

Present Tense in Jaffna Tamil and Sinhala: A Contrastive Study

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While Tamil and Sinhala are the major linguistic groups in SriLanka society, they belong to the Dravidian and Indo-Aryan language families respectively. Contrastive studies in linguistics, particularly in the areas of morphology and syntax in grammatical studies, are of importance. While morphology consists of both noun and verb morphology, the latter is the focus of this study. Verb morphology expresses the internal structure of the verbs, with tenses playing a main role. Although tenses express the time distinctions in all languages through verb forms, the structures of verbs differ from language to language. Morphologically there are three different tenses in Jaffna Tamil, the present tense, the past tense, and the future tense. The perfect tense and progressive forms are mostly found in Literary Tamil. Jaffna spoken Tamil does not have a one to one correlation with different tenses. The present tense is often used instead of the future tense in spoken Tamil. In spoken Sinhala there are two main tenses, the past and the non-past. The non-past tense includes present and future tenses. There are also perfect, progressive, past and present emphatic forms. The Tamil data represent the researcher's own dialect, the Jaffna spoken Tamil, and the Sinhala data represent standard Spoken Sinhala. The main objective of this paper is to highlight the similarities and the dissimilarities of the past tense in the spoken form of these two languages. This study employs contrastive and descriptive methodology.

Key words: present tense, Tamil, Sinhala, morphology, verb morphology