

Sinhala and French Word Phonology: A Contrastive Study



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Abstract

Globalization, demographic trends and developing economy have enlarged the role of foreign languages in Sri Lanka. More and more students learn foreign languages at school and at university level. In this context, French language has become one of the most popular foreign languages taught in the island. Many students consider that pronunciation is the most difficult aspect of French language learning. New phonemes, unstressed letters, liaison and *enchainement* render pronunciation difficult for learners (Fouché 1959). For the teaching process to be effective, teachers need to view pronunciation as an essential part of language teaching. It is believed that better understanding of Sinhala and French phonological systems will facilitate French language acquisition. Due to differences between written and spoken Sinhala, the study will only focus on Colloquial Sinhala spoken around Colombo and its northern suburbs. Since there is no significant difference between the two varieties in French, the standard language used in metropolitan France will be analyzed. This study attempts to identify errors encountered by Sinhala learners of French. The study was carried out on thirty participants who were, by the time of the study, studying at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. They were selected using purposive sampling method from three different language proficiency levels; namely basic, independent and proficiency level. Battery operated audio tape recorder and a 120-minute blank cassettes were used for recording. Beginners and advanced learners encountered difficulties with nasal vowels such as \tilde{e} , \tilde{o} , \tilde{a} . The consonants /ʀ/ and /ɲ/ identified as most difficult phonemes for learners. It was also revealed that initial and final clusters were difficult for learners of all levels. This study will also suggest some pedagogical implications that will help French teachers in Sri Lanka.

Key words: Sinhala, French, word phonology, errors, language acquisition