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Errors Related to the Incorrect Capitalization in Second Language Learning

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The language teachers experience various errors of the students who are learning English as a second language. This research unfolds one of those common errors. The second language learners (L2) of Sri Lankan school face the common problem of using the correct capitalization in written context. The problem is noticeable among the students who are learning in primary and secondary stages. Moreover, it is conspicuous in their day-to-day written documents and even in the exam papers. The aim of this research is to analyze the incorrect usage of capitalization among Sinhala speaking ESL learners who live in their bilingual background. The study group of fifty ESL learners in Grade seven at the age of twelve have been used as the sample. The sample has been closely observed through a diagnosis test, which had four questions; rearranging words to make sentences, re-writing a paragraph, free writing of the given topic and the picture based writing. The data was analyzed considering two aspects: frequency and accuracy. Further a wide variety of capitalization errors of ESL students have been found in their answer scripts. It is evident that sentences of English language starts with capital letters while the Sinhala sentences do not. In addition, some specific words start with capital letters. At first glance, the rule of English capitalization seems simple but there are plenty of special cases and exceptions. The findings reveal that the influence of mother tongue for ESL learners is so strong. According to the analysis, the ignorance and the unawareness can be considered as other factors. In addition, ESL learners are prone to neglect the importance of the rules of capitalization.

Key words: Capitalization, Diagnostic Test, Errors, Influence, Unawareness