CHAPTER ONE

Theoretical Framework

1.0. Preliminaries

This chapter deals with the theoretical framework of the study. It is to be noted that nearly all of the analysis of word order phenomena discussed in the present study are theory neutral since it is not intended to test the validity of any theory with reference to the authentic data used in the study. However, some theoretical assumptions have been made based on Greenberg’s word order universals in the explanations of certain issues raised in the discussion. Quirk’s detail classification of grammatical categories discussed in *A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language* (1985) is used as a model in the present study since it is comprehensive.

1.1. The Concept of ‘Word Order’

The word order is the arrangement of words in a phrase, clause or a 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.

Verma has defined the word order as:

> The word order refers to the order in which words appear in sentences across different languages. The traditional perception of word order is based on the description of syntax that is an arrangement of words in sentences (1996:1).

The dictionaries have defined syntax as follows.
(a). “Syntax is the grammatical arrangement of words in a sentence” (Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2003).

(b). “The rules of grammar which are used for ordering and connecting words in a sentence” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1978).

(c). “Rules for the arrangement of words into phrases and phrases into sentences” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2005).

(d). “Syntax is the rules about how words are arranged and connected to make phrases and sentences” (English Dictionary of Advanced learners- International student edition 2002).

(e). “The way that words and phrases are put together to form sentences in a language” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2005).

It is evident that the focus of syntax has been on the arrangement of words in sentences. According to Radford (1981:5), syntax studies how words can be combined together to form sentences, what position in the sentence a given word or phase can occupy. However, word order can be defined as the order of words in a phrase, clause or in a sentence in any language.

According to Hawkins (1983:1-3) there are three major ordering classifications language falls into; those with the heads of the sentence typically falling to the left, those with heads to the right, and those that are a mixture of these. English is a left-headed language, while Sinhala is right-headed. However, spoken Sinhala demonstrates a mixture. Although English has relatively fixed word order, some structures allow a choice. English speakers have an ordering choice in sentences with two prepositional phrases, for example, I went to the game with my sister or I went with my sister to the game. In dative sentences, there is a choice to say Give the ball to the boy or Give the boy the ball. With verb particles some flexibility is possible, Mary looked up the number versus Mary looked the number up.
The focus of this thesis is about constituents at various levels such as phrase level, clause level and sentence level in both languages. Verma notes:

Linguists have used the term ‘constituents’ to mean structural categories like NP, VP, Prep P etc, functional categories like S (subject) O (object) C (complement) A (adjunct), V (verb) or P (predicator); Semantic or case roles like, Agent, Patient and discourse constituents like Theme, Topic etc (1996: 4).

The points that should be highlighted here are:

1. All these constituents are interrelated.
2. A constituent like NP can function as a subject, object, actor, and theme.

For instance, consider the first constituent of the following sentence in Sinhala.

(1) \textit{mamə ballek mæruva}

\begin{center}
\begin{tabular}{c|c|c|}
I-S & a dog-O & kill-Past-V \\
\end{tabular}
\end{center}

I killed a dog

The word \textit{ballek/ a dog} in the above example is a NP which is the \textit{object} in terms of grammatical function, \textit{suffer} in terms of case relation or semantic role, \textit{marked theme} in terms of discourse function.

Languages in the world are classified according to the dominant sequence of these constituents of sentences. The order of these constituents varies from one language to another. In languages like English and French, this word order appears as subject, verb and object. These languages are named as SVO languages. In some other languages like Sinhala, Japanese, Pali and Sanskrit, the subject comes first, the verb falls at the end and the object appears between the subject and the
verb. These languages are called SOV languages. The structure of the word order of language like Arabic is VSO and these kinds of languages are named as VSO languages. According to Palmer (1999: 76) the SVO and SOV orders are, by far, the two most common word orders of the languages in the world.

Order of words in a sentence may vary depending upon the context and language itself. According to Palmer (1999:76), not all languages mark subject and object in the same way. In Latin, for example, the position of the subject may change without hindering the meaning. The sentence *The girl loves the boy* may be *puella puerum amat* with the girl (*puella*) is in the initial position, in the mid position as in the sentence *amat puella puerum* or in the end position *amat puerum puella*.

Since nouns in the sentence have inflectional suffixes in them, the change of the word order does not affect the meaning of the sentence. Therefore, all the above sentences in Latin have the same meaning. On the contrary, the arrangements of words in English are more or less fixed.

### 1.2. Word Order and Grammar

The word order has already been defined as the way of combination of constituents in a language; it is intended to identify the meaning of the word ‘grammar’ and its relationship with the word order. The word ‘grammar’ is defined as follows.

**a.** “The word ‘grammar’ is derived from the Greek word ‘grammatika techne’ which means the art of writing” ([http://en.wikipedia.org](http://en.wikipedia.org))\(^1\).

**b.** “The word “grammar” means the rules in a language for changing the form of words and joining them into sentences” (Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary 2005).

