

RHODE ISLAND COLLEGE

M.Ed. In TESL Program Language Group Specific Informational Reports

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Sinhala

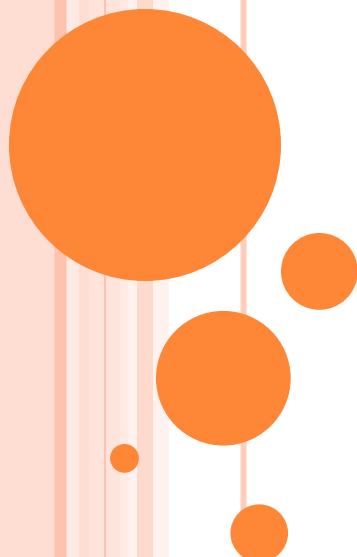
The official and national language of Sri Lanka

By:

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SINHALA

- Sinhala or Sinhalese, is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in Sri Lanka
- The mother tongue of the Sinhalese people
- The Sinhalese people make up the largest ethnic group in Sri Lanka, numbering about 15 million
- There are also considerable numbers of Sinhala speakers in Singapore, Thailand, Canada and the United Arab Emirates



SRI LANKA



(<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/>)

SOUND SYSTEM

- Sinhalese has 14 vowels sounds, seven of them are short and the other seven are long.
- Two of these vowels are unique to the language. They are represented as

“æ” and “æ:”

The Germans interpret them as a vowel change caused by the umlaut.

as in *Über*

The English interpretation is the long U sound

As in cute

Or

oo as in hoot



SOUND CONTINUES

- There are 26 consonants of which four are prenasalized stop.
- The prenasalized sounds indicated as mb, ?d, ?d, ?g do not occur in South Asian languages except in Maldivian. They are attributed either to African or Polynesian languages.
- An example of this is:
 - ɳ
 - sounds like sing or lasagna



WRITING SYSTEM

- Syllabic alphabet: the vowels and consonants are not represented as separate units like in the Roman script, but as syllabic units in which the vowel is inherent in the consonant:

For example: “K” is both “K” and “a: combined

- Direction of writing: Left to right in horizontal lines
- There are no capital letters
- The alphabetic sequence is similar to those of other Brahmic scripts:

a/ā ä/ā i/ī u/ū [r] e/ē [ai] o/ō [au] k [kh] g [g] n c [ch] j [jh] [ñ] t [ta] t̄ [t̄h] d̄ [d̄h] n̄ t̄ [th] d̄ [dh] n̄ p̄ [ph] b̄ [bh] m̄ ȳ r̄ l̄ v̄ [s̄ ſ̄] s̄ h̄ l̄ f̄

- The complete writing system, EluHodiya, consists of 54 basic characters:

This includes 18 vowel characters and 36 consonant characters.

- Only 36 characters (12 vowel and 24 consonant symbols) are required for writing spoken Sinhala.
- The Sinhala script is phonetic, in other words, everything that is written down is pronounced the way it is written.



GRAMMAR

- The English language: SVO (subject Verb Object) word order.
- The Sinhala language: SOV (Subject Object Verb) word order.
- Sinhala distinguishes three conjugation classes. Spoken Sinhala does not mark person, number or gender on the verb (literary Sinhala does)
In other words there is no Subject-Verb-agreement.
- Sinhala and German speakers both have a single native-language phoneme that is similar to English /w/ and /v/
- The auditory sensitivities of Sinhala speakers make it harder for them to discern the acoustic cues that are critical to /w/ - /v/ categorization.

GRAMMAR CONTINUES

- Sinhala is a Pro-drop language:

The subject of a sentence can be omitted when it is redundant because of the context.

Example: The sentence kohed^əgie, literally "where went", can mean "where did I/you/he/she/we... go". Also the copula "to be" is generally omitted: "I am rich" translates to maməpo:sat, literally "I rich".

- There are no prepositions, only postpositions: Example: "under the books translates to pot^əjata, literally "book under".



DIGLOSSIA

- In the Sinhala language, the literary language and spoken language differ from each other in many aspects:
 - Written language: used for literary text and formal occasions (public speeches, TV and radio news broadcast. Etc)
 - Spoken language: used for communication in everyday life.
- The most important difference between the two varieties is the lack of inflected verb forms in the spoken language
- This is comparable to one when the Portuguese language is taught to children in countries that the spoken language is Cape Verdean Creole.



DIFFICULTIES LEARNING ENGLISH

- Sinhalese is a pro-drop language, students could possibly have difficulty understanding that we are a language that is explicit and we use pronouns in our sentences.
- In English we use SVO (subject verb object) and in Sinhalese they refer to SOV (subject object verb), this can be another difficulty when writing and speaking English
 - For example in English: In Sinhalese:
I is the *subject*. I is the subject.
Like is the *verb*. English is the *object*.
English is the *object*. Like is the *verb*.
 - This could cause difficulty for any student when they are writing or speaking.



DIFFICULTIES LEARNING ENGLISH

- When teaching a Sinhalese student about prepositions, it will be important to explain that a postposition in their language is similar to a preposition, but it follows rather than precedes the object.

For example: under the book (preposition)
book under (postposition)

- In the area of written production, a Sinhalese student will have difficulty not phonetically spelling words in English. They will need explicit instruction in phonics.
- Their language is phonetic based and all words are written as they sound.



COMMUNICATION

- Saving face is paramount, so avoid outwardly criticizing people in public situations.
- Do not put people in awkward positions or under pressure.
- Sri Lankans are very non-confrontational in their communication style,
it is important to try and read between the lines. They may say one thing but mean another and it is up to the listener to work out the message.
- When communicating it's often the case that people will tell you what you want to hear in order to be polite. It's best to be patient and see what non-verbal actions follow the communication.

COMMUNICATION CONT.....

Business Situations

- Shaking hands is the most common form of greeting and hand shakes are firm.
- Older adults greet other adults by having their palms clasped with a slight bow at head and eye level.
- As with most hierarchical cultures, Sri Lankans use titles, without a title a person is referred to as Sir or Madam.
- The Sri Lankans will want to feel at ease with you and at least have a small bit of background about you before they will feel comfortable doing business or discussing business with you.
- Meetings may be interrupted by other business but this should not be interpreted as rude in any way.

RESOURCES

Internet Sites

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RESOURCES CONTINUE

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Maps

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