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Prepositional Adjectives in Sri Lankan English

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Abstract - Although Sri Lankan English has been studied since 1940s, its grammar has been paid less attention to. One reason for this is because grammatical innovations take time to establish. When grammatical innovations do emerge, they tend to start out at the boarder-line area between grammar and lexis. The present paper studies such an area in the lexis-grammar interface, Prepositional Adjectives, which are Adjective-Preposition combinations that form a lexical unit. The present study uses a corpus-based methodology primarily and the data are from standard written language corpora. The study explores the incidence and frequency of Prepositional Adjectives in Sri Lankan English, in comparison to that in British English, and Indian English, with special focus on prepositions 'with', 'from', 'for', 'at' and 'about'. Then, the study attempts to account for the innovative Prepositional Adjectives in Sri Lankan English in terms of language contact phenomena because English has been in contact with local languages in Sri Lanka for over 200 years. Specially, the paper discusses how the meanings expressed by the prepositions under scrutiny are represented in Sinhala and Tamil by case markers and postpositions. Thereby, the paper shows how it becomes necessary for the bi/tri-lingual Sri Lankan English user to opt to innovative use of prepositions in Prepositional Adjectives.

Keywords: Prepositional Adjectives, Sri Lankan English, Contact Languages.

I. INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan English (SLE) has been researched and written about since the 1940's (e.g. Passé-1943). Some of these studies describe several sub-systems of language, whereas some others focus on a specific sub-system. As Mendis and Rambukwella (2010) report, SLE phonology has been widely studied (e.g. Fernando-1985, Gunesekera-2005), and 'there appears to be broad agreement on phonological features that mark SLE'. Next to phonology, lexicon of SLE has also been studied (e.g. Gunesekera -2005, Meyler -2007). There have also been a few studies on SLE syntax including Kandiah (1981), and Herat (2005). Comparatively, SLE grammar has been paid less attention to. One reason for such less focus on syntax and grammar of 'New Englishes' is that these sub-systems tend to be much more stable and resistant to change comparatively. As Schneider (2007) points out, when grammatical innovations do emerge, they start out at the intersection of grammar and lexis. World Englishes (WE) literature has already recorded that innovations in the lexis-grammar interface such as different complementation patterns of verbs, co-occurrence and collocational tendencies of words in phrases, and patterns of word formation can be found especially with regard to WEs (Schneider 2004). A frequently studied co-occurrence pattern in the lexis-grammar interface involves particle/preposition use. Almost all studies on particle/preposition use in WEs, however, have focused on Verb-Particle combinations (e.g. Schneider 2004, Mukherjee-2010). This is true regarding SLE as well (e.g. Fernando, D- 2007, Kumara & Mendis- 2010). For this reason, the present study focuses on Adjective-Preposition combinations instead of verb-preposition combinations.

Following Quirk et al (1985:1221), Adjective-Preposition combinations which form a lexical unit are termed Prepositional Adjectives (PAs). Quirk et al (1985:1221) record that adjectives such as angry, glad, happy, mad, knowledgeable, and reasonable; and participle adjectives such as annoyed, delighted, aggrieved, worried, pleased, and frightened form PAs with 'about'. Adjectives such as angry, bad, brilliant, clever, good, hopeless, and terrible; and participle adjectives such as delighted, pleased, alarmed, amused, disgusted, and puzzled form PAs with 'at'. Adjectives such as remote, different, distant, distinct, and free form PAs with 'from'. Adjectives such as aware, afraid, ashamed, capable, certain, conscious, empty, fond, full, glad, proud, short, and worthy; and participle adjectives such as convinced, scared, and tired form PAs with 'of'. Adjectives such as contingent, dependent, intent, keen, reliant, and severe; and participle adjectives such as based, bent, and set form PAs with 'on/upon'. Adjectives such as subject, answerable, averse, close, due, liable, and similar; and participle adjectives accustomed, allied, inclined, and opposed form PAs with 'to'. Adjectives such as angry, busy, comfortable, compatible, content, familiar, friendly, furious, happy, impatient, incompatible, sick, and uneasy; and participle adjectives such as annoyed, bored, concerned, delighted, depressed, disappointed, disgusted, dismayed, distressed, drunk, enchanted, obsessed, occupied, overcome, pleased, satisfied, and taken form PAs with 'with'.

