

Language Spoken at Home and Economic Wellbeing in Sri Lanka: An Analysis Based on Survey Data

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This study examines how language spoken at home, economic activities and personal and national economic wellbeing are interrelated in Sri Lanka. This study uses survey data collected from 905 respondents chosen from nine locations. The percentage of responses was measured using a 1-7 Likert scale. For this purpose, we used five distinct languages frequently spoken at home such as Sinhala, Tamil, English, Malayalam and Telugu and their bilingual arrangements. The study found that when compared to the high percentage of Sinhala-speaking persons who view the language spoken at home as relatively important for economic activities such as income earning, studying, finding jobs, doing trade or business, and getting access to public services, the percentage of Tamil-speaking persons who recognize language spoken at home important for economic activities are significantly low. The minority languages, Malayalam and Telugu, speaking communities also recognize the importance of language spoken at home for economic activities at low levels. However, the relatively higher importance given by respondents to the language spoken at home in doing trade and business indicates that these minority language groups may have better opportunities in trade or business when using their own language. In bilingual arrangements, on average, Tamil-Sinhala speaking persons report a lower satisfaction rate on their living standards than Sinhala or Tamil speaking persons. The Sinhala-English and Tamil-English speaking persons have higher rates of satisfaction with their living standards compared to persons who speak Sinhala or Tamil at home. The Malayalam-Sinhala bilingualism makes Malayali persons slightly better off in terms of life achievements than the Malayalam-Tamil bilingualism. Further, Telugu-Tamil bilinguals indicate that they are better off with the Telugu-Tamil combination than the Telugu-Sinhala combination.

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