Word Formations in Spoken Sinhala and Sri Lankan Sign Language: A Comparative Study

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Sign language is primarily used by individuals who are deaf or hard of hearing. It consists of hand gestures, facial expressions, and body movements that convey linguistic units such as phonemes, morphemes, and syntax. Sign languages are as complex as spoken languages. The primary objective of this research is to analyse the morphological structure of spoken Sinhala and Sri Lankan sign language. To achieve this, the study utilises primary data derived from the sign dictionary published in 2012 by the Sri Lanka Central Federation of the Deaf - Seeduwa main branch, which contains a comprehensive list of 500 signs organised alphabetically. In addition, discussions with members of the deaf community have been conducted to gather first-hand information and recorded discussions involving ten individuals fluent in standard spoken Sinhala have been employed to establish the corresponding spoken forms for the signs. Secondary data sources, including relevant books, dissertations and magazines, have been consulted to supplement the analysis. The research problem of this study is to identify and compare the specific similarities and disparities in the patterns of word formation between Sri Lankan sign language and Spoken Sinhala language. By examining the order in which morphemes change during word formation, this study aims to identify the unique parameters and patterns in Sri Lankan sign language that deviate from spoken Sinhala morpheme order. Furthermore, this research explores the diverse usage of sign parameters in Sri Lankan sign language, which contribute to the creation of signs with distinct meanings. By comparing the word formation patterns between Sri Lankan sign language and spoken Sinhala, this study aims to provide a comprehensive comparative analysis and draw meaningful conclusions regarding the similarities and disparities between these two languages. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of the morphological aspects of both spoken Sinhala and Sri Lankan sign language, shedding light on the unique characteristics and parameters of sign language. Additionally, the study will provide valuable insights into the word formation patterns of Sri Lankan sign language, facilitating improved communication and linguistic research within the deaf community.

Keywords: Linguistics, Morpheme, sign language, Spoken Sinhala, Word formations