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Web: <http://conf.kln.ac.lk/iprc2019>

E-Mail: iprc@kln.ac.lk

Telephone: +94112903952

Faculty of Graduate Studies

University of Kelaniya

Sri Lanka



The Influence of Sinhalese Dative Case suffix /-tə/ in Learning Tamil as a Second Language in Sri Lanka: A Case Study

Sujiththa Srikantharajah¹

Sri Lanka is a multi-lingual and multi-ethnic society. Sinhalese and Tamil Languages are regarded as national languages by the two major linguistics communities: Sinhalese and Tamils. Teaching of Second National Language in secondary school curriculum was introduced by the Sri Lankan Government as compulsory subject in grades 6 to 9 and as an optional subject in grades 10 to 11 also it is taught as compulsory and optional unit in some universities of Sri Lanka which is also one important way to promote national unity in Sri Lanka. The role of First Language [L1] has been recognized as major linguistic activity in Second language [L2] learning. Particularly due to the interference of L1, learners of L2 find it difficult at the initial stage of learning the Language. Furthermore, when constructing sentences the learners have the tendency to translate literally following the syntactic rules of their L1. The aim of this study is to identify the influence of Sinhalese dative case suffix /-tə/ in learning Tamil as a second Language. when the attention is focused on learning case inflection in Tamil by Sinhalese native speakers as a beginner in the first year at the Department of Linguistics, University of Kelaniya, it has been observed that the learners faced certain difficulties to structure and comprehend the sentences with case inflected nouns due to the multiple usage of dative case marker /-tə/ in their L1. The comparative analysis of Sinhalese and Tamil Language says that, the Sinhalese dative case suffix /-tə/ is equal to /-kku/ in Tamil. Therefore the students who are studying Tamil as a second Language are interfered with this grammatical aspect. When the suffix /-tə/ occurs in Sinhalese sentences, they try to translate it by applying the suffix /-kku-/ in Tamil without considering the multiple usage of /-tə/. According to this research, influence of Sinhalese dative case suffix /-tə/ had been identified on the following L2 cases: Instrumental, Accusative, ablative case with the Significance meaning of motion from (an animate object) and locative case with the Significance meaning of on the person of (animate). This study is intended only for the spoken variety of Tamil and Sinhalese. The Tamil data represent the Jaffna Tamil and the Sinhalese data represent the western dialect of Sinhalese. Research sample of this study limited to 30 students at beginner level of Department of Linguistics, University of Kelaniya. The data was collected by reviewing the questionnaire, analyzing the students' performance and classroom observation were also done in order to gather data. In conclusion, the knowledge of contrastive features of case inflection of the two languages and identifies the interference of First Language are very essential for effective learning and teaching a Second Language.

Keywords: Dative case, First Language, Interference, Second Language, Sinhalese Language, Tamil

¹ Department of Linguistics & English, University of Jaffna, Sri Lanka, Sugithasrikantharajah@gmail.com