GRAMMAR DEFICIENCY AFFECTED BY GERMAN GRAMMATICAL GENDER AMONG SINHALESE LEARNERS OF GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

In learning German as a foreign language, the acquisition of grammatical gender poses a challenge to beginners when it comes to appearing in articles for nouns, unlike Sinhala. This study investigated the main reasons for difficulties of acquiring German grammatical gender L1 as Sinhala Students and this study insight into contrastive aspects of Sinhalese and German gender. For beginners, acquiring the grammatical gender of German has often been viewed as a problem whereas their mother language does not have a grammatical gender system. According to the analysis of collected data, it has been identified that Multilingual and bilinguals acquire this grammatical gender concept better than monolinguals. Along with that lack of understanding of German language structure and ignorant of derivational suffixes that help to identify the gender of a noun in German, is also one of the reasons for this problem. Therefore, this paper presents a set of guidelines that help Sinhalese native speakers to use German articles correctly.

Keywords: *Gender acquisition, German grammar, Grammatical gender, Natural gender, Sinhala grammar*

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Introduction

Grammatical gender is one of the most complex and fascinating linguistic categories in the German language (Hocken,1958). In a language, gender systems can be categorized as natural, grammatical gender and genderless languages. In many Indo-European languages, the names of males belong to the masculine gender and females to the feminine gender. Whether an animate-inanimate distinction is made varies with the language (Susan-1962). German nouns have a grammatical gender unlike in Sinhala or English where the three genders feminine, masculine, and neuter are logically placed as masculine and feminine for humans or animate nouns and neuter for non-humans or inanimate objects. According to Sinhala, the words used for grammatical functions gender is (*linga*). Sinhala nouns are also divided into (animate) and (inanimate). In the field of linguistics, a grammatical gender system is a specific form of noun class system natural gender. In the Sinhala language, Male human beings are almost always assigned to the masculine gender and women belong to the feminine gender. But in German, (das Mädchen) 'the girl' is neuter, as well as (das Fräulein) 'unmarried women'. When it comes to the inanimate objects, (das Handy) 'the phone' is neutral, (die Tür) the door is Feminine, (der Tisch) 'the table' is masculine.

The +/-animated and +/-human classification is therefore more important in Sinhala than the masculine/feminine and neuter classification. Living beings are first divided into +/- human, i.e., humans and animals, and then into +/- masculine" (Premawardana, 2001). German nouns always represent gender with an article. Whether Sinhala has not had a separate article to show their gender identity, they have suffixes (-*ek*) for animates and (-*ak*) for inanimates. The gender system of the German language is important in the morphology and sentence structure of the language. Unlike Sinhala, which has almost all forms of declension of adjective endings, cases and definite, indefinite articles of a noun and demonstrative pronouns changed according to the gender of the noun in German. Owing to the complexity of the gender system in German, it is challenging for learners to master this concept of an L2 as Sinhalese. Therefore, this study focused on the main reasons for the difficulties of acquiring German grammatical gender L1 as Sinhala students and then insight into contrastive aspects of Sinhalese and German gender.

Materials and Methods

The study applies a mixed method both quantitative and qualitative. Mainly interviews, questionnaires (with variable and invariable data), Tests and observation were used. The sample of this study consists of two groups, both learners and teachers from academic and school levels. Summing up to 100. All participants are Sinhala native speakers of whom some are bilinguals.

The quantitative method is used to have a wider picture of the research to find out what the picture is concerning the acquisition of the German grammatical gender and the qualitative methods are used to explore the underlying reasons behind the deficiency of acquiring the grammatical gender of the German language. Written Sinhala is considered in this study while contrasting two languages. These exploratory and confirmatory process includes not only questionnaires to quantify and conclude but also personally structured interviews to gain diversified reasoning and justification of the research problem and hypothesis.

Results and Discussion

Consistent with analysis, it has been identified that this gender of the noun in German effect the multitude of other inflections in the language. For example, the masculine definite article in the nominative case is *der*, and the feminine is *die*, but in the dative case the feminine is *der* again. Apart from the fact that if a sentence has an article and adjective in front of a noun, they are infected according to gender, is the present investigation for the confusion of the learners. And also in Sinhala, there is no article like in German which controls the meaning of the sentence. Moreover, teachers do not use interesting and effective methods to teach the gender of the noun. Also, multilinguals and bilinguals perform well on the test than monolinguals. Especially those who are learning a language that has grammatical gender. Furthermore, strong diglossia of the Sinhala language is also one of the reasons for this matter.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Deficiency in acquiring German grammatical gender is a challenge when the learner's L1 is Asian language. But within the better understanding of the language structure and memorizing a set of guidelines help Sinhalese native speakers to use German articles and gender correctly. One of the recommendations is to get as much exposure to the language as possible. In addition, practice the language by using new technology in extra time other than learning the language. Along with that watch movies, read books and

articles, listening news, write texts, practice songs and learn a new language that has grammatical gender.

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