

## **Syntactic Difficulties Encountered by Sinhala Native Speakers in Learning German as a Foreign Language**

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When the attention is focused on learning German as a Foreign Language as a beginner in the first year at University of Kelaniya it has been observed that the learners who do not have any knowledge in German before the university entrance find it difficult to comprehend the syntactic patterns in German language. Particularly due to the influence of the mother tongue Sinhala, in which the syntactic pattern is different, the students find it confusing at the initial stage of learning the language. Furthermore, when constructing sentences, the students have the tendency to translate word by word following the syntactic rules of their first language. The word order in declarative sentences the verb should be in the second position in German. Second position does not mean the second word. It means the second element in a sentence. However, the majority of the students merely count words when they make sentences and thus construct grammatically incorrect structures. As the data collecting methods researcher analysed the answers written by the students in their written work including continuous assessments, class tests and end of course examinations. Furthermore, face to face interviews with the lecturers in German, questionnaire reviews, student performance analysis and classroom observation were also done in order to gather data. This study focuses on common areas of syntactic difficulty for a larger number of students at beginner level. In conclusion, the study helped to find out the common errors done by the students in learning syntactic patterns and develop teaching strategies that can minimize the number of difficulties encountered by the first year students in learning the syntactic patterns. Research sample of this study limited to 50 students at beginner level, University of Kelaniya, interviews with five teachers at other institutions revealed that the difficulties encountered in grasping the syntactic patterns are common among the learners. Thus, it is envisaged through this study that the learners as well as teachers of German as a Foreign Language in Sri Lanka will have an insight into areas of difficulty in syntax faced by students of German that need more attention when designing lessons at beginner level.

**Keywords:** Syntactic difficulty, German, Sinhala, Native Speakers, Foreign Language

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