

# Learning difficulties encountered in learning German as a Foreign Language at the universities in Sri Lanka

Malpathika Danansooriya  
Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Kelaniya.

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## ABSTRACT

Learning a foreign language is a difficult task when compared with the acquisition of the first language. When acquiring a foreign language, the learner is confronted with an entirely new language which is not used in everyday life as opposed to a second language, i.e. English in Sri Lanka, which is spoken, heard and used in daily life. Thus learners of a foreign language encounter many linguistic and cultural differences which they are not familiar with as they are not familiar with the native speakers or their culture and lifestyle..

There are many opportunities offered at several Sri Lankan universities to study a foreign language including French, German, Japanese, Korean, Chinese, Russian, Spanish and Hindi. At present University of Kelaniya offers the most number of foreign languages. Among these languages, German has shown much demand over the last two decades. Thus this paper focuses on difficulties faced by learners German as a foreign language with a sample of over 200 students at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels at University of Kelaniya.

The initial difficulties encountered by beginners of the language are numerous. However, there are several linguistic and cultural issues that pose many a difficulty to advanced students, too. Thus the study examined the phonetic, phonological, morphological, syntactic, semantic and pragmatic challenges faced by students by way of teacher interviews, questionnaire reviews, student performance analysis and classroom observation during a period of two academic years.

Phonetic and phonological difficulties, commonly known as pronunciation difficulties, emerge with some sounds of the foreign language which do not occur in the first language. Word formation, sentence structure, meaning of words and pragmatic aspects that include the knowledge of culture and lifestyle are some of the other issues faced by the students. This study focuses on common areas of difficulty for a larger number of students as found out during the data gathering and analysis.

This study was conducted with an aim to find out what type areas are more complex for the students than the others at different levels of language competency and to minimise the said difficulties. Thus the learners as well as teachers of German as a foreign language in Sri Lanka would have an insight into common areas of difficulty faces by students of German that need more attention when designing lessons at beginner, intermediate and advanced levels.

**Key words:** Foreign language teaching, German as a foreign language, learner difficulties, language, culture and lifestyle