllabus. The links between the departmental staff and the University of Cambridge, the specific inputs and influence of F. R. Leavis and other leading figures of Cambridge University were evident in the syllabus during this period as conveyed by my respondents of that era.

For a long time, the syllabi of many departments of English were founded on literature as involving the study of compartmentalized literary periods. Two of my respondents who graduated in the 1950s and 1960s from the University of Peradeniya attest to the department of English providing 'a grand sweep of literary eras and of literature[20] written primarily in England and an

[19] I reiterate that the methodological stand that I take makes it possible for the scholar to have simultaneously contradicting understandings of a subject though not necessarily uniformly (Wickramasinghe 2010); for instance, from modernist as well as postmodernist perspectives; from postcolonial as well as globalization standpoints.

[20] In the 1960s this sweep terminated with modern writers such as E. M. Forster and Joseph Conrad.

overview of how English developed as a language' (Riza). In many instances, this has now been replaced by categorizations of literary texts according to themes/genres/movements such as war literature, migrant or women's writing.

Over the decades the contents of courses have also responded to the internal thematic and theoretical currents in the discipline. An academic who graduated in the 2000s, Rani writes 'I gained knowledge in English Literature (Sri Lankan, British, American Lit, Modern Lit, critical theory, etc.) I also had training on critical thinking and analytical skills'. Another respondent, Ganga notes that past courses have subscribed to an 'archaic type of Practical Criticism and appreciation of literary techniques called "Dating" ... which has proved to be less than useful in retrospect' (unless one was interested in philology). These have been replaced by courses that incorporate the application of theory—sometimes in preference to Practical Criticism—given the current influence of cultural, critical and literary theories.

In the language front, the lack of student proficiency in language skills and grammar has led to virtually all the universities incorporating language courses and thereby diluting the earlier primacy of literature courses. An overview of how English developed as a language has been supplemented by a range of courses on language structure (morphological, phonological, semantic, and orthographic), history and discourse features, English Language Teaching, and Professional English—some of which have been specially designed for language proficiency. From its inception in 1990, the Open University of Sri Lanka has focussed on teacher training as has the English Language Unit of the Kelaniya University in recent times. Diplomas in English Language Teaching have now been developed into fully-fledged BA degrees in ELT. One of my respondents from the Open University states 'our concept of English Studies includes a sound knowledge of the language, its structure .... its history and development and its discourse features as well its literature from Elizabethan to post-colonial times, including literature translated into English and New Englishes'.

As a result of postcolonial consciousness both at material and theoretical levels, curricula have incorporated not only texts from other postcolonial countries[21], but also indigenous texts in translation as well as comparative studies. The University of Peradeniya, for instance, conducts a long-standing course outlining Sinhala and Tamil Literature 'in an attempt to keep students grounded in the specific context of literary production in Sri Lanka' (Vivian).

As noted *vis-à-vis* English Studies worldwide, the influence of postmodernism/ poststructuralism is one factor that has led to the understanding of what constitutes 'a text' being expanded to include written material, spoken words, communication media, artifacts, the visual realm, social and cultural discourses[22]. Vivian therefore contemplates that 'English academics now publish on just about anything bringing discourse analysis and cultural studies to bear on what they read—be it literature, society, culture, politics, whatever'. Consequently, analysis can move beyond the text altogether, to involve "interdisciplinary studies ... with reference to gender, culture, and the construction of meaning' says Malini. She feels that it would be more appropriate to call the Department in which she works '...one of literature, language and culture studies now, rather than the traditional Dept of English literature' in view of its current interdisciplinary focus. In fact, the department of English of the University of Colombo is awaiting institutional approval to rename itself the department of English, Cultural and Advanced Language Studies. Vivian sums up the status in her department by saying 'all major orientations in English Studies-

[21] Halpé (1993) discusses the problems of naming these literatures in English, internationalism, the criteria for inclusion/exclusion, and balance in his paper on English and the curriculum.

[22] In one understanding (at its most expansive), Spivak (1987: 95) writes of the world as writing itself 'with the many-leveled, unfixable intricacy and openness of a work of literature'.

Literature, English Language Studies, Theory, Linguistics, and Cultural Studies[23] are now represented in our syllabus'.

The above vignettes of the status of some departments of English indicate some of the divergent strands pursued in the practice of English Studies today. When it comes to literature courses, the supremacy of the humanist canon of literature[24] and the touchstones of literature valorised in the early part of the 20th century have been subverted chiefly due to the epistemological influence of feminism, Marxism, postcolonialism and poststructuralism/ postmodernism in knowledge generation/dissemination. These critical theories have undermined the legitimacy of a literary canon by exposing the phallocentrism, arbitrariness, classism, elitism and social/aesthetic values of the criteria in selecting the standards for such a canon. Inputs from linguistics, women's studies, cultural studies, sociology, media and communication studies, management, philosophy, political sciences and education have significantly explored the disciplinary boundaries of English resulting in new dynamic possibilities.

