

A Comparative Study of Word Order in Spoken Sinhala and English at the Clause Level

Manoj Ariyaratne¹ and Rohan Abeywickrama²

¹Department of Languages, Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, P.O Box 02, Belihuloya. manoj@sab.ac.lk

²Department of English Language Teaching, Faculty of Social Sciences and Languages, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka, P.O Box 02, Belihuloya. roh@sab.ac.lk

Abstract

This comparative study focuses on the word order in Sinhalese and in English particularly at the clause level. A clause is a word or a group of words ordinarily consisting of a subject and a predicate, although in some languages and in some types of clauses, the subject may not appear explicitly (This is especially common in null subject languages). The most basic kind of sentence consists of a single clause; more complicated sentences may contain multiple clauses. Indeed, it is possible for one clause to contain another. Though the comparative study of word order in Sinhala and English is so important in the path of understanding the universal features of two languages, hardly any research effort has so far been taken in the field of linguistics. However, a great deal of researches is found involving English word order and several European and Asian Languages but there is no such a study concerning Sinhala and English and also the importance of such a study.

In the present study the word order of both languages has been analyzed separately and compared throughout. 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 have drawn examples for English from native samples.

The findings of the study indicate that the word order within the clauses in both languages is rigid. But it is always not true in the order of clauses at the sentence level.

This study will serve to bring out the peculiarities of the two languages. Further it will show us better equipments for establishing translation rules between English and Sinhala. This comparison will definitely uplifts the knowledge in two languages and more importantly contribute to the field of translation where two languages are involved is therefore going to be of some practical use.

Key words: Comparative Study, Word Order, Spoken Sinhala, Clause Level

Introduction

This is a comparative study which focuses on the word order in Sinhalese and in English particularly at the clause level. Sinhala pronounced /~~sinhala~~/

one of the two official languages the other being Tamil and the mother tongue of the majority (about 70%) in Sri Lanka, is an Indo Aryan language spoken mainly in Sri Lanka.

According to Katre (1964), the term Indo-Aryan represents the language stream brought in by the invading Aryans towards the beginning or early half of the second millennium B.C into India.

Rathanajothi (1975) has explained the genesis of Indo-Aryan branch. The older stage of Indo-Aryan is represented by Vedic Sanskrit, which belongs to about 1500 B.C, and the classical Sanskrit beginning about the 4th Century B.C The second stage of Indo-Aryan which goes back to about the 6th century B.C is represented by Pa:li, Maha:ra:stri, Saurase:ni:, Magadi:, Ardama:gi:, Paisa:ci:, Popular Sanskrit, Apabramsa and the language of the Asoken inscription. The stage called Modern Indo-Aryan began about the 11th century A.D; it includes Hindi, Marathi, Gujarathi, Bengali and Sinhalese.

Sinhala has two main varieties: literary and spoken which differ from each other in important ways. Literary Sinhala is the language of virtually all written materials not just literature in the specific sense. It is characteristically written and read, and on those relatively rare occasions when it is heard, it is generally read aloud from a previously prepared text. Spoken Sinhala, setting aside some formal sub-varieties heard primarily in lectures and seminars, is basically the language used by everyone at all social and educational levels, for all face to face discourse and it is this colloquial variety of Sinhala that is mostly represented in the present study.

Sinhala belongs, as mentioned earlier, to the family of languages usually called Indo-Aryan, the other members of which are found primarily in the North of India and include Hindi, Bengali, Marathi, Gujarathi, Rajasthani, Panjabi, Kashmiri, Oriya and Sindhi. Another member of the family is Maldivian spoken in the Maldives islands and is closer to Sinhala than the others.

The syntactic structure of Sinhala in relation to the other Indo-Aryan languages is SOV. The subject (S) comes in the initial position, then, the object (O) and the verb (V) comes at the end position of the sentence.

Like Sinhala, English is an Indo-European language. While English can be traced back to the Germanic roots, Sinhala derives itself from Indo-Aryan branch.

Weerakoon highlights the roots of two languages as follows.

“Sinhala and English both belong to the same Indo-European language

family. Sinhala is a member of the Indo-Iranian sub-family and English a member of the Germanic sub-family” (Weerakoon, 1982).

