Speech by the Chief Guest Dr. Vivimarie VanderPoorten Medawattegedera, PhD, Senior Lecturer and Head, Department of Language Studies, Open University of Sri Lanka at the English Day

The Management, staff and students of S. Thomas' College, Past pupils and parents, I would like to first thank you for inviting me to be here on this very special occasion of your English Day event. I am honoured to be here.

In watching the performance of your students today I see that there is much emphasis placed on creativity, on performing and speech. I would like to congratulate you on this. Making learning a language fun is extremely important. Celebrating the use of a world language and the link language of Sri Lanka's constitution is more than appropriate. I have also experienced the commendable trilingual ethos of your school and would like to congratulate you on that.

In today's world it is becoming increasingly normal to be a bilingual. Let me tell you a little story. There was once a cat and her kittens in a house. They were extremely afraid of the dog of the house who was mean to them. One day the dog was very near to their part of the house where they hid, and their lives were in danger. All at once, the mother cat started barking loudly. The dog got afraid and fled. The kittens asked her how she barked instead of meowing. Then she said, that is the importance of learning a second language . Bilingual does not mean only knowing two languages. It gives the idea of knowing more than one variety of a language even. For example we have Sri Lankan English. This does not mean wrong English with wrong grammar but our very own local flavor of the English language. When we talk to fellow Sri Lankans we do not speak British or American English but Sri Lankan English. We punctuate our speech with 'Aiyo's and Aney's and '"What are you saying ah's and say things like sambol and mallung and achcharu. We talk about funeral houses and 'at homes' and 'next door neighbours and poruwa ceremonies. These are all features of Sri Lankan English. However when we are required to interact with speakers of British or American English or other international speakers we will have to modify our speech and speak more like them in order that communication takes place without a problem. This is what we call linguistic repertoires.

Linguistic repertoire is defined as the totality of linguistic varieties used in different social contexts by a particular community of speakers. It refers to the set of distinguishable code varieties from which the speakers of certain speech community can choose to be used, in certain social context of speaking. Therefore it is very important for us to remember that our target is not only to learn English, but types of Englishes, and not only to learn types of Englishes, which of course is vital, but also to be fluent in our mother tongue as well as the second national language, be that Sinhalese or Tamil. What we mean by a linguistic repertoire is this range of languages which we can mix and switch from one to another in the course of one speech event or conversation. The ability to mix language is a characteristic of a fluent bilingual. Therefore I would imagine that it is equally important to celebrate Sinhala Language day and also Tamil Language day. Trilingualism is going to be one of the greatest assets young people can possess in this day and these times.

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