

Systemic Functional Linguistic Approach to Language Policy-Problems in Sri Lanka: *From Colonialism to Post-war Reconciliation*

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Abstract: There is a vast body of literature on Language Policy (LP) produced during the last six decades in the newly independent countries from colonial subjugation. Language policy as an umbrella term penetrates several other areas. The present study has been confined to the problems of language status planning in Sri Lanka. This research was conducted to scrutinise LP-relevant problems in the light of Systemic Functional Linguistic (SFL) theory and give a fresh insight into the existing problems based on the SFL approach for Sri Lankan LP ecology. The study is mostly a qualitative study that hardly utilises quantitative data. Apart from the secondary data sources, in-depth interviews were used as an interactive data collection instrument. Almost all the analyses are thematic apart from very few other types of analyses such as content analysis. Among the significant findings of this study, suppression of vernaculars during the colonial language status planning efforts and building up the feeling of superiority and inferiority based on language status planning are identified. This situation has further been established by pitching it to growthism and classism. The present study has also recognised bundles of LP-relevant real-world problems that occurred due to LP adoptions in and around LP practices. At the macro level, the lack of human, financial and material resources, violation of official language policy, the poor language proficiency of public officers, the gap between policies and implementation, lack of official language policy awareness, and legislative and machinery issues were identified. Among the other major problems, polarising linguistic communities, marginalising tiny language communities, lack of language skills of public officers, lack of officers to implement the LP, insufficient training given to the public service, lack of physical resources, resourcing LP implementing bodies poorly, and receiving public service merely in majority's language in some places are influential findings. Several rank scales and system networks of the LP practices within the new model have been introduced to better reflect the problems systemically with some other exploratory tools. Significantly, the present study has yielded a new model which is called *Cyclical Functional Model* for LP in Sri Lanka. The researcher has given an entirely new insight into Sri Lankan LP ecology based on SFL. The applicable possibility that was introduced by M. A. K. Halliday to expand the SFL theory as a holistic model was the justification of this theoretical expansion. The researcher has also been able to demonstrate a causal relationship among the factors/entities from socio-political background to immediate factors involved in language policy-making, and from the language policy itself to the current social problems. The current study further concludes that the country started with some critical monolingual language policy discourse, and has moved to a fertile situation where the languages are considered as resources in principle in its orientation, nonetheless still they appear as written policies that are yet to seek practical realisations to stabilise this language ecology of the country.

Keywords: Language policy, language status planning, language policy problems, systemic functional linguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a vast body of literature on Language Policy (LP) during the last six decades in the newly independent countries from colonial subjugation. Language policy or language planning itself penetrates several other areas as an umbrella term. The present study has been confined to the problems of language status planning in Sri Lanka. We have mainly taken into account 'system' for this analysis, and a few other Systemic Functional Linguistic concepts. 'System' is used to locate the LP problems and it has allowed us to systematise the available LP problems in a better way. As the new SFL model introduced in this research is primarily a problem-solving approach, this systemic understanding and pitching are substantial. We have introduced three system networks in this analysis in a formal manner while using 'probability' to assess the LP problems. In other words, the probability is used as an assessment tool within the overall approach. Also, the new rank scale is used in the process of problem-solving. Rank scale is also used in this study to locate LP problems to understand them under different ranks. Then only, can identify the gravity of problems, and the nature of the solutions that they seek.

2. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The main objective is to scrutinise and explore the language policy-relevant problems that occurred in Sri Lanka at two levels: macro and micro while providing fresh insight to tackle the problems by taking the past experiences as resources to come up with a sustainable solution in the light of Systemic Functional Linguistic theory.

Research Questions

1. What are the language status planning-relevant macro and micro-level problems experienced in Sri Lanka?
2. What theoretical concepts can be employed out of SFL theory and how they can be further expanded to address the LP-relevant problem in the given sample?
3. How can the SFL theory be used to recognise, eradicate or mitigate LP-relevant problems in Sri Lanka?