English is the language of Britain, Ireland, North America, Australia and other countries.

According to Baugh and Cable (1993) in number of speakers as well as in its users for international communication, English is one of the most important languages of the world. Spoken by more than 370 million people as a first language in the United Kingdom, the United States, and the former British Empire, it is the largest of the occidental languages.

As far as the linguistic categories of languages in the world are concerned, English is placed under the SVO language category since its normal word order appears as subject, verb and object. As Dryer (2005) observes, English is neither verb-final nor verb-initial, since the subject precedes the verb while the object follows it. SVO languages are the second most widespread word order type among the languages of the world, more common than verb-initial; but less widespread than verb-final languages.

The word order is the arrangement of words in a phrase, clause or sentence in order to show their relationship to one another. The word order is essentially concerned with the way of distribution of words specifying which words, phrase or clause can appear in which position in a sentence.

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

“When a phrase or group of words includes a verb it is known as a clause. A clause needs to have a main verb that is the verb included should not be a verbal noun or an adjective” (Wijesingha, 2002).

Aims and Objectives of the Study

- To understand the different properties in the two languages in respect of word order at the clause level.
- To identify the similarities and differences of the two languages in respect to the word order at the clause level, thereby make efforts to minimize the problems faced by the translator or interpreter who is involved in translating or interpreting from Sinhala to English and vice versa.

Problem of the Research

Do Sinhala and English Languages constitute (dis) similarities with respect to the word order at the clause level?

Methodology

Word order of both languages at the clause level was analyzed separately and compared throughout. Primary data for Spoken Sinhala were collected in the Sabaragamuwa Province. Being a non-native speaker of English the researcher of this survey has drawn examples from native speaking analysts.

Results and Discussion

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 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.

Examples in English include the following:

- a. I went to the doctor (Independent clause)
- b. because I was ill (dependent clause)

Adverbial subordinators occur at the beginning of the subordinate clause in English, as illustrated by the adverbial subordinator because in example.

because I was tired

But in Sinhalese the word order within the subordinate clause is contradictory to that of in English as it is indicated in the following examples, in Sinhalese the postpositions /nisa:/ and hinda/ (because) occur at the end of the clause.

a.mafə mahansi nisa:
 | | |
 I-Dat tired because-Pop
 because I am tired

mafə mahansi hinda
 | | |
 I-Dat tired because-Pop
 because I am tired

So, it is clear in any language though it is with a high degree of flexibility or inflexibility, there may be some peculiarities where Sinhala and English is also a case in point.

The Comparison of the Major Clause Types in Sinhala and English

Though Sinhala is known as a SOV language, it has a number of other word order characteristics which are typical of verb final languages. According to Quirk et al., (1985) there are seven clause types in English.

<u>Type</u>	-	<u>Examples</u>
Type 1: SV	-	<p><u>Λuɾuddə</u> <u>uda:ɐnəva</u></p> <p> </p> <p>the new year- S dawn-V</p> <p>The new year dawns</p>

The structure of Type I has the following marked word order.

i. VS	<p><u>uda:ɐnəva</u> <u>Λuɾuddə</u></p> <p> </p> <p>dawn - V the new year- S</p> <p>The New Year dawn</p>
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(3) SVC She seems happy
 | | |
 S V C

Type 4: SAV - mamə gedərə innəva
 | | |
 I-S at home-A stay-V
 I stay at home

The following variations of Type 4 are commonly used in Sinhala.

i. ASV - gedərə mamə innəva
 | | |
 at home-A I-S stay-V-Pres
 I stay at home

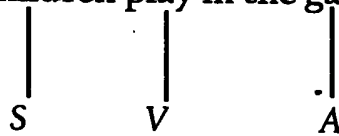
ii. VSA - innəva mamə gedərə
 | | |
 stay-V-Pres I-S at home-A
 I stay at home

iii. SVA - mamə innəva gedərə
 | | |
 I-S stay-V-Pres at home
 I stay at home

iv. AVS - gedərə innəva mamə
 | | |
 at home-A stay-V-Pres I-S
 I stay home

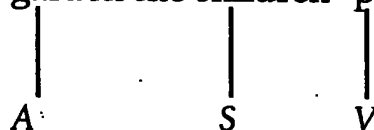
In English the unmarked word order in Type 4 is SVA.

