

An Analysis of Common Errors in the Use of The Sinhala Language (Based on First-Year Students at Rajarata University of Sri Lanka)

Ven. O. Chandasiri and Ven. G. Vipula

Department of Language Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka.
gvipula260@gmail.com

1. Introduction

The concept of language error analysis has been utilized in language teaching since around the 1960s. It is particularly applicable in teaching the academic writing of languages with diglossia, where it can be used under the high variety of those languages. Language errors can be identified as errors of competence and errors of performance. Errors of competence refer to general conditions of errors. Errors of performance are easily self-corrected. Because it is not possible to identify the errors within a single academic document, both competence errors and performance errors tend to be considered equal in value within the academic writing. Despite having a general awareness of the Sinhala language by students accustomed to academic writing after receiving school education and coming to the university level, this knowledge itself appears to be weak. Under this situation, there is a deficiency in systematic research conducted on language error analysis related to Sinhala academic writing. In a paper titled "Characteristics of slang in Modern Sinhala" by Ratnasiri Arangala (2009), the errors of several university lecturers and writers are explained. However, it does not encompass the language errors of contemporary university students. Various analyses of language errors are presented in newspapers and guidelines regarding correct usage. These are isolated explanations aimed at establishing Sinhala written language capability. They are neither macro nor micro. Moreover, there is a lack of attention to the causes in these error analyses. Although Wimal G. Balagalle (1996) has indicated several causes of language errors in the study of language and Sinhala usage, they do not cover all aspects of language error analysis. Therefore, there is a research space to analyze the current form of Sinhala writing usage comprehensively and meticulously, to analyze the reasons for the frequent occurrence of errors, and to investigate steps to avoid those errors.

The main objective is to identify what language errors students who have learned Sinhala for an extended period make. Additionally, identifying the reasons for common errors in language usage and developing strategies to create students who exhibit accurate language capability are secondary objectives. It is frequently observed that students currently learning in universities struggle to use correct Sinhala proficiently. Solutions proposed include that accurate writing should be taught in universities, while there are also assertions that the university's role is not to teach accurate writing. Advocates for the latter opinion argue that teaching correct writing is a school responsibility. However, it appears that this responsibility is not being adequately fulfilled at the school level. Accordingly, students often err in language usage. This situation is also evident in job placements. Hence, it is essential to identify the language errors frequently committed by students and the underlying reasons for those errors. Also, it is crucial to investigate what actions can be taken to equip students to engage in accurate writing.

2. Materials and Methods

This study focuses on first-year students enrolled in the general Sinhala course, a compulsory subject at the faculty of social sciences and humanities of the Sri Lanka Rajarata University. It randomly selects fifty students from this group. Their language issues reported in WhatsApp groups and their language capability are measured through specially tailored questions in a questionnaire. Responses they provided and language errors from their assignments were collected, examining individual language components. Data were collected in various ways, including offering different questions on each language component, posing a question that

measures all language components with one query, and creating questions to promote long-term engagement with such queries. Thus, qualitative and quantitative data were employed.

This research employs content analysis under qualitative research methods. Language error analysis for teaching scholarly writing under a high variety of Sinhala language utilizes the framework introduced by S. P. Corder (1967) and developed by J. Abbot (1980). Accordingly, errors were categorized as omission, addition, selection and ordering. The identified omission and addition errors were subjected to frequency analysis using Google applications. Errors related to the four categories mentioned were examined through specific questions aimed at gauging language capability. A questionnaire reviewing all language errors and related issues concerning copy editing was also used to analyze expression-related errors. The effective use of both competence and performance could be assessed through questions that allow for long-term engagement.

3. Results and Discussion

Common errors of Sinhala languages made by students include issues related to letter usage, orthography, word formation, word division, word order, sentence formation, semantic, the use of compatible words, and punctuation. Some students do not know the correct representations of letters such as "ආ," "ආආ," "ආ," "ආ," "ආ," "ආ." Regarding orthography, they frequently misplace /a:di/, /a:di:n/, /dhuraya/, /karthru/. Many students show weaknesses concerning the use of /ya/ ending words. It appears they interpret /mu:lashraya/ as a singular word and /m:lasra/ as plural. Additionally, they display confusion regarding the use of the suffixes /-wath/ and /-math/. Due to the presence of free sentence structures, they mistakenly order words in an unstructured manner. Incorrect placement of adjectives is often observed. Under the use of compatible words, phrases like /suba pæthum/ and /suba aluth awuruddak/ are commonly misused. During festive seasons, many students inquire about the correct usage of words such as /suba/Shubha/. Regarding punctuation, common mistakes can be seen in the use of semi colon and in the use of full stops. In teaching and assessment processes, while students provide successful responses to individual questions, it appears they frequently commit language errors when measured through collective questions. Thus, although they learn what they have been taught, they tend to err in practical usage. It is, therefore, confirmed that conducting assessments and practicing the use of language in a practical manner is essential.

4. Conclusion

Despite students having learned formal writing in Sinhala for a long time, there are many weaknesses in the language competence of Sinhala written language. These errors can be identified within areas such as letter usage, orthography, word formation, word division, word order, sentence formation, semantic, the use of compatible words, and punctuation. Each of these elements shows varying degrees of success when questioned individually. Some students respond with high success, while others are at a very weak level. Accordingly, some indicate frequent errors of competence, while others exhibit few errors of competence. Students who showed higher success regarding language competence errors also displayed weaknesses in questions relating to both competence and performance. Therefore, as a result of exam-based learning, they can achieve only the minimum or satisfactory level and do not develop their competence and performance due to the poorly constructed sample questions issued alongside. It becomes evident that ensuring questions relating to both competence and performance are integrated with practical language use can help reduce students' language errors significantly.

5. Keywords

Common errors, Formal writing, Language usage, Sinhala Language

6. References

- Abbott, G. (1980). Towards a more rigorous analysis of foreign language errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 121-134. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1980.18.1-4.121>
- Arangala, R. (2009). "Nuthana Sinhalaye Apabhasha Lakshana", Sasthriya Sangrahaya (ed.) M. Abjayathissa at all. The Oriental Studies Society of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 67-92.
- Balagalle W. G. (1996). *Bhasha Adhyayanaya ha Sinhala Vyavaharaya*, Colombo: S. Godage Publishers.
- Corder, S. P. (1967). The significance of learner's errors. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 161-170. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1967.5.1-4.161>
- (1971). Idiosyncratic dialects and error analysis. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 147-160. <https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.1971.9.2.147>