Consequently, English Studies in Sri Lanka is today an interdisciplinary subject that incorporates the study, teaching and research of 1) literatures written in English (including British, American, postcolonial literatures and translations) 2) language and sociolinguistics, 3) literary, critical, political and philosophical theories, 4) gender, culture and society 5) media and communication, 6) pedagogy and research methodology. As noted earlier, these strands of internal growth and diversification within the discipline can be attributed to the increasing number of academics and teachers pursuing further studies abroad, interacting at a global level with other international departments and academics, presenting their work at global knowledge forums, being published worldwide as well as through keeping abreast of *avant-garde* knowledge developments. The on-ground demand for English proficiency as well as the accessibility and expansion of the diverse range of job opportunities for those with English degrees have also revolutionized the boundaries of the discipline. However, these disciplinary developments are not without censure. More conservative scholars and teachers feel that the growing interdisciplinarity/ transdisciplinarity of English Studies 'dilute the textual base of English. The text is what distinguishes literary studies from other disciplines' (Kumari). Yet, the primacy/legitimacy of the text have already been ruthlessly undermined from within the discipline through the interventions of cultural and critical theories (particularly poststructuralism and deconstruction). Furthermore, Foucault's (1972) understanding of a discipline through the concept of archaeology as constituting formal knowledges (*des conniassances*) as well as informal knowledges (*savior*) has reconceptualised the very notion of a discipline. In view of these transdisciplinary trends, the more practical concerns for departments include the need/pressure on academic dons to have a more holistic, multidisciplinary knowledge base (spanning not only the Humanities but also the Social Sciences). Furthermore, epistemologies have hitherto valued 'specialist', concentrated knowledge. Interdisciplinarity implies more wide-ranging, multiple but superficial understandings of knowledge—although this need not necessarily be the case.

Contemporary Issues and Challenges

The selective literature survey on English Studies in Sri Lanka, the responses to my interview schedule as well as my own experiences as a teacher, researcher and practitioner of English

[23] In particular, the incorporation of cultural studies into English or the expansion of English to include culture (by taking into account TV, music, popular culture etc.,) is seen by Gikandi as a way of encapsulating the realities of postcolonial experiences (Jefferess and Gikandi 2006). However, there are concerns within cultural studies in North America that this may have led to assumptions about high and low culture—with literature occupying the higher echelons and popular culture the lower strata' or as cultural studies as referring to race studies (*ibid.*).

[24] F.R. Leavis, for instance, established a once widely accepted Humanist canon through his highly influential study of British fiction, *The Great Tradition*. (1948).

Studies led to the identification of the following issues as well as the re-casting of earlier issue when examining contemporary English Studies.

In discussing English Studies, postcolonial resistances and paradoxical emotions toward English exhibited by the wider populace in the country cannot be ignored. The dominant misconceptions that are prevalent with regard to the discipline include the stale and sour remnants of nationalist allegations of the presumed interests of English courses as being British and Eurocentric, as being 'western' and therefore alienated from Sri Lankan culture, as catering only to the Sri Lankan elite, and as not serving national needs. These concerns are bound up with the powerful middle/upper class elite who formed the power block that replaced British colonial rule and who still wield considerable power in the country as segments of global capital, local industry, and the professional sector. The ways in which English (*'kaduwa'*)[25] becomes a metonymy for a particular aspect of culture, middle-class, kingship, colonialism, and non-democratic power within the country are explored by a number of Sri Lankan scholars (including Fernando 1976; Kandiah 1984:1999; Gunesekera 2005). Yet ironically, there is grudging acknowledgement of the indispensability of English when it comes to employment opportunities in spite of its colonial origins and postcolonial connotations. Clearly this has been brought about by the supremacy of the English language within globalizing networks and processes of economic migration, knowledge economies, trade, travel, information technology and the media that have fuelled a massive demand for English language proficiency. The accusations, rejections, desires and demands on English reflect the tensions of the complex, complicit and contradictory status of the discipline / language / culture that Kandiah engages with in 1999.