Studies on particle/preposition use in WEs are interested in the use of particles/prepositions which is innovative, i.e. use in which the particle/preposition choice is different from that in historical input varieties such as British English (BE) or American English. For instance, De Klerk (2006:148-149) reports 'a few repeated patterns' of distinctive prepositional usage in Xhosa English, which include, among others, combinations such as interested about, satisfied about, need of, bored of, and honest around, which are PAs. WE literature has also attempted to suggest reasons for such innovative use of particles/prepositions. Tan (2013:118-123), for example, states several processes of formation of multi-word verbs in Malaysian English such as modelling on noun + preposition combinations, modelling on other semantically related prepositional/phrasal verbs, based on generalizations about the syntactic functions of productive prepositions, and influences from Malay and Chinese (local languages). Likewise, the present study attempts to study what the innovative PAs in SLE are, and whether the local languages in Sri Lanka have an influence on the use of PA innovations in SLE. The focus on contact language influence is because English has been in contact with the two prominent local languages of Sri Lanka for over 200 years. Additionally, as Mendis & Rambukwella (2010) observe, all speakers of SLE today are bilingual and some are trilingual. In bilingual language processing, one language exerting influence on the other (and vice versa) is inevitable and it results in restructuring of the systems of the contact languages.

The two main national languages in Sri Lanka that English has been in contact are Sinhala, which is an Indo-Aryan language, and Tamil, which is a Dravidian language. As Herring and Paolillo (1995) state, both are harmoniously head-final, SOV languages; and both have postpositions rather than prepositions. Meanings expressed by English prepositions are expressed in Sinhala and Tamil by both postpositions and case markers. Thus, certain meanings expressed by the English preposition for are represented in Sinhala by the Sinhala dative suffix /tə/ and in Tamil by the Tamil dative suffix /kku/; similarly, some meanings expressed by the English preposition from are denoted by the Sinhala ablative case suffix /en/ and Tamil ablative case marker /iruntu/, and some meanings expressed by the English preposition with are represented by the Sinhala 'auxiliary' (De Alwis, 1852:30) case suffix /-n/ and Tamil 'sociative'

(Lehmann, 1989:37) case markers /ooɽu/ and /uɽan/. Additionally, certain meanings expressed by the English preposition for are represented by the Sinhala postposition /sadəha:/; meanings of from by the Sinhala postposition /sitə/ and /vetin/ and Tamil postposition /mutal/ and /viɽɽu/; and meanings of with by the Sinhala postposition /saməgə/ and Tamil postpositions /muulam/ and /koɳɽu/. Thus, the present study hypothesizes that the three prepositions- for, from and with- would go into combinations with adjectives significantly in SLE. In addition to these three prepositions, two other prepositions are selected as controls: the first out of the two is about, of which an equivalent does not play a role as a case suffix in Sinhala or Tamil. However, it does have postposition equivalents both in Sinhala - /gænə/ - and in Tamil - /parri/. The second is at, which does not have either a case marker equivalent or a one to one postposition equivalent (historically) in Sinhala or Tamil for most of its meanings. As almost all users of SLE are bilinguals, who bring English into contact with the other language(s) in their mind, it is hypothesized that the incidence and frequency of use of the PAs with about will be fewer than those with for, from, and with, and it will be even less with at.

II. METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIMENTAL DESIGN

The present investigation is primarily corpus-based. A corpus (plural corpora), which is a computer-readable collection of texts or transcribed speech representative of a language or variety, can basically be used to get information on frequencies of words, phrases etc. Corpus access software, or concordancers, are used in arranging such digitalized language data to find patterns in language use. Performance data for the present study are extracted from 2 types of written language corpora representing SLE, which are compared with data from parallel corpora representing British English (BE), the historical input variety of SLE; as well as Indian English (IndE), in order to effectively evaluate the significance of occurrence of selected structures in SLE. However, the present paper does not attempt to distinguish between SLE and IndE in terms of contact language influence, primarily because contact languages of SLE are also from the main language families of the contact languages of IndE.

The first type of written language corpora of the present study's corpus environment is from the written parts of the respective components of International Corpus of English (ICE) (Greenbaum 1996), namely Sri Lankan component (ICE-SL), Great Britain component (ICE-GB), and Indian Component (ICE-Ind). ICE corpora provide comparable language data from each variety with a high level of representativeness covering a wide range of genres. Each written component of the ICE consists of approximately 400,000 words. The second type of written corpora used in the analysis is a large online database recently made available. It is the corpus of Global Web-based English – GloWbE (Davies & Fuchs, 2015), which is composed of 1.9 billion words in 1.8 million web pages from 340,000 websites (including newspapers) in 20 different English-speaking countries. The relevant components to the present study contain 46,583,115 words of SLE (GloWbE-SL), 96,430,888 words of IndE (GloWbE-Ind), and 387,615,074 words of BE (GloWbE-Gb). This large database is useful in detecting those innovative features of SLE which are low-frequency phenomena.

