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Acquisition of Grammatical Competence in English
by Sri Lankan Second Language Learners

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Abstract

This study is placed in the context of *Natural Order Studies* and examines common errors committed by learners of English as a second language, with the intention of proving that these errors represent the evolving grammatical system of the language.

The author shares the view of scholars who believe that a natural order exists in the acquisition of grammatical features of a language and assumes that errors common to learners of a language belonging to a similar level of proficiency are in fact markers of a common order of acquisition and expects the mother tongue to play an important role in the acquisition of a second language.

In order to test the hypotheses of the study, samples of students' writing were divided into three categories based on their level of proficiency and subjected to error analyses with the objective of identifying common errors for a number of grammatical features, within a group. The notion of *Suppliance in Obligatory Context* was used to score and rank order

grammatical features. The accuracy order that was obtained was compared across the three groups to examine whether progression along the *Interlanguage Continuum* was evident. An effort was made to determine the percentage of errors due to interference from the mother tongue and to examine the role of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the second language.

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This investigation demonstrates the manner in which competence in a second language is acquired and discusses the role of the mother tongue in the acquisition of the second language. There is strong evidence for a natural order of acquisition and the study highlights the nature of acquisition of two subsystems of the language, i. e. the grammatical system and the lexical system and their implication for future research. The results constitute a basis for formulating measures for effective organization of instructional material based on the natural order of acquisition of grammatical features and demonstrate the central importance of the lexical system in communication.