3. METHODOLOGY

Philosophically this work falls into post-positivism while the type of research is an inductive mixed method. The research strategy is partially ethnographic as raw data was collected from the natural environment. As the data collection was done at one point in time, the time horizon is cross-sectional. The sampling strategy is purposeful sampling; specifically, criterion sampling. The type of data used in the study is mainly qualitative and hardly quantitative. Data collection methods are structured interviews and specified secondary sources while thematic and content analyses were used as the data analytical methods.

4. THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) is one of the two leading linguistic traditions in the world; formal and functional linguistics. SFL is an approach to language, mainly developed by M. A. K. Halliday and his followers during the 1960s in the United Kingdom and later in Australia. It was built based on the previous works of two influential linguists, namely; Bronislaw Malinowski and J. R. Firth. We adopt the SFL approach to recognise, analyse and locate the problems and to propose possible solutions to solve the relevant problems in this study. Fundamentally, this approach is a function-oriented method that has three dimensions: ideational, interpersonal, and textual metafunctions. M.A.K. Halliday, the proponent of SFL, has not given a detailed explanation of the possibility of applying SFL to the research of LP. Still, his concerns have appeared in some studies by opening up new applicable potential. He has given some essential explanations on language policy and planning (LPP) since 1975 in his article, "Aspects of socio-linguistic research".

Halliday aimed at transforming SFL into a general theory that is applicable to socio-linguistics while considering many topics, including language policy and planning under socio-linguistics. We have used this possibility to apply SFL concepts in the current study.

5. DISCUSSION

A. Probability and Problems

Probability has been identified as an inherent feature of language by Halliday, and it is a quantitative property of the system of language or registrial systems. More specifically, in the systemic sense, it is a distillation of the frequencies in the text (Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam, 2010: 163-164). In the context of LP, particularly in language status planning, the application of this concept has become extra-linguistic. As probability has several directions in language policy, especially in the language proper, such as choice of vocabulary and choice of grammar, we have happened to become specific in our application. As the present effort is to apply this theory, the system above the language proper, probability in all areas such as language practice, language ideology, and language management are not equally helpful. Therefore, we take the probability in the general sense of SFL as how likely it is to be based on its scale; possible, probable, and certain (Thompson, 2014: 70) to place the LP-relevant problems in SFL theories. For the present work, probability in language management and probability in language practice are relevant as language policy problems come under those two domains.

Probability is used here to figure out the problems from the viewpoint of language managers, or in other words, those who are responsible for solving LP-relevant problems. Language managers can use probability to assess the

problems based on their scale. Also, in answer to the identified problems, their success or failure can be measured based on the probability scale. Probability cannot be used in the sense of the application of textual metafunction in this context. Still, our effort is to use it metaphorically as a new application or as an extension of SFL applications from language proper to language-relevant other areas. For this purpose, Matthiessen, Teruya, & Lam’s definition of ‘probability’ can be amended as a distillation of the frequencies of occurrences of language-relevant issues, and this is absolutely extra-linguistic. It means that the “causes of language probability are all in nature extra-linguistic, most of which are, in fact, social” (Yang & Wang, 2017: 85). ‘Probability’ can also be used to understand the occurrence of LP-relevant problems once the policies are implemented. In this case, ‘probability’ is proposed to be used as a monitoring tool to identify and scale the problems. All kinds of suggested applications of probability in LP can be put in a nutshell; probability as an assessment tool of LP. Specifically, the degree of probability can be used for this purpose.