ICE corpora data were analyzed using the concordancer, Wordsmith Tools-Version 5 (Scott, 2008), with the selected prepositions as the search word and adjectives occurring with it at positions 01, 02, and 03 to the left of it as collocates (L1, L2, and L3 positions) in all three written components. In order to exclude adverbial combinations, all concordance lines were

manually read. The frequencies of the selected concordances were normalized to 1 million words because the word counts of each ICE component are not exactly similar. Additionally, as ICE corpora are comparatively small in size, PAs selected through the analysis of ICE corpora data were searched in GloWbE corpora using its online interface as the concordancer, under individual scholar license. With GloWbE, the adjective (lemma) was used as the search term, and selected prepositions as the first collocate to the right of the adjective lemma for brevity's sake (without going to the second and third position to the right). The frequencies of these PA types in GloWbE corpora were normalized to 100 million words. Those that hit over 100 normalized counts of the raw frequencies in SL component were then compared with the normalized frequencies in GB component and when the former value is two times or more than the latter, they were considered significant in SLE, and were analyzed for contact language influence.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Figure 1 below shows the number of different types of PAs in the three ICE written components, normalised to 01 million words. As the figure shows, the expected higher incidence of PAs in SLE compared to that in BE is seen in PAs with 'with', but not in those with 'for' and 'from'. It is also interesting that IndE records more PA types than SLE for 'for', 'from', and 'with'. The normalised token frequencies (total occurrences) of these PAs shown in Figure 2 also depict a similar picture. The expected higher occurrence in SLE is seen in PAs with 'with', while IndE records the highest frequency in PAs with 'for'. It is also notable that normalised frequency of PAs with 'at' is also higher in SLE, contrary to the expectation in the hypothesis.

