Socio-Cultural Aspects of Language; Perspective on Learning and Teaching Processes of Sinhala Language as a Second or Foreign Language

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There is an inseparable interrelationship between language and culture because any language reflects the socio-cultural factors such as traditions, lifestyles, way of thinking, social norms and beliefs of a speech community. In the context of language learning, acquiring a sound knowledge of the socio-cultural background of the native speakers is essential to understand the language and use it effectively. Most language learners think that grammatical competence and a lexicon alone can give them the skills to communicate real life situations but the reality is that without learning the unwritten rules governed by the social norms of the speech community of the language expected to be learnt, they will not acquire the language efficiency. Thus, it is essential to integrate the socio-cultural aspects into the language teaching as well as into the learning processes. The objective of this paper is to examine the importance of socio-cultural aspects in learning and teaching a language as a second or foreign language focusing on Sinhala language. The data are collected from literary sources, observations and discussions on teaching and learning activities of Sinhala language. The findings of this study are the following; linguistic competence alone is not sufficient for language learners to be proficient in the targeted language because they cannot accurately master the language until they have also mastered the socio-cultural contexts in which the language occurs. Thus, on one hand the language learners have to gain a sound knowledge of degrees of respect, aspects of distance, formal and informal communication, customs, traditions and way of life of native

speakers and on the other, the teachers have to teach the same to learners. If not, the language learners will master the grammatical rules perfectly, but will be unable to use them in effective communication. Accordingly, socio-cultural aspects are very important in learning and teaching processes of a second or foreign language.

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