When probability is used as an assessment tool in LP environments, the ideal application is Halliday’s paradigm which shows the probability organized as a system of three values. This can be done by putting it into a table view;

Table 1: Probability in LP Problems (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 620)¹

Value	Probability	Problems of LP Adoptions
High	Certain	-
Median	Probable	-
Low	Possible	-

Probability can further be amalgamated with the ‘polarity’ to use it correctly as an assessment tool. In order to implement an ideal language policy in a country by avoiding or at least minimizing issues, there must be a way of pre and post-assessment. Notably, for the post-assessment, ‘probability’ is a valuable tool. This tool can practically be applied to the LP environment of Sri Lanka. The most recent LP proposals in Sri Lanka have suggested a trilingual policy, and the expected responses for this policy after implementation can be assessed by using the probability table given above. Let us see how it works practically by taking the responses of the target language communities into consideration from the point of view of expected problems. If we assume that the majority language community will highly resist the new policy. Then, the assessment tool will realise as follows;

Table 2: Application of Probability in LP Assessments

Polarity	Positive	Value	Probability	Response	Remarks
		High	Certain	√	
		Median	Probable		
	Low	Possible			
Negative	0	0	0		

Sometimes, there may not be any negative responses that create a problematic environment, or else there will be resisting responses. The resistance itself will remain at different scales as shown above; high, median, or low. The monolingual policy provision enacted in 1956 in Sri Lanka was a situation where there was very high resistance from the minority language community in the country, but the response of the majority for the Tamil Language Special Provisions Act that came out subsequently received median value resistance from the majority and, in that case, the probability was not certain but probable. Thus, the whole LP landscape of the country from the perspective of problem occurrence can be assessed by using probability as an assessment tool. This new tool can be used anywhere for the same purpose as a universal tool apart from this immediate context.

¹ This table is not the exact one presented by the authors, and we have adapted it into the present work based on the original contribution.

B. System and Problems

System' is a founding concept in SFL analysis, and it is indeed applied in the language proper. But, the present effort is to extend this application into extra-linguistic environments. In other words, this is going to be applied to language-related other issues. Before starting this analysis, it is worthwhile to quote the ground-breaking decision made by Halliday at the beginning of the SFL theory, which has allowed us to use 'system' as a key concern in language-relevant analyses today, including extra-linguistic efforts. That was the decision to change the balance in the model between paradigmatic and syntagmatic relations in favour of paradigmatic relations by taking the descriptive priority, and also the decision to allow systems to consist of semantic features with associated formal realization statements rather than formal options with associated semantic characterizations (Bache, 2013: 72). If this change would not have been made, the traditional structural linguistic norms have no permission to go for this kind of analyses. The concept of 'system' is used here to locate the current LP-relevant macro-level problems found in Sri Lanka in this research. The first effort is to pitch them into simple system networks. These system networks are drawn based on ideological issues, language management issues, and the issues of language practice. All these are firmly linked with the language status planning in Sri Lanka. Also, the system networks start with the macro-level with some entry conditions, and when they are split into delicate problems, they show the issues at the micro-level or more delicate level. It conveys that the system networks are the illustration of both macro and micro-level problems. System networks are drawn from ideological issues to other issues of LP practices and management. It is also required to emphasize that there are more possibilities to extend these system networks by splitting the problems into more delicate levels, but we believe that they need to be done in a separate study that focuses merely on LP problems and system networks.

