



DISSERTATION

A CASE-STUDY OF THE FIRST LANGUAGE
INTERFERENCE IN STUDENTS' WRITING IN ENGLISH
AS A SECOND LANGUAGE

Submitted by

H.P.L.W. Shashikala

M. A. (Linguistics) / PG Diploma (TESOL) / B. A. (Arts)

(FGS/04/02/04/2011/10)



A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies, University of
Kelaniya in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of
Philosophy in Linguistics



ප්‍රවේශ අංකය:	1302
විවර ලිපිය:	

July 2014

Abstract

It is commonly known that a child or an adult learning a second language (L2) is different from a child acquiring a first language (L1). This study attempts to analyse and describe the syntactic features of L1 interference in the writing of L2 with specific reference to the interference of Sinhala in English.

The most frequent syntactic errors in the writing of fifty Sinhala speaking undergraduate learners of English are categorized under Larsen-Freeman and Long's (1991) classification of learner errors. The findings reveal that students are likely to make errors of syntax when differences exist between their L1 and L2 while the similarities have contributed to the accurate production of English. The questionnaire to the sample and interviews with L2 teachers reveal that they think in Sinhala and then transfer everything into English. Further, it is revealed that all errors cannot be attributed to L1 interference. They are a result of the false hypotheses formed concerning their L2 with the limited exposure they have had.

This study will help many L2 learners and teachers of English around the world to identify frequent interference errors in writing and to develop strategies to overcome them. Also, L2 learners should be encouraged to create hypotheses concerning L2 and test them constantly. Importantly, L2 should be introduced together with one's L1 to avoid interference and comparative studies of the syntax of Sinhala and English should be encouraged at school level. This will enable students to gain a deep understanding of possible negative L1 transfer. In addition, studies can be carried out to seek the kinds of influence caused by Sinhala phonology, morphology and semantics on L2 acquisition.

Keywords: *First language, Second language, Language transfer, Acquisition, and Interference*