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Paper: Transformability

Analysis of common English errors found in the writing of the first year students at Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology

Sri Lanka Institute of Information Technology is a degree awarding institute. The majority of the first year undergraduates are Sinhalese, reading for degrees in Information Technology/Information Systems and Business Management. On admission, an English aptitude test is administered: this has revealed that the first year students English fluency is mediocre. Subsequently, they were grouped into three classes according to their marks.

It is mandatory for all these undergraduates to follow the module called “Communication Skills 1 and 2” throughout the first year as their medium of instruction is English. All three groups follow the same text book while the lecturers pitch the material at the appropriate level. When marking written classroom assignments and the examination papers we identified some errors, repeatedly common to all three groups. Furthermore, fellow lecturers from other disciplines informed us of common language errors.

All these factors prompted this study to be carried out at a systematic level. Therefore, end of semester papers and in-class assignments were taken as the sample of the research while questionnaires and informal interviews were employed as the methodology. As the scrutinizing process progressed, a pattern surfaced in the aftermath of in-depth analysis. The most dominant root cause of the errors was first language interference. Most of the learners exhibited a tendency to transfer the rules of their first language; in this case Sinhalese (L1), to express themselves in English (L2). Consequently, they produce erroneous structures deviating from the acceptable standards of English. Additionally, we identified several morphological errors as well. Thus this paper intends to identify and analyze such recurrent error patterns and their root causes. The findings of this research would be helpful in designing remedial measures to minimize the frequency of errors in future.