

M.A. THESIS IN LINGUISTICS

**CORE VOCABULARY OF
THE SINHALESE LANGUAGE
SPOKEN BY PRESCHOOL-AGE
CHILDREN IN A SRI LANKAN
PRESCHOOL SETTING**

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Abstract

In the absence of spoken communication some individuals rely on Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) systems to interact with others and the world around them. One important consideration in developing an AAC system is identification of relevant vocabulary. The AAC literature discusses core vocabulary as a small corpus of words that are used at a greater frequency across individuals and settings. The characteristics of core vocabulary make it an important choice of words to be included in AAC systems. At present, there have been no studies on core vocabulary of the Sinhalese language. Core vocabulary has been established in the English language spoken in USA. This study attempted to identify core vocabulary of the Sinhalese language spoken by preschool-age children in a single preschool in Sri Lanka. Language samples were obtained from 6 children engaged in 2 different activities. Words with a commonality score of 3 or more and occurred at a frequency of 0.5 or more per 1000 words were identified as core vocabulary. The core vocabulary words were then described according to their respective word classes. Subsequently, the morphological structure of the core vocabulary was examined. Further, the two activities were compared to identify the common core vocabulary. A total of 79 core vocabulary words were identified from Activity 1 and 32 from Activity 2. Twenty six common core vocabulary words were identified. The core vocabulary accounted for a very small percentage of the total different words which is consistent with previous studies. In Sri Lanka, individuals who require AAC system utilize mostly no-tech systems such as communication boards and books with limited capacity to represent words. The identified core vocabulary words are finite in number and can be used across individuals and activities; hence, the identified core vocabulary can be easily included in the no-tech systems used in Sri Lanka. It is recommended that the identified core vocabulary be included in AAC systems for preschool-age children and be monitored for its effect on communication. Further studies will be required with a larger sample and from children of various socioeconomic, demographic settings to better understand its usability across individuals and settings.