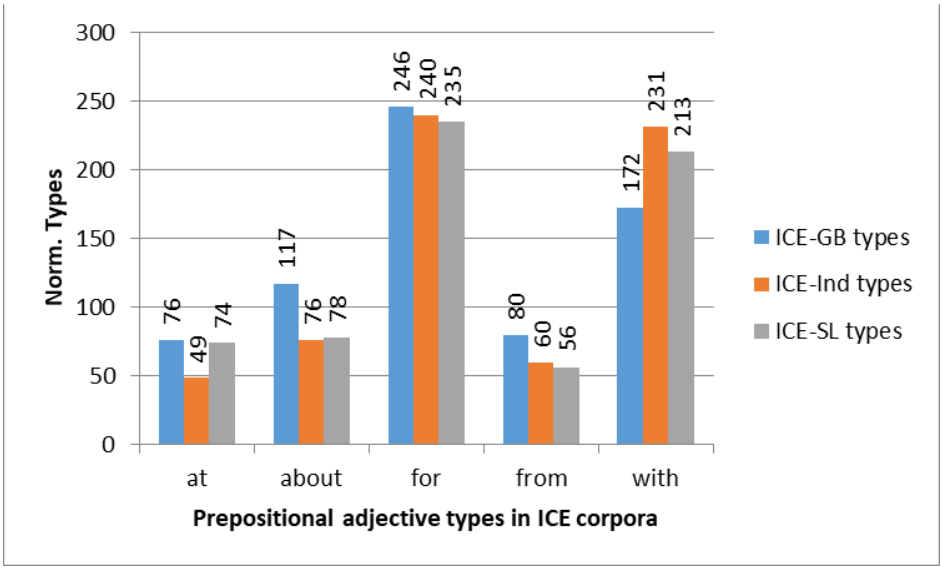

Figure 1. Normalised numbers of PA types in the three ICE written components

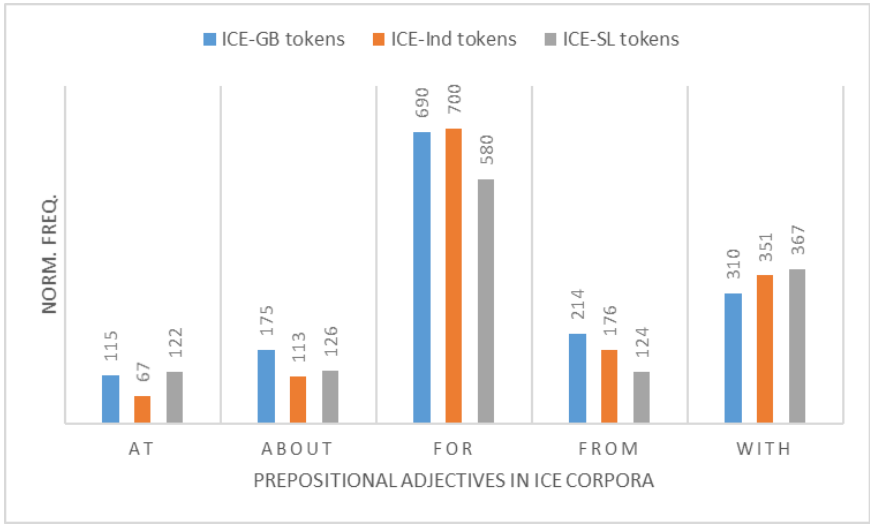

Figure 2. Normalised token frequencies of PAs in the three ICE written components.

Figure 3 below depicts the normalised token frequencies of the PAs in GloWbE corpora. As can be seen in the figure, the profile for PAs with 'with' is different from that in ICE corpora in that it is highest in BE data and lowest in SLE data. However, the figures for PAs with 'for' and 'from' show a preference to the 'new' varieties of English, the former recording highest in IndE data and the latter in SLE data. Additionally, just as with ICE corpora data (except for ICE frequency of PAs with 'at'), PAs with the control prepositions 'about' and 'at' behave in line with the hypothesis, recording highest in BE data.

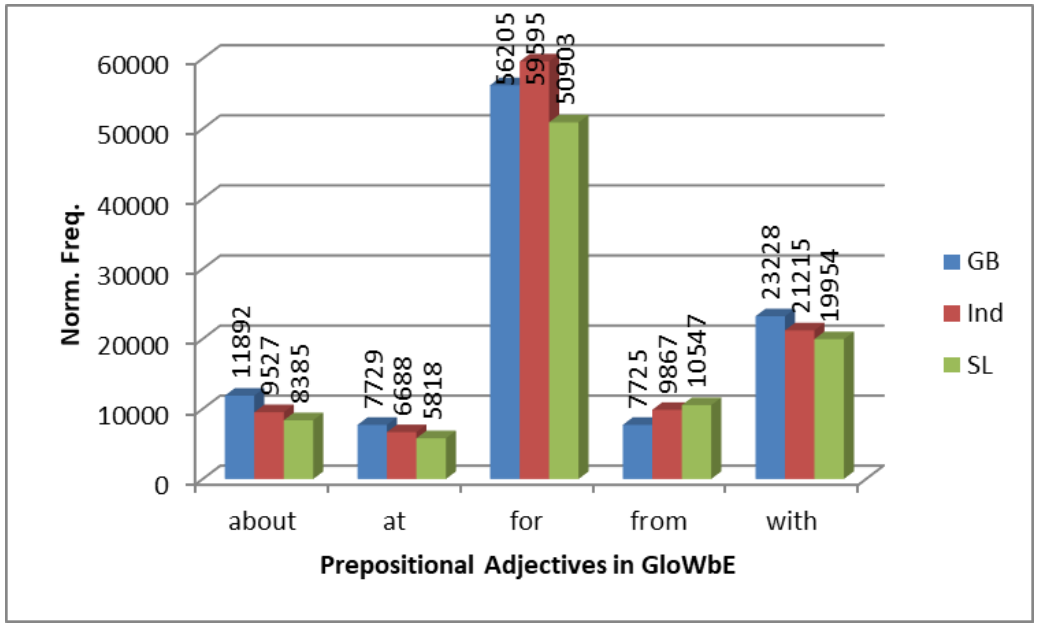

Figure 3. Normalised token frequencies of PAs in the three GloWbE components.

Thus, the distribution of overall type and token frequencies of the PAs in the two corpus environments under scrutiny shows an uneven pattern. Nevertheless, conforming to initial hypothesis, an overall pattern of PAs with the 'suspected' prepositions (for, from, and with) showing a preference to the 'new' varieties (SLE and IndE), and those with the 'control' prepositions preferring BE is seen, albeit unevenly. Additionally, individual PAs described below, which are significant in SLE data, too, show influence from Sri Lankan local languages as hypothesized. The present study found 06 such PAs which are twice as frequent in GloWbE-SL as in GloWbE-GB: conversant with, conducive for, greedy for, aloof from, proud about, and silent about. None of these are recorded in Quirk et al (1985:1221-1222) as PAs.The fact that no PA with 'at' was found to be significant in GloWbE-SL data according to the study's selection criteria, too, confirms the initial hypothesis that absence of a one-to-one local language equivalent for the preposition 'at' influences the SLE user not to prefer it in combinations (PAs in this instance). Because of the page limit restrictions of the present paper, analysis of only four PAs (one each for each preposition which produced 'positive' results) is presented below.

