

## Difficulties encountered by Sinhala native speakers in learning French as a foreign language: Aspects of negation in Sinhala and French

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French is among premier foreign languages taught in Sri Lanka for decades. In this context it is imperative to analyse the difficulties faced by learners of French. Phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and semantics are the main linguistic areas that pose difficulties to students mainly due to contrastive aspects between the mother tongue and the foreign language and interference from the mother tongue. Due to the vastness of the areas of difficulty, this paper will mainly focus on aspects of negation.

This paper aims to analyse the contrastive aspects of negation in French and Sinhala as this can be identified as one major area of difficulty in grasping French as a foreign language by Sinhala native speakers. Furthermore, it will help to determine the interference from mother tongue or from the second language (English) in learning French. This study is based on data available from a sample of over 300 monolingual and bilingual students of French as a foreign language in Sri Lanka. Various problems encountered by them in acquiring the negation in French and the same samples can be used in order to understand their learning difficulties.

Different morpho-syntactic elements are used to express the negation in Sinhala and French. Certain differences are visible in written and spoken varieties of French. The position of particles in an utterance denoting negation follows a more rigid pattern in written French than in the spoken variety. The students are faced with the difficulty of understanding the different nuances of negation, both semantic and pragmatic. Spoken Sinhala (SS) differs vastly from written form and the particles signalling negation are more freely used in a sentence according to the context / person. Thus the Sinhala native speakers face interference from both Written Sinhala and Spoken Sinhala when learning French as a foreign language. Furthermore, bilingual learners face interference from both Sinhala and English in learning French as a foreign language.

Therefore this study presented in this paper focuses on identifying the comparative and contrastive aspects of negation in French and Sinhala which will lead to a new area of discussion to analyse the difficulties encountered by Sri Lankan Sinhala speakers acquiring French as a foreign language.

**Key Words:** French as a foreign language, Sinhala native speakers, contrastive studies, negation, Sinhala

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