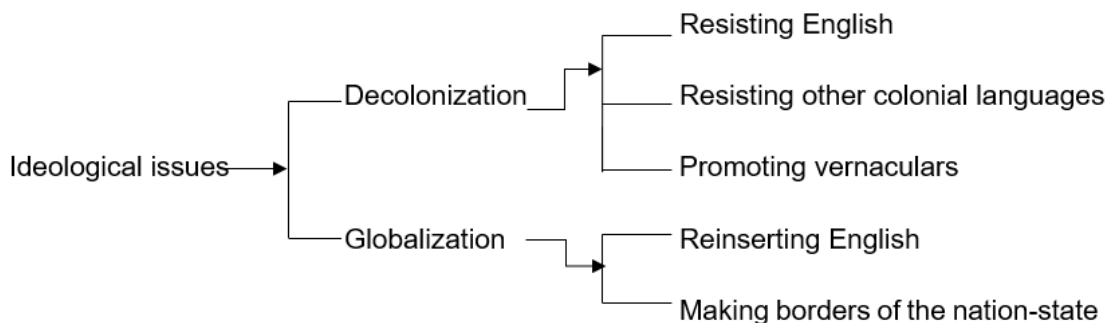


Figure 1: System Network of Ideological LP Issues

The ideological issues of the LP in Sri Lanka as illustrated in *Figure 7 system network* have come into the arena after colonization, and it has become a major political bubble-gum from there onwards. The rise of nationalism and the sub-branches of nationalism, such as linguistic nationalism, Buddhist nationalism, Sinhala nationalism, and Tamil nationalism, have come into frontage as ideological arrivals dominantly after colonization. Apparently, ideological issues are not LP-relevant problems, but indeed, ideological issues have created problems among language communities due to different prioritizations of languages. Putting these problems into system networks helps figure out the problem better and understand their delicacy for decision-makers. For instance, two different directions of ideological issues; globalization and decolonization have produced more delicate problems. In the context of decolonization, the prime focus was to eradicate colonial characters from the state, and we can observe more delicate problems appearing at the micro-level in that phenomenon itself. Therefore, the system networks in LP problems help us to see the similarity between delicacy and micro-level. Someone might wonder why decolonization has been identified as a problem in LP. In fact, it is an answer to colonisation, but in the process of decolonization, problems have occurred when giving official status to the languages. In the process of decolonization, language has become a key symbol, and priorities have been provided for vernaculars while letting dominant communities be in the upfront. Making Sinhala only the official language and accepting Tamil as an official language while even no mentioning small minorities are all implications of this issue that we can further put into system networks. On the other hand, globalization which is illustrated in the system network has made efforts to reinsert English into the previous state and create borders for the nation-state. These also have formed a problematic environment in the whole language landscape of the country.

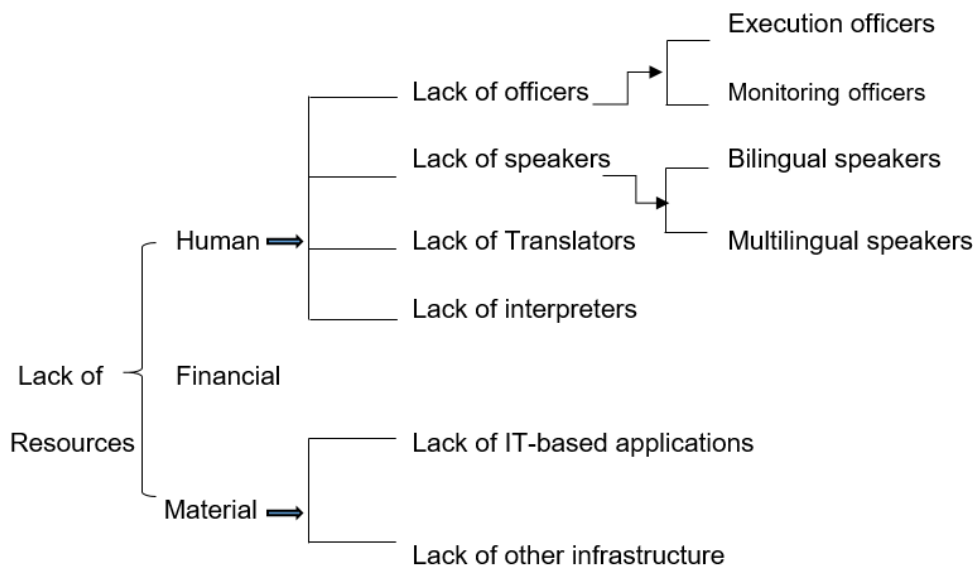


Figure 2: System Network of Resources Lack Identification

This kind of system network is helpful for language managers, including the political authority, to start addressing problems in two ways; they can undertake a top-bottom approach or a bottom-up approach to solve the problems without just throwing ad-hoc solutions while losing focus. Depending upon the financial capacity, they can make the principal decision first whether they approach top to bottom or vice versa. If the financial allocation is not sufficient to go for a complete shift, more delicate problems can be addressed separately, but based on their importance. Once the issue is pitched into a system network, the probability of missing some issues can be minimized while allowing authorities to come up with concrete and coherent plans. The system networks have not been expanded into further micro-level, but the possibility is still there. We have identified an issue in this system network that we need further clarification on; the lack of resources in the above system network has three entry conditions, namely, human, financial, and material, but both human and material resources can also be considered as lack of financial resources. The delicacy of problems shows the actual LP-relevant problems experienced by the language communities in a problematic environment.