Among the significant PAs in SLE, 'conversant with' is found once in ICE-Ind, but not in the two other ICE written components. In GloWbE, the normalized frequencies are 112, 88, and 29 for SL, Ind, and GB components respectively. Whereas with is the most frequent R1 preposition collocate for the adjective [conversant] in the entire GloWbE corpus, preposition in appears second producing a competing structure, conversant in, for which the normalized frequencies in GloWbE are 116, 13, and 04 for SL, Ind, and GB components respectively. As the normalised frequencies of the total occurrences of the adjective [conversant] may also differ widely, influencing the results, the frequencies of the two competing structures were worked out as a percentage of the normalised total occurrences of the adjective (Figure 4). As the figure shows, both BE and IndE record a clear preference to [conversant] with, while SLE uses both structures more or less equally, with a marginal preference to [conversant] in. Thus, innovative PA in SLE seems to be [conversant] in rather than [conversant] with.

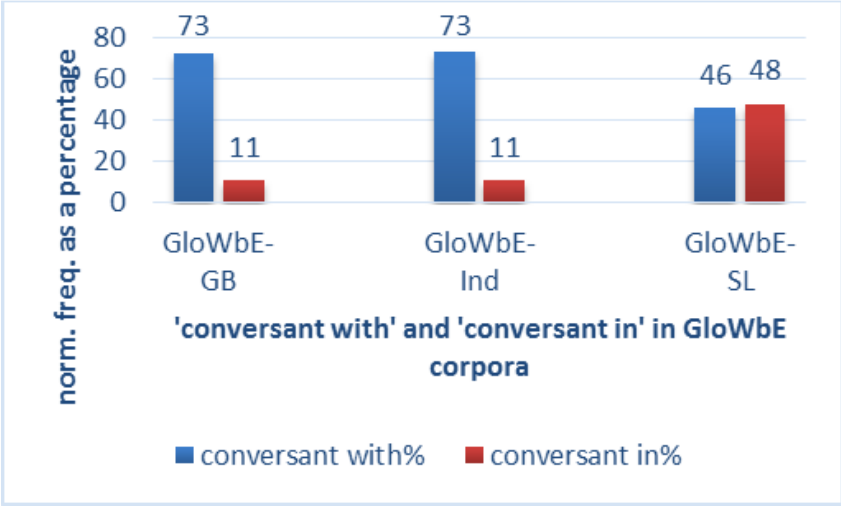

Figure 4. Normalised frequencies of [conversant] with and [conversant] in as a percentage of normalised frequencies of [conversant] in the three GloWbE components.

Example structures 1 and 2 below from GloWbE-SL show how the meanings of these two competing PAs are expressed in Sinhala. As can be seen from the structures, the Sinhala suffix /hi/, which is (one of) the equivalent(s) for the preposition, is translated to English as 'in' rather than as 'with'. Tamil equivalents for these examples shown in the structures 3 and 4 below too show that the prepositional equivalent in these PAs in Tamil is not translated to English as 'with'. This habit of the local languages to prefer a prepositional equivalent of 'in' rather than 'with' for the meanings of these structures may have been one of the reasons for SLE's preference to [conversant] in over [conversant] with, thus showing contact language influence on the preposition choice in these competing PAs in SLE.

1.Sinhala: /kuveːni sʌhʌ ægeː gɔːtrəjə sʌŋgiːtəjə sʌhʌ

Gloss: Kuveni and her tribe music and

Sinhala: / nʌrtənəje**hi nipunə** vuːhə/

Gloss: dancing **in conversant** were

SLE: Kuveni and her tribe were **conversant in** music and dancing.

2. Sin/ mʌmə dʌhʌtunveni sʌŋʃɔːdʰənəje**hi prəviːnə** nɔvemi/

Gloss: I the 13th amendment **in conversant** am not

SLE: I am not **conversant (with)** the 13th amendment.

3.Tam: [Enakku 13vatu tiruttattaip **parri** peritāka teriyavillai]

Gloss: I the 13th amendment **about conversant** am not

SLE: I am not **conversant (with)** the 13th amendment.

