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PAPER

### **Common Errors in English Essays of the Undergraduates of the University of Kelaniya: A Case Study**

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Learning a language as in any other learning process involves making errors. Analyzing these errors done by language learners is a part of applied linguistics research related to L2 (Second Language) learning processes. Researchers are interested in these errors as they are considered to have invaluable information relating to strategies used by learners to acquire a language. Therefore, analyzing and identifying types of recurrent errors is important.

This study attempts to investigate the most common errors in essays written in English by students whose first language (L1) is Sinhala. This is also aimed at identifying reasons for these errors and providing suggestions to minimise the problems. The target population was the first year undergraduates who are offering English as a second language for their BA (General) Degree at the University of Kelaniya. A sample of written essays was collected from fifty randomly selected students who are in the first academic year of their degree programme. These students were provided with the topic 'My University life' and were asked to write approximately 200 to 250 words. They were instructed to write this as an in-class activity during the first week after the commencement of the first semester and were given sufficient time to write.

The results of the analysis show that four most common errors were: tenses, word order, prepositions and subject-verb agreement. It was identified that in composing these essays, students have been greatly influenced by their L1. Further, This study suggests that teachers must emphasize on how certain concepts are handled in English and make them aware of the differences in structure of English and L1. The findings of the study are important for ELTU lecturers when designing the curriculum for first years.