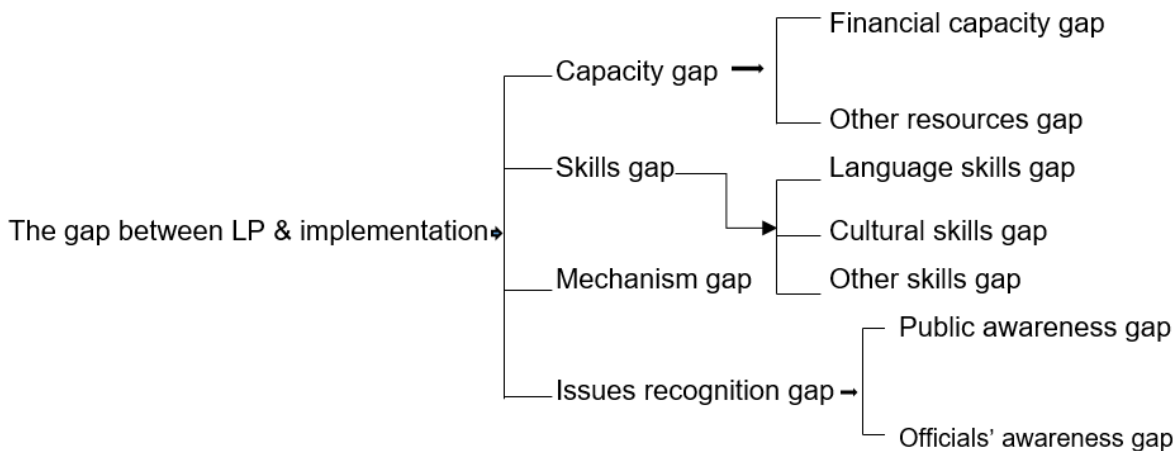


Figure 3: System Network of the Gap between LP & LP Implementation

System network:3 is more comprehensive than *system network:2*. We can see similar features between these two system networks, but it is important to understand the problems of LP without entangling overlapped problems. This system network has focused on the gap between language policies and their implementation. This is the dominant issue in the LP in Sri Lanka, which has mushroomed the problem. As most academics have identified, Sri Lanka has an ideal legal framework for LPs mainly enacted through the constitution. The responsible officers of the Official Language Department revealed that the Canadian LP practice is the model followed by them to create the Sri Lankan

model, and as they further stressed, Sri Lanka's legal background is far ahead of the Canadian model by now (Abeykoon, 2018). However, the problem is the execution of these LPs. The country has not been able to put into action the legal provisions of LP due to several reasons such as the capacity gap, skills gap, mechanism gap, and the gap in recognising issues. The capacity gap is already illustrated in the previous system network. Apart from the capacity and skills gap, the country does not have a proper mechanism to deliver the services of LP. Everybody says that the LP is not executed properly in the country, but most people cannot rationalise why it is. This system network allows us to understand why it is. The recognition of issues of LP itself appears as a problem. As we realized through the interviews, there are two entry conditions in this; the officers' inability to figure out the problem accurately and the public's inability. As we have already mentioned, the system networks are essential to better figure out the problems systematically and address them adequately by starting from a viable point with the available capacity and resources. Fundamentally, a 'system network' helps to make decisions regarding LP-relevant problems.

C. How to Use the Proposed Rank Scale to Mitigate Future Issues

The problems can always be eliminated or at least mitigated by having a systematic approach to understand, figure out, and address them. The newly developed rank scale to approach language policy in this study is not systematic, but a systemic one that proposes a comprehensive model ultimately linked to the overall solutions in this study. The below-mentioned rank scale was used to place the language policies and frameworks in the historical investigation of this study, and, in this part, this is used to locate LP-relevant problems and come up with systemic and coherent solutions for LP-related problems.

