

# An Investigation of Morphological Processes in Sri Lankan English; A Study Based on Selected YouTube Comment Sections

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**Abstract**— British rule left a lasting impact on Sri Lanka with the introduction of English language. In addition, English was considered as the official language of the country under the British government. After gaining independence in 1948, Sri Lanka evolved into a multi-ethnic country which subsequently affected its vernacular languages, which are Sinhala and Tamil. English language in Sri Lankan context emerged as Sri Lankan English (SLE), a new variety representing diverse cultural and social factors of the country. SLE has undergone numerous word formation processes and developed into one of the most major varieties of the English language. In the present day, the frequent use of social media platforms like YouTube comment section has become a dynamic site for the morphological processes in SLE. The content creators utilize new SLE words to facilitate audience engagement. This research aims to investigate the productive and frequently used morphological processes of SLE in selected YouTube comment sections. The study was designed as a qualitative content analysis. A sample of thirty words was selected employing judgmental approach where researcher's knowledge on SLE morphology was utilized to select YouTube channels. According to the findings, compounding accommodates the largest number of entries in SLE vocabulary found in the YouTube comment section of the selected channels. Borrowing stands as the second-largest entry. Clippings and affixation respectively accommodate fewer entries. Thus, compounding and borrowing can be identified as the most productive and frequently used morphological processes in YouTube comment section in Sri Lanka. Moreover, most of the compounding and borrowings are influenced by the Sinhala language, revealing its significant influence on morphological processes in Sri Lankan English. In conclusion, it is evident that further research on the SLE morphological processes is essential to codify the modern trends in SLE vocabulary due to the influence of digital platforms like YouTube.

**Keywords**—*Morphological processes, Sri Lankan English, YouTube*

## I INTRODUCTION

Sri Lankan English is a unique variety of English that consists local languages, cultures and social factors. According to [1], “the English language was introduced to Sri Lanka in 1796 as a ‘gift’ from colonists as an official language for administrative work and trade”. Later, this new variety of English was labelled as Sri Lankan English [2] and this variety is heavily influenced by the vernacular languages in Sri Lanka (Sinhala and Tamil).

Sri Lankan English has undergone multiple word formation processes such as compounding, borrowing, clipping, and affixation. Due to the rising social media impact in the contemporary world, these morphological processes have reached frequent usability. Even though there is a considerable amount of research studies in the field of morphology, a scarcity can be seen in the studies of Sri Lankan English morphological processes, significantly in the digital context like YouTube. The aim of this research is to systematically identify, classify and analyze the most productive word formation processes (compounding, borrowing, clipping, and affixation) of SLE used in YouTube comments sections, while providing the contextualized linguistic examples. The research was conducted through two research questions to examine how YouTube content creators utilize SLE word formation processes to engage with audience, and which are the most productive morphological processes in the context.

## II LITERATURE REVIEW

This study focuses on the productive SLE morphological processes utilized in the YouTube comment section by the audience. This research identifies and categorizes the word formation processes applied in Sri Lankan YouTube comment section. In addition, four morphological processes compounding, borrowing, clipping, and affixation are selected based on the results of the research and previous studies on morphological processes in social media platforms.

As in [3], “compounds are formed by combining two

bases, which may be words in their own right, to form a new lexical item". Moreover, compounds can be divided into types based on their meaning and behaviour of the head noun. Furthermore, [4] has observed a list of compounds in his A Dictionary of Sri Lankan English which are common to colloquial SLE. "Jump- seat" and "Agency- office" are examples from the dictionary, which are defined as endocentric and highly compositional. [4] has documented another type of compounds that are directly translated into English from Sinhala language such as "small- village" and "Colombo- seven". According to [2], compounding is one of the most productive word formation processes in SLE and it may consist of combination of Sinhala, Tamil and English words.

As [3] defines borrowing as an impactful word formation process where instead of forming new words a language can expand the number of words in its lexicon by borrowing from the vernacular languages. However, borrowing stands as the most influential word formation process in SLE history. Reference [2] asserts that SLE is rich with borrowings from Sinhala, Tamil, Malay, and Arabic reflecting the cultural impact on the language.

Clipping is a systematic technique to create new words by cutting or shortening longer words by reducing one syllable or more, without changing the original lexical meaning of the word. Reference [3] has introduced the types of clipping as back clipping, middle clipping and front clipping. As [5] states that clipping is one of the most common word formation processes in social media platforms due to its convenient nature on informal conversations.

In morphology, when bound morphemes are connected to a root to form a meaningful word is known as the process of affixation. Furthermore, [3] has discovered two types of affixations, such as inflectional affixation (which mainly occurs to form grammatical words) and derivational affixation depending on the usage of the word. According to [2], affixation is one of the most prominent SLE word formation processes.