This hunger for competence in communication has resulted in aspirations to read for a BA in English—sometimes based on the assumption that such a degree is founded on language (or as leading to greater language proficiency). There does not seem to be adequate understanding that the current degree in English is founded on existing high proficiency in the English language, analytical and critical skills. Often, departments of English are expected to be solely committed to teaching English language to those not proficient in English, despite the work done by the English Language Teaching Units. 'There is a national demand to make undergraduate degree programs more "vocationally oriented". This places demands on English departments by making them opt for more "professional/vocational" content rather than the more academic. More support in terms of funding and research opportunities go to ELTUs as opposed to departments of English (the World Bank grants being case in point)' writes Rizvina, a respondent from an ELTU.

This mismatch of expectations on the part of potential undergraduates and the disciplinary standards/diversity that constitute the discipline of English today (outlined in the earlier section) have resulted in large numbers of angry, disappointed and alienated school-leavers who unfortunately do not qualify to read English at the universities each year. Currently, English departments do not have the requisite teaching expertise or the institutional capacity to meet these erroneous expectations at university level (of enabling graduate employment via English proficiency as well as associated competencies in IT and 'numeracy' skills). However, it must be noted that a number of English departments have incorporated courses on soft/personal skills into their syllabi in recent times so as to address the needs of their internal students. Nevertheless, the lack of compatibility between basic student expectations, the professional requirements of a transitional country like Sri Lanka and the sophisticated capacities and expertise of departments of English need to be merged in attempts at reinventing English Studies.

Within universities, a critical issue affecting the quality of English Studies is the overall plummeting standards of English language proficiency in undergraduates of the English departments in recent years. My respondent Riza writes of the 'poor knowledge of English, of the language, its structure, vocabulary, idiomatic and rhetorical patterns. This is probably because the

[25] The Sinhala term that came into prominence in the 1970s to signify the power of English language use as a weapon of privilege related to class/culture (though it is not so frequently used now).

reading habit has not been encouraged for a complexity of reasons—linked to this is the lack of analytical and writing skills. Lack of reading has also led to ignorance of the world, its history and its literature. Students tend to be culturally "monogamous"! They only know—if "know" is the correct verb—about their own religion and culture'. Given the growing interdisciplinary/transdisciplinary directions of the discipline this poses a serious problem. For the first time in the history of the Department of English at the University of Kelaniya, there were no undergraduates qualified to sit for a Special Degree in English in 2008. This insularity and ignorance of students threaten not only the standard of education but also the conversant and urbane image of English graduates that traditionally eases them into diverse employment opportunities. The abject state of English can be related to a number of reasons. At the macro-level, though successive governments in the country have identified the urgent demand for English by the populace, there has not been a sustained, integrated approach to respond to this need over the years except through *ad hoc* policy changes and provisional measures for political gain. These have resulted in the prioritization of quantity over quality; haste over thoroughness; and outputs over outcomes. Other contributory factors include 'crash-courses' in English, the appointment of teachers not always adequately trained or qualified to teach English in schools and the diminishing university faculty influence over English teaching and 'A' Level marking at secondary levels over the years. 'Less stringent marking at the A/Ls and the lowering of the pass mark at the Dept of Examinations in order to increase the number of A/L English passes .... result in students who normally would not have been admitted to study English at the degree level, now gaining entrance to universities' writes respondent Malathi (usually to ensure that a larger number of students qualify and are selected to read English at universities). On the positive side, this has resulted in greater geographical diversity amongst students as the bigger intakes draw 'on students from both provincial and urban, rural *Maha Vidyalayas* and elite schools' as pointed out by Dhamani. Unfortunately, the lack of English teaching expertise and facilities in most rural schools as well as a corresponding lack of a family/social culture of English-speaking among students are some of the possible reasons for sharp discrepancies in student English proficiency and educational standards. Thus the changing profile in the aptitude of undergraduates who read for a BA in English needs to be taken into account in reinventing efforts.

It must be stressed here that the problem is not simply one of language acquisition; rather, it is a far more complex challenge of corrective or remedial action that neither the Departments of English nor the English Language Teaching Units have the adequate pedagogical expertise to address. 'We have not been trained to address, or 'unteach', or solve the problems of decades of faulty English language learning' writes Kumari from an English Department. Thus gaining expertise in remedial language training has become one of the principal concerns of English Departments. In this context the status of Sri Lankan English has become an important issue that need to be definitively addressed at all levels. What extent of 'Sri Lankanization' is acceptable in academic speech/writing? (Canagarajah 1994; Raheem and Gunesekere 1994). Given the above concerns, English departments are faced with not only a disciplinary but an ethical/political dilemma. Options for most departments have been whether to stick to departmental standards and fail students (with the attendant slog of additional paper marking each year for the already overburdened faculty); provide supplementary grammar/writing courses and individual tutorials for weak students (identified *via* internal testing) in the vain hope that these students will catch up; restructure courses in such a way that the bulk of student assignments focus on oral presentations rather than written work (as students are weakest in writing); or bring down the standard of marking and pass students. Options for students are exceedingly limited. Those who have obtained 'A' and 'B' grades as well as those who have received simple passes are now informed that their aptitude is worthless. Their enthusiasm and confidence are crushed; and some of them are actively discouraged from pursuing their subject choice. Where they have achieved 'competence' during their school years, they must now struggle to deliver and for some it may

not be possible to do so at all. The following comment exemplifies the debate and action within English departments with regard to English Studies today.