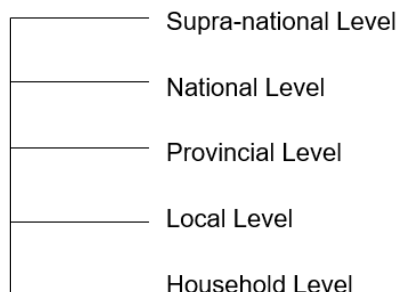


Figure 4: Newly Proposed Basic Rank Scale

This is the basic rank scale proposed for this study. The purpose of this sub-topic is to introduce the way of using this basic rank scale to solve or mitigate LP-relevant problems. The highest rank in this rank scale is the 'supra-national level,' which is perhaps operated beyond the geographical boundaries of the country. The ideological issues of LP can be placed at this rank. The role of the supranational level is very important in the dichotomy of globalization and decolonization. Most of the national level, or the highest rank in our model before forming nation-states, are interlinked or superseded by the supra-national level rank. Globalization itself has become a reason to create this level above the national level. Globalization, which considers how far it can be said to be a new phenomenon brings us into a post-national period where supranational and transnational structures have started to replace the national (Wright, 2004: 157). The national level has not purely been replaced by the supra-national level by now, but obviously, some functions have been replaced. In this context, understanding the relationship between different ranks is very important. The SFL concept of 'taxis' can be used to define and understand this relationship. The degree of interdependency is known as 'taxis', and there are two different taxis in SFL literature based on degrees of interdependency. That is 'parataxis' (equal status) and 'hypotaxis' (unequal status). In more lay terms, 'parataxis' is the linking of elements in equal status, and hypotaxis deals with the binding elements of the unequal status (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2004: 374-384). This interdependency and level of responsibility at each rank are the key determinants of this rank scale. Without understanding these key determinants, this rank scale cannot correctly be used to solve existing LP problems.

First, the problems can be pitched into different ranks. As has already been mentioned, ideological problems can be placed at the top rank, as they have a lot to do with the supra-national level. Both domains of ideological issues (decolonization & globalization) have supra-national level influences so that they can be placed at this level while all kinds of resources lack placing at the national level. As was identified earlier, losing the direction of post-independence LPs is also a recognized problem in Sri Lanka, which is at the national level, but it has some elements at the supra-national level too. Therefore, this can be considered a hypotaxis as this is a linking element of unequal status. Lack

of state commitment to eradicate LP issues, the failure to put legal provisions of LP into action, and weak legislation power assigned to some governmental bodies (such as the Official Language Commission) who work with LP implementation are also at the national level. Problems that are experienced at the provincial level and local level may almost be similar. But, the reason to have two different ranks as local and provincial in the Sri Lankan context is to align with the political-institutional structure of the country. This was helpful in placing the different policy adoptions at different levels though it is not that helpful in this analysis. The implications of the threat to minority languages, ignorance of minority language status, marginalization of minorities using the language functions, not attempting to understand or figure out LP problems properly by officers, violation of OLP, etc. prevail at this level (provincial and local). The most delicate and immediate problems can be placed at the household level. The day-to-day difficulties of not receiving government services and even private business in their own native language and the very micro-level conflicts that emerged in the families due to official language matters (issues occurred when mother and father represent different language communities, etc.) can be placed at the bottom of this rank scale model. They have further realized as frustration, mistrust, and discrimination at this level. The disappointment or mistrust towards the members of the same family or the mistrust or frustration towards the state that represents the national level can be taken into account in this regard. As these micro-level problems also have linking elements of unequal status, they also can be included in hypotaxis. These kinds of dependencies and interlinks (parataxis and hypotaxis) must be explored before using this rank scale to have better results of using in LP contexts.

Once these problems are identified with their ranks, they are beneficial in two ways for language managers (or decision-makers). First and foremost, problem categorization and understanding their level of impact in this way is the first step in solving problems. On the other hand, they are helping to plan new LPs, including ideological planning, since this model works in the whole SFL model as a cyclical process.