Type (4): SVA - The children play in the garden



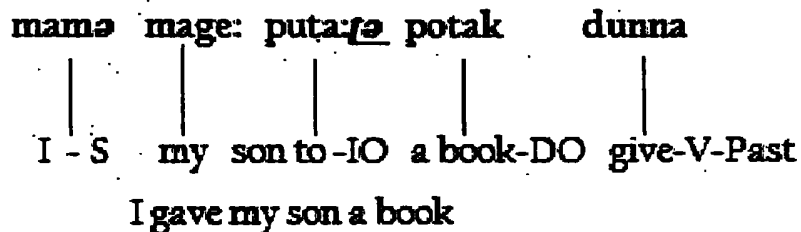
The following marked constituent order is also acceptable in English.

ASV - In the garden the children play



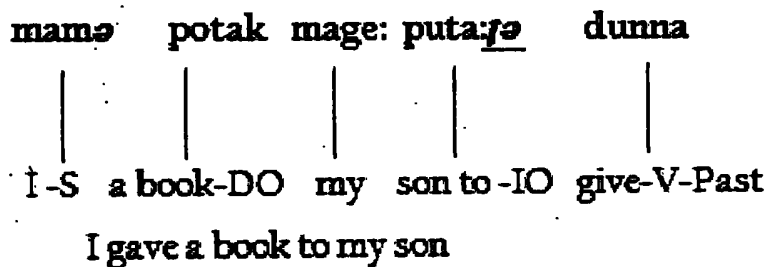
In Sinhala in clause Type 5, the indirect object is inflected whereas in English instead the preposition is used. This phenomenon is considered as a big difference between inflected and uninflected languages.

Type 5: SVOO -

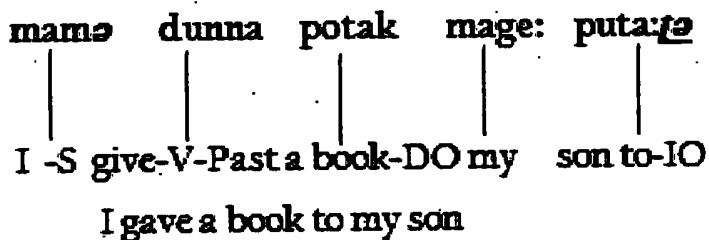


The following variations are also predominantly used in spoken Sinhala.

i. SDOIOV -



ii. SVDOIO -



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The following variation is largely in English.

SVIODO - I gave my son a book
 | | | |
 S V IO DO

Type 6: SOCV - *mamə mage: puta: dostərə-kenek kərənəva*
 | | | | |
 I-S my son-O a doctor-C will make-V
 I will make my son a doctor.

The following variations are largely used in spoken Sinhala.

i. CVSO - *dostərə-kenek kərənəva mamə mage: puta:*
 | | | | |
 a doctor-C will make-V I-S my son-O
 I will make my son a doctor

ii. OCVS - *mage: puta: dostərə-kenek kərənəva mamə*
 | | | | |
 my son-O a doctor-C will make-V I-S
 I will make my son a doctor

But the constituent order in English of Type 6 is fixed as exemplified below.

But the constituent order in English of Type 6 is fixed as exemplified below.

Type (6): SVOC - I found her very helpful
 | | | |
 S V O C

The unmarked word order of clause Type 7 in Sinhala would be as:

Type 7: SOAV - *perera hæmædeyakmæ avankeuamæ piligatta*

Perera -S	everything-O	frankly-A	admit-V-Past
Perera admitted everything frankly			

The following variations are predominantly used in spoken Sinhala.

i. OSAV0 - *hæmædeyakmæ perera avankeuamæ piligatta*

everything- O	Perera - S	frankly- A	admit- V- Past
Perera admitted everything frankly			

ii. ASOV - *avankeuamæ perera hæmædeyakmæ piligatta*

frankly- A	Perera - S	everything- O	admit- V- Past
Perera admitted everything frankly			

iii. AOSV - *avankeuamæ hæmædeyakmæ perera piligatta*

frankly-A	everything-O	Perera -S	admit-V-Past
Perera admitted everything frankly			

iv. AOVS - *avankeuamæ hæmædeyakmæ piligatta perera*

frankly-A	everything-O	admit-V-Past	Perera - S
Perera admitted everything frankly			

v. OAVS - *hæmədeyakmə avɔŋkəvəmə piligatta perera*
 | | | |
 everything-O frankly-A admit-V-Past Perera-S
 Perera admitted everything frankly

The basic word order of clause Type 7 in English would be as:

Type (7): SVOA - He took him into the hotel
 | | | |
 S V O A

The following marked word order is possible in spoken English so as the adverbial is thereby emphasized.