> Students who are identified as "weak" in English are given extra classes in English. These classes are not for credit but we expect all our students to attend those classes. Some members of staff (those who teach the "language" sections of the syllabi) are assigned the task of teaching these students. Of course, how to do remedial English classes is a question not yet successfully resolved: small groups, one-on-one, what type of writing (academic/personal/creative?), whether the focus should be on writing assignments that the students do for credit courses, etc. This year, because we have a Fulbrighter who regularly teaches writing in the US, we are offering these remedial English classes at the first year level. Some feel we should catch them as soon as they enter or even before.... We have also assigned a young lecturer to attend the classes in order to train him to take over instruction once the Fulbrighter leaves. We are also debating whether to give up the First Year entirely to teaching writing (a lot of resistance there from staff), to take over one of the compulsory first year courses for this purpose, to bring the students offering English along with the rest of the student population for the intensive course and to offer them special instruction.
>
> (Vivian)

Thus English Studies needs to grapple with the challenges and far-reaching damage often caused by competitive and highly commercialised local knowledge economies. Within the country, there are numerous unregulated institutions, 'tutories', and self-proclaimed experts who teach spoken and written English as well as 'A' Level English. Even some prestigious institutions offer dubious external and sub-standard internal degrees and diplomas when it comes to English. Indiscriminate printing of lesson materials, study guides and translations by publishing houses and individuals have further relaxed standards and compromised on quality. In fact, the potential of English teaching as a commercial venture is being exploited to the fullest—though not necessarily with the expected outcomes.

The goals of organisational efficacy in universities through periodic organizational restructuring funded by global multilateral agencies, though designed to maximize on higher education, have not always yielded the expected results. In particular, the conditional changes to curriculum according to course systems (supported by institutional restructuring) have led to a tapering in academic interests while a single-minded pressure to focus on quantitative outcomes have been at the expense of processes. This however should be related to what is considered to be the general clash in the paradigms of quantitative and qualitative knowledge/methodologies (Oakley 2000). In keeping with evolving mixed methodologies, evaluation methods within academia need to be diversified (to include the qualitative) so as to prevent superficiality in appraisals and a lowering of academic standards. This struggle between the desired objectives of maintaining institutional competency *versus* the diminishing standards in academic quality is evident in 'Faculty trying to reconcile standards they are expected to maintain *vis-à-vis* majors in English without crashing the entire system by failing 70% of those who sit for their first year examinations—those who really should fail' writes my respondent Prabath. Maintaining departmental or disciplinary standards in quality (in the face of challenges relating to English proficiency and output-oriented evaluation systems) have thus become a crucial issue.

For decades, the overwhelming majority of undergraduates reading English have been women. A number of departments have responded to this demographic fact by focussing on women's perspectives and issues as well as mainstreaming gender concerns into the syllabi so as not to alienate women students. Aside from which, English departments (especially in the US and UK) giving birth to women's studies have led to 'women's studies work being incorporated into

some English departments—even in Sri Lanka—through interdisciplinary work—including teaching and research-based on sociology, development, culture, education...' writes Kumari. The situation requires further contemplation—for the discipline as well as for the students themselves. Should the University Grants Commission consider special provisions or a quota for male students to read English Studies for the sake of gender equality? How can the discipline be further oriented to recognize the gendered interests of its women students? What roles should women's studies as well as other interdisciplinary studies play within the discipline?

For, as noted earlier, universities have yet to engage adequately with the status of English Departments as progenitors of interdisciplinary scholars and research studies. The interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary nature/phase of English Studies has been more-or-less established in higher education institutions; but it needs formal sanctioning at the level of national educational policy-makers—not only for epistemological reasons (because of global interdisciplinary trends in knowledge) but also because of its implications *vis-à-vis* the job market in Sri Lanka (as will be discussed in the next section). Thus interdisciplinarity has democratized the discipline to some extent 'by diluting the perception of English literature as a status symbol' as pointed out by Kumari. Respondent Vasanthi writes that on-line courses could make the discipline even more accessible. Doubtless, exploiting the technological revolution in information would further broaden access to English Studies.