4.Tam: [Kuveniyum avaḷuṭaiya kulattinarum pāṭṭu marrum

Gloss: Kuveni and her tribe music and

Tam: naṭanatt**il nalla keṭṭikkārarkaḷ**]

Gloss: dancing **in conversant**

SLE: Kuveni and her tribe were **conversant in** music and dancing.

The second individual PA analysed in this paper is 'conducive for', which is found twice in ICE-SL only, among the ICE written components under study. In GloWbE corpora, the normalized frequencies are 155, 97, and 14 in SL, Ind, and GB components respectively. In the entire GloWbE corpus, the most frequent R1 preposition collocate, however, is 'to', and 'for' appears as the next most frequent. Figure 5. below shows the frequencies of [conducive] for as a percentage of the normalized total occurrences of the adjective [conducive] in the three GloWbE components along with the percentage frequencies of the competing structure, [conducive] to. As the figure shows, in GB data, the preference to [conducive] to is marked, whereas in data for the two 'new' varieties, its preference becomes less marked. On the other hand, the preference to [conducive] for shows the opposite trend, showing a greater preference

in SL and Ind data. Thus, 'conducive for' seems to be emerging as an innovative PA in the 'new' Englishes under scrutiny.

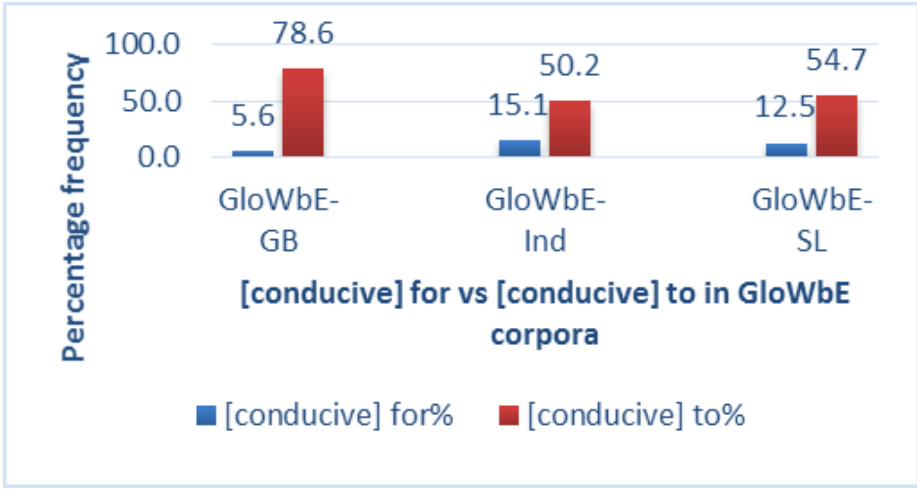

Figure 5. Normalised frequencies of [conducive] for and [conducive] to as a percentage of normalised frequencies of [conducive] in the three GloWbE components.

Sinhala equivalents for these two competing PAs are illustrated in example structures 5 and 6 below from GloWbE-SL. As they show, the equivalent for both prepositions, 'for' and 'to', in Sinhala, especially in the formal expression, is the same (the postposition /sʌdəha:/). In less formal expression, too, the equivalent for both prepositions is similar, which is suffix /tə/. Thus, for the SLE user, 'for' is also available as an option for complementation of [conducive] in the given examples because he/she does not distinguish 'to' and 'for' with regard to the meanings of these PAs in his/ her Sinhala linguistic habits. This situation is not different in Tamil equivalents too, as illustrated in structures 7 and 8. Suffix /kku/ appears as the equivalent for both 'for' and 'to' in these PAs. This availability of an equivalent of 'for' similar to that of 'to' in both Sinhala and Tamil for the meanings expressed by this PA may have prompted the bi/tri-lingual SLE (and IndE) user to opt to *[conducive] for* in addition to *[conducive] to* for the said meaning.

5. Sinhala:/ʌrtəvʌt sa:kʌtʃtʃa: **sʌdəha: hitəkərə** dʰʌna:məkə

Gloss: meaningful negotiations **for conducive** positive

Sinhala: pʌrisərəjʌk/

Gloss: environment a

SLE: A positive environment **conducive for** meaningful negotiations.

6. Sinhala: /nidʌhʌs ha: sa:da:rənə mætivʌrənəjʌk **sʌdəha**:

Gloss: free and fair election a **for**

Sinhala: **hitəkərə** sa:məka:mi: va:ta:vərənjʌk/

Gloss: **conducive** peaceful atmosphere a

SLE: A peaceful atmosphere **conducive** (**to)** a free and fair election.

