

## Negative interference of Sinhala language in learning English as a second language

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English is a gift of colonialism for Sri Lanka. In 1796, the British East India Company annexed the Maritime Provinces, and English became the only official language. Since then teaching English as a Second Language prevailed in Sri Lanka. Though Sinhala became the only official language of Sri Lanka in 1956 due to the official language act, English was used continuously for many international as well as national purposes. With education reforms in 1997, teaching English as a Second Language received a prominent place and was introduced in grade 1 in government schools.

With nearly fourteen years of experience in teaching English as a second language for the first year students in the Faculty of Commerce and Management of University of Kelaniya, and also studying the students' performance in "English for Business Communication End of the Year Exams (2005, 2006)" the researcher observed, that the majority of the students' first language is Sinhala, and they do not have a satisfactory knowledge in pronunciation and grammar in English.

So, the purpose of the research was to identify the students' errors and investigate the sources of error. The data was collected by analyzing the performance in written and speech assignments of the first year students of the Faculty of Commerce and Management (2008) whose first language is Sinhala. A questionnaire was also given in order to have a combined qualitative and quantitative analysis. Here the "Standard Sri Lankan English" was kept as the bench mark in the process of error analysis.

In conclusion, students' errors were described as phonological and grammatical errors and thereby investigated that a considerable amount of students' errors were due to the negative interference of Sinhala language or in other words the interlingual transfer. This paper focuses on investigating appropriate teaching methodology, revising the syllabus and the teaching material in order to enhance learning English as a Second Language of university undergraduates.

**Key words:** Post colonialism, English as a second language, Sinhala as the first language, Interlingual transfer, Standard Sri Lankan English

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