Academics of the discipline of English have always been unavoidably aware of the political nature of teaching and studying of English language and literature in more ways than one. Work within the discipline has dealt with the politics and ethics relating to the varying contents of English Studies. Recent examples are Crusz (2008) on an aesthetic of and duty to justice; Wickramasinghe (2008) on the ethics of reading and researching English literature; Nuhman (2008) on Tamil/Sinhala and Sinhala/Tamil translations of literature as a socio-political and literary activity designed to support mutual understanding and harmony amidst moribund ethnic relations. This brings up the point that, despite being caught up in unresolved postcolonial identity politics, the potential of English Studies to contribute towards ethnic harmony (obviously alongside other measures of political devolution, the implementation of the Official Languages Act, initiatives for truth and social reconciliation, etc.,) has not been exploited adequately[26]. At this juncture, when the country is portrayed as being at the brink of a post-conflict era[27], it is obviously of utmost importance that there are integrated efforts on the part of Sri Lankan universities to devise supportive policies and programs aimed at peace and reconciliation through English Studies. Failing to do so would not only be a personal moral lapse but also an ethical failure for English Departments in any effort at democratizing/reinventing the discipline. Furthermore, as pointed out by Kanagaratnam, a respondent from an ELTU, 'English Studies need to further expand its relevance to indigenous cultures/languages', especially given the implications of Sri Lankan English and bilingualism/trilingualism in today's context. Consequently, English Studies programs that can cater to the needs and specificities of each demographic/geographical region as well as collaborative programs that can re-establish ruptured ethnic bonds need to be envisaged.

Given the rise of commercial interests within academia in recent times, it is essential that attempts at rejuvenating and reinventing the discipline also account for some of the original humanist and liberal values that have served the discipline for decades. I argue this despite the fact that these same ethics and values have often been undermined by the aspirations/contents of English Studies. For instance, Viswanathan (1989) discusses how in colonial India humanistic ideals of enlightenment paradoxically drove education for social and political control. Moreover,

[26] Individual departments have espoused peace and reconciliation through teaching, research and extra-curricular activities.

[27] This may still be premature given the lack of access to free information in the country and the continuing violations of human rights, media suppression, policing of civil life and stifling of democratic norms.

the discipline's own theoretical impulses (feminism, postcolonialism, Marxism and postmodernism) have often deconstructed these humanist aspirations (and their proponents like F. R. Lewis) as noted by Gikandi (Jefferess and Gikandi 2006). Nonetheless, these same humanistic critical, theoretical and analytical traditions within English Studies have also led to the possibilities of self-critique and for contrarieties to exist simultaneously within the discipline. Such a twofold understanding can be related to Foucault's (1972) conceptualization of an episteme. Thus, the methodological hallmarks of English Studies (subscription to the democratic and liberal freedoms, human values/rights, holistic ontological understandings, flexibility and interdisciplinarity, critical traditions, self-reflexivity and critique) exist amidst the remnants of colonial mindsets, postcolonial resistances, trends in globalization and mutibridity, pressures of personal economic drives and the commercialization of academia. Therefore, combined modernist and postmodernist perspectives tends to provide keener insights into the discipline of English Studies today.

Rejuvenating and Reinventing English Studies: A Conceptual Overview

The issues and challenges highlighted in the earlier section need to be the base of any project aimed at reinventing English Studies. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contends:

> I am attempting to suggest our pedagogic responsibility in this situation: to ask not merely how literary studies, more correctly the universitarian discipline of English studies, can adjust to changing social demands, but also how we could, by changing some of our assumptions, contribute toward changing those demands in the long run.
>
> Spivak (1987: 100)

Spivak's concerns were focused specifically on deconstructing the positioning of English Studies as separate from society/ideology; and for a reading that supported dialectical and continuous engagements between these two areas. This paper is founded on the *a priori* assumption of a symbiotic relationship between society/ideology and English Studies in its broadest sense. Consequently, the crucial question remains the same. To put it simply: in relation to English Studies in Sri Lanka, how can the discipline of English be revived and reinvented at the University of Kelaniya and other universities in Sri Lanka to a) meet the social needs of the country; b) not compromise the academic integrity and standards of English Departments; c) change our assumptions about the discipline; and d) to create new social/disciplinary demands and benchmarks. 'The primary challenge is to remain an academic discipline while catering to the needs of the job environment' as asserted by Rizvina. This would require changes to the curricular and discipline, teaching and pedagogy, educational structure (new programs), institutional structure, networking and linkages as well as departmental inputs at national level and international levels, concludes respondent Dhamani.

