SINHALA AND FRENCH WORD PHONOLOGY: 
A CONTRASTIVE STUDY

Chandeera Gunawardena

Department of Modern Languages, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka
lechandeera@yahoo.fr

Globalization, demographic trends and the developing economy have enlarged the role of foreign languages in Sri Lanka. More and more students learn foreign languages at school and at university level and, it shows the enthusiasm for modern languages among the young generation. In this context, French language has become one of the most popular foreign languages taught in the island. Many students consider that pronunciation is the most difficult aspect of French language learning. New phonemes, unstressed letters, liaison and enchainement render pronunciation difficult for learners (Fouché (1959). Furthermore, pronunciation is often overlooked by teachers. For the teaching process to be effective, teachers need to view pronunciation as an essential part of language teaching. It is believed that a better understanding of Sinhala and French phonological systems will facilitate French language acquisition. Due to differences between writing and spoken Sinhala, the study will only focus on Colloquial Sinhala spoken around Colombo and its northern suburbs. Since there is no significant difference between the two varieties in French, the standard language used in metropolitan France will be analyzed. This study attempts to identify difficulties encountered by Sri Lankan learners. The current study is based on both qualitative and quantitative methods. The study was carried out on sixty participants who were, by the time of the study, studying at University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka. The participants were studying at different language acquisition levels: basic level, independent level and proficient level. Firstly, literature data was analyzed then the pronunciation difficulties were identified using a test. It was also decided to administer a questionnaire to the sixty participants. It was revealed that pronunciation is a common difficulty encountered by Sri Lankan learners of all levels. Beginners and advanced learners encountered difficulties with nasal vowels such as ē, ē, and ŋ. The consonants /r/ and /ɲ/ identified as most difficult phonemes for learners. It was also revealed that initial and final clusters pose problems for learners of all levels. This study will also suggest some pedagogical implications that will help French teachers in Sri Lanka.