Type (7): ASVO - Into the hotel he took him
 | | | |
 A S V O

The nominal clause

There are five main types of nominal clauses in Sinhala namely:

- i. The interrogative sub clause
- ii. The nominal relative clause
- iii. The nominal $\hat{Y}(to)$ - infinitive clause
- iv. The participle clause
- v. The nominal equational clause

In English also there are five main types of nominal clauses namely:

- i. that clause
- ii. interrogative sub clauses
- iii. Nominal relative clause

iv. Nominal *tə*- infinitive clause

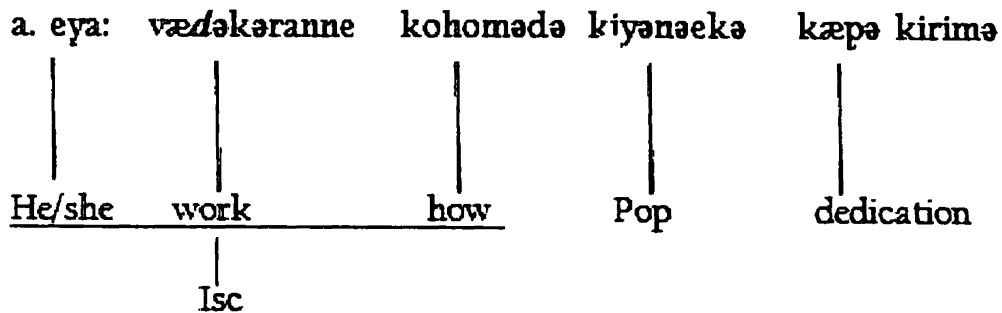
v. Nominal *ing*- clause (Leech and Jan 2004).

The syntactic function

i. The interrogative sub clause

The interrogative sub clauses are introduced by *wh*- interrogative words in both languages, including */kohomədə/* (*how*).

- *Wh* interrogative subclause as: a subject:



matə tirənəyəvenəva



How he/she works depends on dedication.

b. How he/she works depends on dedication

Nc

In nominal clauses of this kind the postposition */kiyələ/ kiyənækə/* which bears no special meaning is used in order to fulfill the meaning of the sentence. Unlike in English, in Sinhala the word order of interrogative sub clause in a sentence is flexible.