1) The Discipline and the Educational Structure

In the earlier sections of this paper, I outlined the current status of English Studies as straddling several different tracks simultaneously—globally as well as in Sri Lanka. Though this was evident from syllabi contents and departmental changes, national educational policies and wider institutional structures have not always responded to these developments in Sri Lanka. Thus changes to the educational structure would involve expanding and diversifying the conceptualization of 'English Studies' to include several different BA and MA degree programs. The University of Colombo has already instituted the option of specializing in either literature or linguistics in their BA Special degree programs. Jaffna University is also 'planning a degree course named English Language Studies accommodating English linguistics, language skills, translations, Sri Lankan cultural studies (accommodating Dalit and women studies) solely on

English and English-related studies for a three and four year study programme with specialization in ELT, English language and literature designed in a semester system' writes my respondent from Jaffna. However, it is also important to think beyond English degrees as simply constituting language, literary or linguistic studies given the current diversity and interdisciplinarity of the discipline. Instead of merely specializing on a particular area of English Studies, departments need to restructure/reinvent their degrees. The following are degree programs that could be simultaneously conducted by departments of English.

- **BA in English Language**

This degree could be designed to address English language proficiency needs in the country—by immersing students in courses that focus on English language acquisition (reading, writing and speaking skills) and remedying inappropriate usage. The academic component of the program could include support courses on literature, linguistics and other interdisciplinary aspects of English Studies. Students could specialize in Business English, Medical English, Legal English and other varieties of technical Englishes that are required for various professions.

- **B A in English Literature**

A degree in literature could engage those interested in literatures in English (including translations from world literatures) and could conform to the more traditional disciplinary bent towards the analysis of literary and other texts and critical thinking. Many of our graduates have exploited the skills developed from the traditional core of English Studies—critical analysis—in various job sectors. Given that today, texts have come to include newspapers, films, policy documents, graphics, legal drafts, advertisements, historical writings, letters, diaries, websites, artefacts, etc., critical and analytical expertise can be utilized in the following fields as pointed out by Durant and Fabb (1996). Training in rhetorics can develop skills in analysing techniques of speech, writing and persuasion for speech writers in politics, professions, business and the media. Training in Christian theology and hermeneutics has assisted in delving into the possible meanings of religious and legal texts in other countries. Philology and textual criticism have helped in establishing accurate versions of texts (especially historical texts). Professional criticism and reviewing courses have assisted critics in evaluating contemporary creative work. Academic criticism has served to engage with/inform teachers and students. In general, the fields of education, advertising, journalism and the media have generally recognized the professional worth of English degrees. To provide value addition to these academic/literary skills, English departments need to professionalize/market this valuable training in textual analysis by orienting it to the employment needs of the legislature and politicians, policy-makers and lawyers, theological institutions and research organizations, the Department of Archaeology, the National Archives, etc.

- **BA in English Linguistics**

A degree in English linguistics could encourage the study of the English language; its structure (morphological, phonological, syntactic, semantic, and orthographic) its history and development and its discourse features especially with reference to Sri Lankan English, bilingualism and trilingualism. It would serve to ground English Studies within the Sri Lankan context and aim to provide expertise in addressing some of the urgent language issues in the country.

- **BA in Interdisciplinary Studies in English**

This degree could incorporate the global trends in the discipline towards interdisciplinary studies. It could acknowledge the special status of English in promoting interdisciplinary post-graduate work relating to women, gender, culture, communication, ethnicity, politics, peace, development, disability, and the media, to name a few examples. Even as it stands, these interdisciplinary characteristics within the discipline have often led to our graduates finding employment with

INGOs, NGOs, development organizations, research institutions, media institutions and institutions of higher education.

- **BA in English Professional Studies**

This B A degree can build on the technical expertise related to English Studies in the form of courses in translation methods, interpreting, critical analysis, editing, drafting, speech writing, website designing, report writing, screen writing, copywriting, teaching and pedagogy as well as research methodologies. With the assistance of other departments and faculties (Business Management, for instance) in the university it could develop a bank of professional experts in English Studies who could also be self-employed if they so wished.

- **B A in English Language Teaching**

There is no doubt that teaching English language should be a priority in the country. As argued by Vasanthi, 'a literature degree should not be seen as a qualification to just teach the English language. It should be considered as a clearly defined discipline'. Both the Open University of Sri Lanka and the University of Kelaniya are currently offering degrees in English Language Teaching. This is aimed at building the capacity and a corps of English language teachers to address English language proficiency needs in the country at primary and secondary levels. Training in remedial English is another area that requires urgent attention.