D. Possible Solutions based on SFL

As they appeared in the above discussion, the problems of LP are associated with two directions; one is the problems that emerged as the consequences of the LP adoptions from time to time with different motives, and the other is LP-relevant problems which are not direct consequences of different kind of LP adoptions, but they are also LP relevant problems such as lack of resources, the gap between legal provisions and their executions, etc. The solutions for the existing LP problems in Sri Lanka from the standpoint of SFL are obvious by now as we have already unpacked them step by step using SFL theories. They have been unpacked from different angles up to now by employing the SFL perspective.

E. The Role of SFL in Solving LP-Relevant Problems

The ultimate goal of the intervention in a problematic environment is to solve the existing and expected problems. For this purpose, problem identification is the first step. We have proposed several ways to identify problems and analyse the same. In that, the nature of problems, and the level of impact by understanding whether they are at a macro-level or micro-level are prominent. Therefore, they have already been explored in previous analyses. In a systemic environment, understanding the nature of problems, whether they are ad-hoc or evolved for years is primarily important for proposing solutions. The overall approach in this study which is to intervene in LP problems has used three major SFL theories; rank scale, system, and probability are those three theorems. Rank scale played a vital role in understanding the impact of problems and the level of involvement required, while the system helped to systematize the existing problems in system networks. Then, the entry conditions of the problems and their paradigmatic relations were able to be revealed. Assessment is an inherent part of a full-fledged problem-solving approach. Therefore, probability plays the role of an assessment tool to do the pre and post-assessment, particularly with reference to LP problems.

The LP adoptions, implementations, monitoring to see the responses, and reassessment of the policies are a cyclical process. Therefore, having a strong and sound problem-solving approach for a country to solve their LP-relevant problems is essential. If one step is weak in action or paralyzed, the whole process will not function in a cyclical process. Also, for long-lasting and concrete solutions, there must be a full-fledged model rather than ad-hoc practices. In this sense, the role of SFL in solving LP-relevant problems fulfils the requirement of a coherent, concrete, and full-fledged model for approaching the language policy in the country, and problem-solving is one inherent part of this model that operates as a cyclical process model.

6. CONCLUSION

This article presents almost all the problems of language status planning in Sri Lanka. First, it revealed the LP-relevant problems as a universal phenomenon, which is discussed in the field with keen academic interest while placing the problems primarily at two levels based on their level of impact. As was necessarily required, the interplay between macro-level and micro-level problems was identified from different angles ideologically and practically, while presenting some ideological contradictions. The delicacy of micro-level problems was highlighted as it certainly deals with the SFL. Some unique observations such as the polarization of language communities in the country based on LP-relevant problems and the complete marginalizing of tiny language communities from the process of state functions without taking into consideration their concerns in language status planning also were made. The identification of the nature of problems in this work is substantial to predict the problems that might occur in the future while understanding their current nature. Particularly, the LP problems have evolved over the whole period alarm that they will go on continuously if the proper solutions are not given. The SFL theory, 'probability' is used as an assessment tool in tackling LP-relevant problems, and it was proposed to use both pre and post-assessments. In this SFL application, Halliday's paradigm on probability was further developed as an extended theory that could be applied to extra-linguistic matters such as LP problems. The other significant contribution of this work is introducing and applying new system networks based on SFL norms to place the LP problems, which subsequently allow authorities to make the right decisions at the right time and the correct position of the cyclical process of LP. This will also be beneficial for them not to come up with ad-hoc solutions for LP-relevant problems but to be coherent and consistent. On the other hand, these system networks have been able to rationalise the existing problems by understanding their relations. This rationalisation is a big leap to address the problems by starting from a viable point. The new rank scale model that is introduced in the theoretical framework of this study is practically put into action in this article to rank scale existing and evolved problems over the period. Thus, this article has become a prominent work, particularly concerning its contribution to the field of SFL as well as LPP.

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