

SINHALESE AND ENGLISH PHONETIC FEATURES

A Contrastive Study of the Sinhalese and English Phonetic Features

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The main objective of this paper is to study the phonetic features of the Sinhalese language in comparison with that of English; the role and characteristic of each phoneme in both languages will be analysed in terms of place of articulation, manner of articulation and voice; in order to identify the similar and dissimilar phonemic features characterized in these two languages, the description of each speech sound has been supplemented by appropriate examples. It is admitted that these phonemic classifications cannot be properly distinguished unless the speech sounds concerned are analysed with great accuracy and care; hence an attempt has been made to ascertain the characteristics of the two sound systems as accurate as possible.

The transliteration form used in this study in giving examples pertaining to Sinhalese is in accordance with the usual practice in the transcription of Indian languages, and in the case of English examples transliteration form adopted is mostly in accordance with the International phonetic alphabet. The use of (ɾ) for the alveolar flap, (y) for the palatal semi-vowel and (v) for the labio-dental semi-vowel are a few exceptions.

Although the two systems do not differ very much as far as the superficial inventories are concerned, there are certain contrasts in the point of articulation, manner of articulation and voice etc. Sinhalese language has thirty eight phonemes consisting of thirty one consonant sounds and seven vowel sounds; on the other hand English has thirty seven phonemes, consisting of twenty three consonant sounds and fourteen vowel sounds. In this chapter we shall begin our analysis with an examination of consonant sounds in both languages; in order to identify each of these sounds in terms of place and manner of articulation. Sinhalese and English consonantal phonemes are presented below in two separate tables. A peculiar feature in the table depicting Sinhalese consonants has been the inclusion of aspirates along with non-aspirates; such aspirates do normally occur only in written Sinhalese whereas in the spoken Sinhalese aspirates are either not emphasised or not used at all.¹

1. It should be mentioned here that in our phonetical analysis of the Sinhalese language we have not differentiated between written and spoken language; even in the table all the consonant sounds relevant to both registers have been indiscriminately used.