- **B A in Creative English**

With an emphasis on creative writing, this degree could train students to capitalize on their innate talents for creative purposes with the help of other departments and faculties (for instance, Liberal Arts) as well as creative and professional writers from the community. Students could also be given practical skills on writing book proposals, developing manuscripts, writing funding proposals for creative projects, budgeting theatrical productions, accessing sponsorship etc., so as to direct them into generating their own work opportunities.

It is not suggested that the degree programs outlined above need to be conceptualized in isolation from one another. In order to preserve and maintain the academic integrity of English Studies it is vital to ensure that the core facets of the discipline (literature, language, linguistic, interdisciplinarity and research) remain as important components of each degree. Consequently, while it is important that degree programs are responsive to social needs given the association of higher education with employment in today's context, the instrumentalism of such a rationale should not defeat or deflect from designing academic or intellectual programs. This is why this paper consistently advocates a fusion standpoint that combines socio-political/economic needs with epistemological concerns.

2) The Institutions

Given these manifold possibilities for future English Studies, the current institutional casing and compartmentalization into a singular department of English within a university would need reorganization into a number of departments under a faculty of English Studies (along the lines of the law or medical faculties). The final goal would be the institution of departments of English Literature, English Language and Linguistics, English Language Teaching, Interdisciplinary and Multidisciplinary Studies, Pedagogy and Policy Studies, Communication Studies, Gender Studies, Ethnic Studies, Cultural Studies and a Centre for Interdisciplinary Research Studies—to name a few. Under the institutional structure of a faculty, students should take courses only from English Studies, thereby immersing themselves in the subject as far as possible. Other faculties from within the university (such as the Faculty of Management) could provide supplementary courses that could also professionalize academic degrees and provide self-employment/income-

generating components. Such initiatives would lead to diversified but inclusive programs of study that are scholarly and cutting-edge, professionalised and needs-based. If undertaken, the objectives delineated above need careful consideration and adaptation according to the ground situation of each university. Keeping in mind the different historical, socio-political and cultural priorities of each institution, universities should formulate their individual long-term policies and step-by-step comprehensive plans calculated to fund, equip, and develop academic cadre/resources so as to institute faculties of English over a period of time.

3) The Departments

Today, the institutional cultures within universities (promoted by global restructuring efforts) challenge academics to 'makeover' from top-down approaches, isolated research work and distanciation from students to more engaged, participatory and interactive roles within departments. While these may allow for a greater degree of innovation in teaching, it does not always allow space for research. On the one hand, this needs to be urgently rectified given the significance of research (for instance, in teaching methods/pedagogy to 'unlearn' flawed English; to develop benchmarks in quality; and to move towards the establishment of guiding principles on Sri Lankan English for primary, secondary and tertiary levels of education). On the other hand, departments need to be professionalized through in-house staff training on the latest in pedagogy, research methodology, networking techniques, ethics, participatory collaboration and leadership, and through updated departmental resources if they are to become forerunners in English Studies. Funding and resources should specifically target the North and East to rectify years of inaccessibility and neglect as pointed out by Kandasamy. This could be complemented by the establishment of local and international linkages, networks with employers, employers' federations, professional bodies, academic bodies, media and arts organizations, creative writers etc. Furthermore, some English departments 'lack variety in specialization; they confine themselves to internal recruitment so no new blood (we seem to like clones); no postgraduate students' writes Dhamani. Measures need to be taken to encourage the diversification of academic interests within interdisciplinary English Studies and to ensure a vibrant academic cadre from other universities and specializations. A considerable chunk of resources need to be allocated to engaging with postgraduate students via the internet.

4) English Education Policy-makers

While departments of English have traditionally possessed the autonomy to guide the discipline within universities according to institutional traditions, expertise and interests, they have not always influenced national policy on English Studies at primary and secondary levels. This needs remedying given the contemporary issues and challenges faced by English Studies as delineated in the earlier section. Though current national priorities have focussed on language acquisition and language teaching as well as exam/market orientations at primary and secondary levels, they have not represented the bevy of other interdisciplinary interests within English Studies. In order to be in the forefront of the discipline and influence national policy directions it is important that English departments organize themselves into a convincing force/academic cum professional body[28] that can engage with the challenges of our times. The lack of strong ties and consistent networking (especially with the English departments in the North and the East) need to be rectified through a broad inter-university forum on English Studies. As proposed by my respondent Pushparani, one of its tasks should be to formulate common benchmarks in the quality of English Studies that all universities should endeavour to follow. Thus the inherent possibilities of English Studies need to be exploited not solely within departments and syllabi but also at national levels through the formulation of broad policy guidelines that can take all aspects of

[28] It should go beyond the current mandate of the University Grants Commission Standing Committee on Teaching English.