7. Tamil: [Oru arttamuḷḷa pēccuvārttai**kku**

Gloss: A meaningful negotiations **for**

Tamil: nērmaṟaiyāṉa cūḻal **ukantatu**.]

Gloss: positive environment **conducive**

SLE: A positive environment **conducive for** meaningful negotiations.

8. Tamil: [Cutantiramāṉa marṟum niyāyamāṉa tērtalu**kku**

Gloss: free and fair election **for**

Tamil: oru amaitiyāṉa cūḻnilai **ukantatu**.]

Gloss: a peaceful atmosphere **conducive**

SLE: A peaceful atmosphere **conducive** (**to)** a free and fair election.

The third PA analysed is 'aloof from', which is found once in ICE-GB among the ICE written components under scrutiny. In GloWbE, the normalized frequencies are 107, 61, and 22 for SL, Ind, and GB components respectively. 'From' is the most frequent R1 preposition collocate of the adjective *[aloof]* in the entire GloWbE corpus, and [*aloof] from* is 41%, 30%, and 15% as a percentage of the normalized frequencies of the adjective lemma *[aloof]* in GloWbE-SL, GloWbE-Ind, and GloWbE-GB respectively. Thus, the PA's preference in GloWbE-SL over that in GloWbE-GB is significant. As the example structure 09 from GloWbE-SL below shows, an equivalent, which is an ablative case suffix /en/, is readily available in Sinhala for the meaning expressed by the preposition in this PA. The Tamil equivalent of this example illustrated in structure 10 too shows that an ablative case marker [iruntu**]** is readily available for the meaning expressed by the preposition in this PA. This ready availability of one-to-one equivalents in the local languages for the preposition of this PA may have triggered the significant usage of it by the SLE user, who is mostly bilingual.

9. Sinhala: / ɔvuhu indiːjə hʌmudaːv**en durʌsvə** sitijəhə/

Gloss: They the IPKF **from aloof** had kept

SLE: They had kept **aloof from** the IPKF.

10.Tam: [Avarkaḷum aipīkē'ev iṭam **iruntu vilakki**

Gloss: They the IPKF **from aloof**

Tam: vaikkappaṭṭu iruntārkaḷ]

Gloss: kept had

SLE: They had kept **aloof from** the IPKF.

11.Sinhala: /mʌtə eː **gænə aːdʌmbəraɪ**/

Gloss: I it **about** **proud** am

SLE: I am **proud about** it.

12. Sinhala: / ʌpi ɔbə **gænə aːdʌmbərə** vemu /

Gloss: we you **about** **proud** are

SLE: we are **proud** (**of**) you

13. Tam: [Nāṉ ataip**parri perumai** aṭaikiṉṟēṉ]/

Gloss: I it **about** **proud** am

SLE: I am **proud about** it.

14. Tam:[Nām uṅkaḷai **parri perumaiyāṭai** ṟōm]

Gloss: we you **about** **proud** are

SLE: we are **proud** (**of**) you

The last PA analysed in the present paper is 'proud about'. It is found once in ICE-SL only, among the ICE written components under scrutiny. It is not recorded in Quirk et al (1985:1221-1222), which records 'proud of' as a PA. In GloWbE, the normalized frequencies of 'proud about' are 105, 48, and 25 for SL, Ind, and GB components respectively. Figure 6 below shows the normalized frequencies of 'proud about' and 'proud of' as a percentage of the normalized frequencies of the adjective [proud] in the three GloWbE corpora. As the figure shows, the preferred structure in all three varieties is 'proud of'. However, as the trend line in the figure shows, the preference to this PA is highest in GB component and lowest in SL component, while Ind figure lies in between. The PA 'proud about,' on the other hand, shows the opposite trend showing the highest percentage in the SL component, and lowest in the GB component. Thus, 'proud about' seems to appear as a 'new' PA particularly in the two 'new' varieties of English being studied.