### III METHODOLOGY

The study was designed as a content analysis of the comment sections from the YouTube videos featuring SLE, particularly focusing on spoken content from influencers. The sample was chosen through judgmental approach where the researcher's knowledge of SLE and morphology is used to select YouTube channels. The identified words were qualitatively analyzed to classify the morphological processes (compounding, borrowing, clipping, and affixation) and subsequently, quantitative analysis were applied to determine the most productive word formation processes through their frequency of usage. The chosen sample consists of thirty words from the comment sections of two YouTube channels (LET'EM COOK and ChrisnCrysBlissed), which were chosen for their relevance to the authentic portrayal of contemporary SLE and high audience engagement. The sample size was adequate and

feasible to represent the morphological features within a variety of English. The existing classification of morphological processes by [5] provided a theoretical yardstick to analyze, categorize, and interpret the collected data. More particularly, this research presents compounding, borrowings, clippings and affixation [5] as four major morphological processes found in the SLE on YouTube comments. The content was carefully analyzed to identify the words that represent features of SLE and categorized according to the relevant morphological processes. The existing classification of morphological processes by [6] provided a theoretical yardstick to analyze, categorize, and interpret the collected data. More particularly, this research presents compounding, borrowings, clippings and affixation [6] as four major morphological processes found in the SLE on YouTube comments. This categorization allows for the examination of the dynamic nature of SLE used in this specific digital platform and its morphological impact on SLE within this context.

### IV RESULTS AND EVALUATION

When the research findings were analyzed, compounding can be identified as the most productive morphological processes, which involves the combination of two words, both English or one English and the other Sinhala or Tamil. Compounds (57% of the overall sample) have dominated the morphological processes on YouTube, being the most productive and frequently used morphological process as shown in Fig. 1. Most of them are endocentric in which the meaning is derived from the head, and highly compositional compounds in which the meaning is easily derived from its components. Some compounds are indicative of the socio-political and geographical context; 'Kandy situation', and 'Pageant fever' [7]. According to the evidence provided by research, hybrid compounds mostly consist of words from Sinhala and English; 'Genuine /ja:luwə/', '/supiri/ solution', 'Mental /'prɑ:fnə/', 'Private /isko:le/', and 'Government /isko:le/' [8].

Borrowings (23% of the overall sample) are the second most productive morphological processes that integrate new words into SLE from local languages, reflecting our national and in-group identity as shown in Fig. 1. Almost all the borrowings found in the particular digital platform are directly borrowed from Sinhala /bodu radʒ:nan vahəŋse/, /dʒe:sus vahəŋse/, /sædæhəwatun/, /ʃramada:na/ [9].

Clippings involve the formation of a new word form with the same meaning as the original lexical item by lopping off a portion of a word [3] Clipping represents 13% of the overall sample indicating its moderate role in morphological processes in Sri Lankan YouTube comments as shown in Fig.1. It involves the formation of a new word form with the same meaning as the original lexical item by lopping off a portion of a word. In the digital

context, clippings are used to ease and speed up communication; ‘subs’ for ‘subliminals’, ‘insta’ for ‘instagram’, ‘Undergrad’ for ‘Undergraduate’, and ‘Epi’ for ‘Episode’ [10].

Forming unusual and unique lexical items affixation attaches English affixes to Sinhala or Tamil root words [11]. Affixation represents 7% of the overall sample indicating its minor role in morphological processes in Sri Lankan YouTube comments as shown in Fig. 1. Under this morphological process, both inflectional affixations; /lokka:s/ (possessive ‘s’) [12], and derivational affixations; /vɪsɑ:kɪən/ (suffix ‘ian’) [8] could be uncovered on YouTube comments.

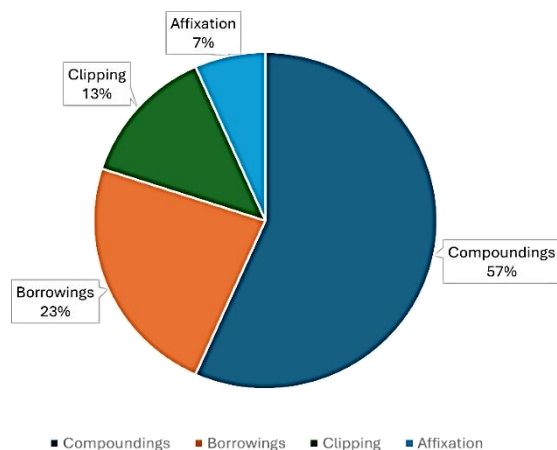


Fig. 1. Analysis of word formation processes in Sri Lankan YouTube comments

Compounding accommodates the largest number of entries in SLE while borrowing stands as the second-largest entry. Clippings and affixation respectively accommodate fewer entries in SLE. Thus, the results of the research denote that compounding and borrowing are predominantly used in Sri Lankan YouTube comments, while clippings and affixations are used infrequently.

## V CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study exemplifies some of the major trends found in the SLE morphological processes on YouTube comments which are representative of the Sri Lankan online community. One key trend is the dominance of compounding and borrowings in comparison to other morphological processes such as clipping and affixation. Another trend is the significant influence of the Sinhala language to coin unique compoundings and borrowings SLE. Thus, it is evident that Sinhala as the superstrate of Sri Lanka has exerted a significant influence over these morphological processes which are recognizable on YouTube comments.

Due to time constraints, this study has focused only on two Sri Lankan YouTube channels resulting in an insufficient sample size for statistical measurements to

fully represent the variety of morphological processes as they appear on Sri Lankan YouTube comments. Thus, future studies can expand the sample into a broader range of YouTube channels to improve generalizability and to codify the SLE vocabulary which is rapidly growing with the influence of digital platforms like YouTube.

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