English Studies into account (not merely the instrumental). Here, a distinction needs to be made between formulating 'a national policy on English Studies' and consensus-building on policy guidelines on common issues and standards.

5) National and Regional Levels

Any attempt at reinventing English Studies in the universities requires support at primary/secondary levels by the state. 'I think restructuring English studies in the universities necessitates restructuring English studies in the school system, the A/L teaching, evaluation and marking as well. Isolated restructuring of the higher education system is going to be a flop' writes my respondent Piyumi. Thus foremost support should be through teacher training for schools to ensure quality and disciplinary alignment with tertiary English Studies. This has been acknowledged to some extent by national authorities. Referring to the emphasis on English language teacher training in the educational reforms of the early 2000s, Raheem (2004: 42) concludes 'in contrast to the past the assumptions of society at large, the views of the legislature and the goals of the ELT practitioner seems to have coincided'. She goes on to list the challenges that need to be faced given the harmonizing in policy and practice at national levels: they include appropriate guidance for teachers in terms of the required methodologies and approaches; equitable distribution of qualified teachers and resources to underprivileged areas; teacher higher education and training as well as 're-skilling'.

The quality of English language teaching is a recurring issue. 'Given the mushrooming number of tuition classes around the country, I don't think that accessibility is the issue, its quality that matters. Therefore, the quality of primary and secondary English teachers should be improved to foster a culture that discourages students from attending tuition classes' writes respondent Devini. As noted earlier, it is thus imperative that the English Departments' lost status as the national drivers, standard-setters and final authorities of English Studies is re-established, as one reason for sliding standards is the marginalization of university academics from powerful decision-making bodies as well as the corresponding disinterest of academics to contribute to these bodies. Marshalling the services of university academics would lead to a strengthening of linkages between English at primary/secondary levels and the universities, the adherence to common quality standards and the infusion of the latest developments in the discipline to secondary level education.

Another issue that requires definitive national acknowledgement and action is the status to be assigned to Sri Lankan English within the education system at all levels. Respondent Rizvina writes of the need to remove 'the stigma attached to those who don't speak 'standard' English .... The concept of standard *versus* non-standard has to be challenged'. In 1994, Raheem and Gunesekere discussed this very issue of defining standards for the spoken varieties of English in Sri Lanka given the complexities associated with English usage. In today's context, given the challenges discussed earlier, it becomes even more urgent to subscribe to consistent policy guidelines on written and spoken Sri Lankan English at all levels, especially as there seems to be a mismatch between the variety of English accepted at secondary level and tertiary level.

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The vibrant possibilities of re-conceptualizing English Studies discussed above could explode, once and for all, some of the more fundamentalist and parochial condemnations of the discipline of English within the country as an elitist, impractical, colonial remnant. At the same time, it is also necessary to look outwards in terms of how Sri Lankan universities could engage with the increasing English language requirements of the South and South East Asian region. Targeting students from the region is one way forward as well as improving networks and linkages with universities from other countries so as to facilitate the expansion and exchange of updated

knowledge on the discipline from different perspectives as proposed by a number of my respondents.

As evinced by the subtext of this paper the discipline of English has taken on various political connotations at various historical moments—not only in relation to the expediencies of postcolonial, national politics but also *vis-à-vis* knowledge and personal politics. In fact, English Studies will always be part of larger political projects and is therefore not a site that is pure—were it possible for any discipline to be devoid of the influences of various congruent as well as conflicting social forces. However, as discussed hitherto, there is no doubt that the potential of English Studies is immense if we apply an alternative paradigm of engagement. This requires a long-term overview (of at least 10–15 years) and structural changes first, a systematic program of action at institutional level and the preparation and training of adequate specialised cadre for some of the areas outlined. Given the necessary groundwork, such a prospect may not be immediately achievable. However, it should be a goal for the not-too-distant future if we have an inclusive and liberal vision, the intellectual courage and the ethical conviction to plan ahead and prioritise funding; and to re-design and reinvent the discipline. Such initiatives should not only meet the local on-ground needs of individual economics but also engage with global epistemological movements and existing knowledge traditions/possibilities within the discipline. The probable contradictions implied here should not be considered as insurmountable given a fusion of modernist/postmodernist perspectives and methodology. Thus, traditions and interdisciplinarity, flexibility and fusion as well as instrumentalism and marketability should simultaneously define what constitutes knowledge in English Studies. Only then can English Studies be a form of progressivist education that can assist the critical, intellectual, professional, as well as economic growth in individuals and address the national needs of the country.

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