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Exploring the Present Perfect Aspect in Acrolectal Sri Lankan English Using Written Corpus Data.

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Background: Sri Lankan English (SLE) has been described as a semi-autonomous variety of English, characterised by variety-specific structural features. Unlike many other studies based on learner English data, the present study uses a standard corpus which provides acrolectal SLE data for empirical studies.

Objective: The objectives of the present study were to explore the uses of the present perfect tense in SLE using the International Corpus of English -Sri Lanka (ICE-SL) and to investigate whether variety-specific tendencies are found.

Methods: The study employed a corpus-based methodology, in which the 400,000-word written component of the ICE-SL, compiled at the University of Colombo, was analysed using the concordancer AntConc. Version 4.3.1. Auxiliaries used in the present perfect tense were used as search words, and the first two past participles of the verbs were used as the Right collocates. Eight uses of the present perfect tense, as identified in pedagogical models based on reference grammars, were analysed qualitatively by manually reading the concordance lines to determine their applications.

Results: The predominant use of the tense in the data set was 'to describe a past action with present relevance', which accounted for 643 instances (43.6%) out of the 1474 analysed concordance lines. This was followed by 'recently completed actions', and 'experiential past', which accounted for 17.7% and 16.1% instances respectively. There were also instances of the use of the tense in occasions where simple past and past perfect tenses would be more appropriate, albeit as low-frequency phenomena (less than 1%).

Conclusion: The study suggests that the main uses of the present perfect tense in standard written SLE comply with pedagogical models based on native language varieties of English. Nevertheless, the occurrence of variety-specific uses may be attributed to SLE bilinguals' transfer from their first languages, shedding light on structural features of SLE.

Keywords: Corpus, Present Perfect, Sri Lankan English.