c. *kəpə kirimə matə tirənəyəvenəva eya: vədəkəranne kohomədə*

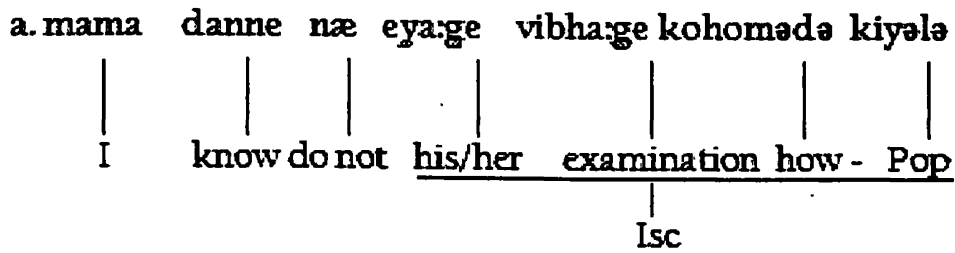


kiyənækə

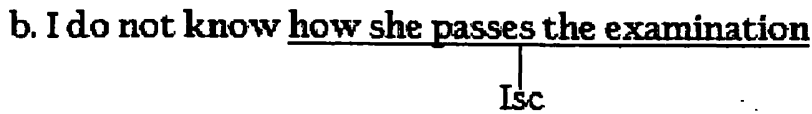


How he/she works depends on dedication

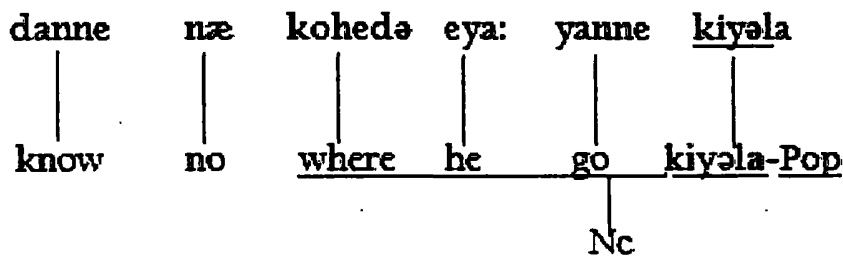
an object:



I do not know how his/her examination is.



The word order of this nominal clause in itself as well as the sentence in English is very rigid. Contradictory to nominal clause in English, in Sinhala the postposition /kiyəla/ follows the verb. However, in Spoken Sinhala for the purpose of emphasis the word order within the nominal clause and its position in the sentence can be changed.

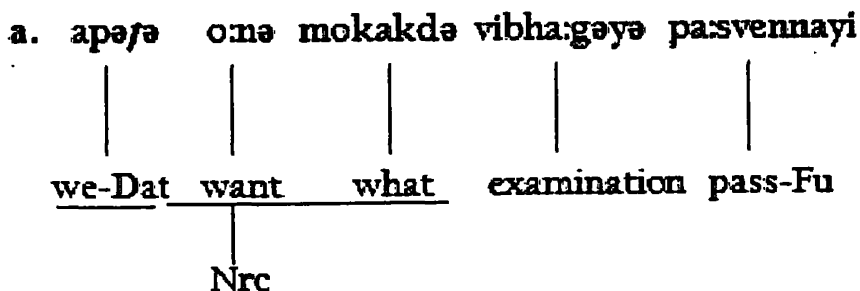


Where he is going is not known to me

The emphasis in this example lies on /danne næ/ with the change of its order in the sentence. Usage of this kind is named as the emphatic transformation (Gair, 1970).

ii. Nominal relative clause

Nominal relative clauses are also introduced by different *Wh-* words which in both languages can function as:



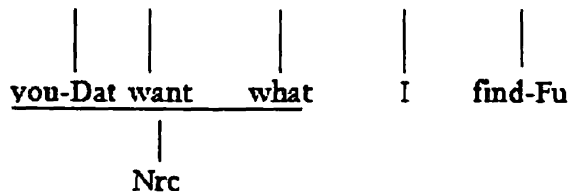
b. What we need is to pass the examination.



b. an object

Nominal relative clause occurs as an object at the initial position of the sentence.

a. oya:ʔə o:nə mokakdə mamaə hoyannaŋ

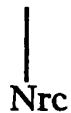


b. I will find what you need



a subject compliment

The school is where we started our education



a object compliment.

You can call me whatever name you want



iii. The nominal ʔə or də(to)- infinitive clause

Nominal ʔə or də(to)- infinitive clause can function as:

a subject

In English Ic occurs as a subject.

To go on foot is difficult



Languages , the complement occurs to the LEFT of the head and thus the DIRECTION of the government is to the LEFT”(Subbarao, 1996).

But in English being a right-branching language, the relative clauses occur to the right of their heads with a very rigid word order.

In the sentence “The man who is wearing a white shirt went home” while “who is wearing a white shirt” does the work of a relative clause and “The man” is the modified noun.

The Adverbial Clause

A clause which functions as an adverb is called adverbial clause (Richards, etal., 1985). In Sinhala it is named as / kriya: vise: sənəva: chi: aturu væki. The constituent order of an adverbial clause in both languages can be identified as follows.

(In the following Table 1 Sinhala adverbial clauses are translated into English in order to identify the similarities and differences in constituent order between them).

