

An Examination on Difficulties of Understanding
Sinhala Counting System
When Japanese Students Learn Sinhalese as the Second Language

Dilini Ariyawansa

Assistant Lecturer, Department of Sinhala, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka
dilini1@yahoo.com

As second language learning happens after first language acquisition, impact of the first language can be identified in the process of second language learning. When both languages have same patterns, learners can acquire the new language without difficulties. According to word order typology, Sinhala and Japanese have same sentence structures. Though there are many similarities between two languages, slight differences can be identified in some situations. Those differences may mislead the second language learner and the counting system is that kind of point. Thus, it should be examined how these problems can be minimized. Though Sinhala and Japanese counting systems are same in structure, there are some exceptions. When Japanese students learn Sinhala, they are trying to count according to Japanese system. For an example, 'jū' is 'ten' and 'yon' is 'four' in Japanese. 'Jūyon' is the word for 'fourteen'. Though 'dahaya' is 'ten' and 'hathərə' is 'four' in Sinhalese, 'dahahathərə' is the word for 'fourteen', not 'dahayəhathərə'. After understanding that Sinhala counting system is parallel to their own counting system, Japanese students tried to make words such as 'vissækə', 'thihədekə' and 'panəhahathərə'. On the other hand, 'vissə' becomes 'visi', 'thihə' becomes 'this' while 'hətə' does not change the form when combined with other numbers. As there is not a certain pattern, it is difficult for second language learners to keep each point in mind. This problem has been observed by examining these kinds of mistakes done by Japanese students who learn Sinhala as a second language. This research demonstrates that the attention should be paid to difficulties of language learners when teaching a particular language as a second language. Firstly, difficulties should be identified. This is a qualitative research and data will be collected from language teachers and learners. The ultimate goal of this research is to introduce techniques to overcome the difficulties of understanding Sinhala counting system when Japanese students learn Sinhalese as the second language.

Key Words: Japanese Counting System, Language Typology, Second Language Teaching, Sinhala Counting System