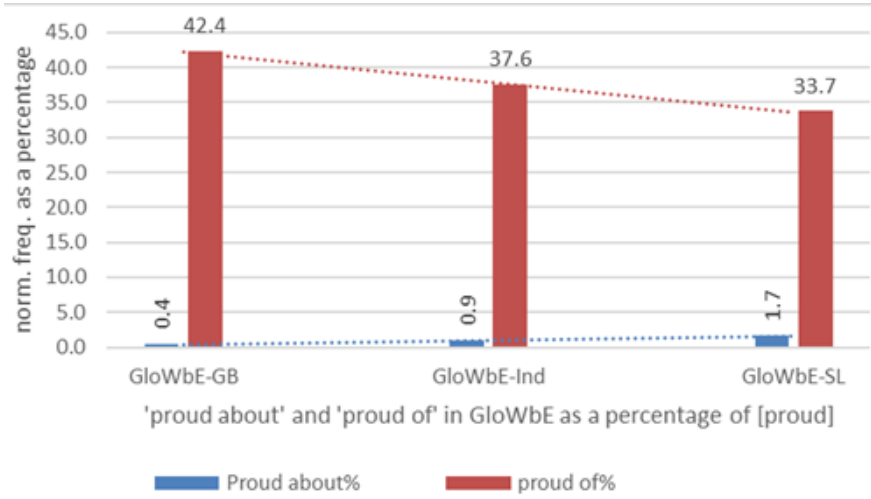

Figure 6. Normalised frequencies of [proud] about and [proud] of as a percentage of normalised frequencies of [proud] in the three GloWbE components.

Example structures 11 to 14 below illustrate how the meanings of these two alternative PAs are expressed in Sinhala and Tamil. As illustrated, in both languages the equivalent for the two prepositions 'of' and 'about' is the same: / gænə/ in Sinhala and [parri] in Tamil. In fact, both of these are direct equivalents of 'about' rather than of 'of'. Therefore, the already established linguistic habit of this equivalent seems to have driven the SLE (and IndE) user to use 'about', rather than 'of,' in the complementation of the adjective [proud], thus opting to use [proud] about, in addition to [proud] of. However, as shown in Figure 7 below, percentage frequency of [proud] about in GloWbE-SL is significantly low compared to that of the other PA innovations discussed so far. A possible reason for this is that unlike 'for', 'from', 'in', and 'with', 'about' finds its equivalent in Sinhala and Tamil only as a postposition, not as a case marker, as stated in the initial hypothesis.

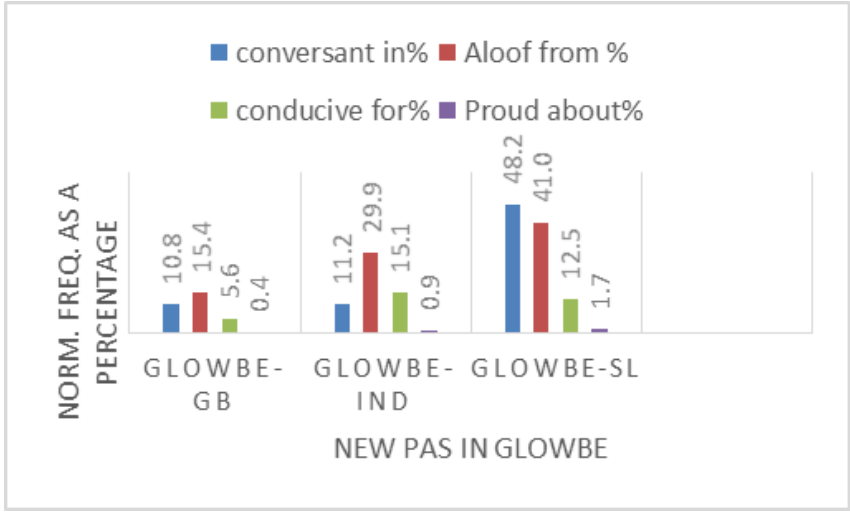

Figure 7. Percentage frequencies of the analyzed PAs significant in GloWbE-SL.

IV. CONCLUSION

The foregoing discussion makes it evident that language contact phenomena exert an effect on the incidence and frequency of PAs in SLE. Overall incidence and frequency data show that the 'suspected' prepositions, -for, from, and with- show fidelity to SLE and IndE, while the control prepositions – about and at - favour BE, albeit unevenly. The analysis of the four individual PAs shows that their emergence as innovative PAs in SLE has been influenced by the representation of the equivalents of the relevant prepositions in Sinhala and Tamil. This is not surprising because it is inevitable for the bi/tri-lingual SLE user to transfer some of the linguistic habits of his/her first language into his/her use of English. These conclusions, however, have to be further validated with more data using other research methodologies such as elicitation techniques in future studies. Additionally, as one of the session chairpersons at the TRInCo-2017 conference suggested, another dimension that should be investigated is whether these different PA alternatives are genre specific. More corpus environments could be used to this end.

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