Table 1: Translation of Sinhala adverbial clauses in to English

Language	Examples from both languages	The constituent order
Sinhala	maʃə mahansi nisa: I-Ds tired-Adj because-Pop	Ds+Adj+Pop
English	because I am tired	Co+S+V+Adj
Sinhala	mamə gedərə yanəkoʃə I home go when	S+O+V+Pa
English	when I go home	Co+S+V+O
Sinhala	mamə kaka: innə vela:ve I am eating while	S+V+Auxv+A
English	while I was eating	Co+S+Auxv+V
Sinhala	mamə kanəva naŋ hodəʃə I eat if well	S+V+Pa+A
English	If I eat well-	Co+S+Auxv+A

The significant difference is that the word order within some of the adverbial clauses in Sinhala is free whereas that of in English is totally inflexible.

c. *eya: eliyəʃə giya pa:ŋ gediyak gannə*
 | | | | | | |
 she out go-Past-Mc bred a loaf to buy-Dc
 She went out to buy a loaf bread (Purpose)

d. She went out to buy a loaf bread (Purpose)
 | |
 Mc Dc

In both languages the order of adverbial clauses can be changed as follows.

pa:ŋ gediyak gannə eya: eliyəʃə giya
 | | | | | | |
 bred a loaf to buy-Dc she out go-Past-Mc
 To buy a loaf bread (Purpose) she went out

Concessive

The concessive adjuncts establish the contrary circumstances

b. *eya: eliyəʃə giya væssə tibunat*
 | | | | | | |
 he out go-Past-Mc raining it was although-Dc
 He went out although it was raining.

b. *væssə tibunat eya: eliyəʃə giya*
 | | | | | | |
 raining it was although-Dc he out go-past-Mc

Although it was raining he went out

Apparently, the word order of clauses functions as causal and concessive is free.

When the adjunct clauses are introduced by the temporal complimentizer 'before' (*perə/kalin*) 'when' (*vela:ve/koʃə*) and 'after' (*passe*), the word order is free since they can be adjoined on either side of the main clause.

languages, such meanings are expressed by words that occur at the end of the clause, rather than the beginning of the clause the way they do in English and most other European languages” (Dryer, 2005).

However, the noteworthy similarity is that all those complementizer, particles and postposition in both languages embody a very rigid order.

a. *poli:siyə giya:rə passe*

the police	had left	after	- Dc
after the police had left			

b. *after the police had left. -Dc*

Consequence of mixing the order of conjunctions in Sinhala with that of in English, the English learners of Sinhala tend to make mistakes like misplacing conjunctions.

Conclusions

In considering the word order in clauses in English it is obvious that within the clause the word order is very rigid which is not always true with that of in Sinhala. The changes of the order of noun clauses in sentences embody different meaning whereas the order of adverbial clauses can be changed without changing the meaning. However, in both languages the word order within the clause is rigid.

End Notes

¹“The university life (*is*) important for us because after the A/L examination we (*are*) selected to the university. It is very happy for us. Some students (*are*) very close to us. University students (*are*) important for the country. We can be the good citizen in the country. So university life (*is*) very significant in our lives.

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Abbreviations

S-Subject

V-Verb

O-Object

Adj-Adjective

Pred- Predicate

Nrc-Nominal relative clause

SVO -Subject+ Verb+ Object

SOV- Subject+ Object + Verb

VSO- Verb+ Subject+ Object

OSV-Object + Subject+ Verb

Dat-Dative case

Com-Compliment

Isc. -Interrogative sub clause

Pop-Postposition

POP-Post Positional Phrase

Auxv -Auxiliary verb

Ac-Adjectival clause

Gen-Genative case

Loc-Locative case

P-Preposition

C-Complimentizer

Co-Conjunction

Ds-Dative case

Pa-Particle

Mc-Metric clause

Dc-Dependent clause

Oc-Object Compliment

DAO-Dative object

A-Adverbial

Adv-Adverb

DO-Direct Object

IO-Indirect object

Ic-Independent clause

Fu- Future tense

Nc-Nominal clause

Partc-Particle clause

Ind-Indefinite

Transliteration

In the transcription words in Sinhala, Gandhari Unicode system which is similar to IPA with a few exceptions is used. The following symbols are used in Sinhala examples:

– Long vowel are indicated by the symbol : (as in æ:)

ə - Schwa

a - open short vowel a

o - Gutturolabials short vowel

l - Linguals or Cerabral Consonant

f - Linguals or Cerabral Consonant

æ - mid front short vowel (as in cat)

ŋ - velar nasal