

A comparative study of word order in English and Sinhala

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This is a comparative study which focuses on the word order in English and Sinhala, particularly at the phrase level and the clause level, analyzing separately and comparatively. The data for spoken Sinhala presented here is drawn from several native speakers. Being a non-native speaker of English, the researcher of this survey has drawn data for English from native samples.

According to Verma (1996:1), the word order refers to the order in which words appear in sentences across different languages. It can be identified in different levels such as the phrase level, the clause level and also the sentence level.

Clauses are often contrasted with phrases. Traditionally, a clause was said to have both a finite verb and its subject, whereas a phrase either contained a finite verb but not its subject (in which case, it is a verb phrase) or did not contain a finite verb. Hence, in the sentence “I did not know that the dog ran through the yard”, “that the dog ran through the yard” is a clause, as is the sentence as a whole, while “the yard”, “through the yard”, “ran through the yard” and “the dog” are all phrases. Modern linguists do not draw quite the same distinction, however, the main difference being that modern linguists accept the idea of a non-finite clause, a clause that is organized around a non-finite verb.

Clauses are generally classified as either dependent or independent. An independent clause can stand alone as a complete simple sentence, whereas a dependent clause must be

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connected to or part of another clause. The dependent clause is then described as subordinate to a main clause, or (if it is part of a larger clause) as embedded in a matrix clause.

Adverbial subordinator *because* in English being a head first language, occurs at the beginning of the subordinate clause whereas in Sinhala being a head last language, the word order within the subordinate clause is contradictory to that of in English as the postpositions *nisa:* and *hinda* (because) occur at the end of the clause. The main conclusion is that though English is considered a SVO (Subject+Verb+Object) language and Sinhala a SOV (Subject+Object+Verb) language, both share common properties. The word order of both the languages is fixed at the phrase level, whereas at the clause level there is flexibility.

Keywords: word order, SVO language, SOV language, Sinhala language