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\(^1\) Accessed on 23\(^{rd}\) May 2007
c. “The branch of linguistics that deals with syntax and morphology (and sometimes also deals with semantics or morphology)” wordnet.princeton.edu/perl/webwn\(^1\).

Grammar is the conventions which govern the relationships between words in any language. This includes the study of word order and changes in words, use of inflections, etc. Study of grammar is important, as it enhances both reading and writing skills; it supports effective communication. www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/secondary/keystage3/respub/mlfframework/appendices/glossary_of_terms/g_to_i/\(^2\).

According to Quirk et al.(1985:38) Grammar is a complex system, the parts of which cannot be properly explained in abstraction from the whole.

In the Wikipedia, the word grammar is defined as:

Grammar is the study of rules governing the use of language. The set of rules governing a particular language is the grammar of that language; thus, each language can be said to have its own distinct grammar. Grammar is part of the general study of language called linguistics (en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grammar\(^3\)).

According to these definitions, it is evident that grammar is a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words, phrases and clauses are combined to produce sentences in a particular language. It usually takes into account the meanings and the function of these sentences in the overall system of a language. According to Radford (1997:1), Grammar is traditionally subdivided into two different but interrelated areas of study as morphology and

\(^1\) Accessed on 23\(^{rd}\) May 2007  
\(^2\) Accessed on 25\(^{th}\) May 2007  
\(^3\) Accessed on 25th May 2007
syntax. Morphology is the study of how words are formed out of the smaller units.

According to The Wikipedia, syntax is being originated from the Greek words ‘Syn’, meaning “co” or “together” order arrangement. The word order, which comes under syntax, is concerned with the ways in which words can be combined together to form phrases, clauses and also sentences (http://en.wikipedia.org)\(^2\).

First and foremost, the word order deals with how words like nouns, verbs, adverbs, adjectives etc which comes under structural category are arranged in human languages. One of the ways in which languages in the world differ is this order of the main element in the sentences. In English, for example, the surface structure of a simple sentence is that the subject comes before the verb and the direct object follows the verb whereas in Sinhala the opposite holds true as exemplified in b.

\[
\begin{align*}
a. \quad & \text{He} & \text{eats} & \text{rice} \\
& S & V & O \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[
\begin{align*}
b. \quad & \text{eya:} & \text{baṭ} & \text{kanəva} \\
& he/she-S & rice-O & eat-V \\
\end{align*}
\]

He eats rice

It is apparent that grammar is a part and parcel of a language. However, grammar is traditionally concerned not just with the principles, which

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1 Accessed on 29\(^{th}\) May 2007
2 Accessed on 29\(^{th}\) May 2007
determine the formation of words, phrases and sentences, but also with the principles, which governs their interpretation. According to Radford (1997: 1) for example, any comprehensive grammar of English will specify that compound words like *man-eater*, the word like *man* is traditionally said to have a patient interpretation in the sense that man is the patient victim on whom the act of eating is going to be performed; by contrast in compound like *man-made*, the word man is said to have an agent interpretation, in the sense that man is the agent responsible for the act of making.

Thus, the structural aspects of meaning are traditionally said to be part of the domain of grammar. So, grammar can be identified as the study of principles, which governs the formation, and the interpretation of words.

For example, if one says;

1. **I love you more than Gamini**
   
   It has ambiguous meaning and it can be interpreted in two ways as follows.

   2. **I love you more than Gamini loves you**

   3. **I love you more than I love Gamini**

Grammars traditionally set out to tell us what we need to know about a language in order to have native speaker competence in the language. Hence, it is clear that grammar is concerned with competence rather than performance.

Noam Chomsky (1965:4) has drawn a distinction between competence (the fluent native speaker’s tacit knowledge of his language) and performance (what people actually say or understand by what someone else says on a given occasion). Competence is the speaker-hearer’s knowledge of his language, while performance is the actual use of language in a concrete situation.

According to Chomsky’s theory of grammar, (1965:16) the internal grammatical structure of words, phrases and sentences in natural
language is determined by the innate principles of universal grammar, offers the important advantage that it minimizes the burden of grammatical learning of a child.

According to Chomsky (1977: 40), grammar of language is a model of the linguistic competence of the fluent native speaker of the language. Here the word competence can be considered as a key word. Chomsky has described two types of competencies.

1. Pragmatic competence
2. Grammatical competence

Ratford has elaborated the grammatical competence as follows.

Grammatical competence is divided into three primary types of linguistic ability as syntactic, semantic and phonological. The principle syntactic ability, which forms a part of the native speaker’s grammatical competence, is the ability to combine words together to form grammatical sentences in his native language, and to know which sequences of words form grammatical or ungrammatical sentences (1981: 3).

Any native speaker of English, for example, would intuitively recognize all the examples below are grammatical.

a. He eats rice.

b. She dances well.

c. It is expensive.

But the following sentences in English are not grammatical as their order of words is not acceptable.

*d. Eats rice her

* e. Dances well she

* f. Is expensive it

* Not an acceptable sentence
This feature holds true for most of the languages in the world. Any native speaker would definitely recognize the following sentences in Sinhala, as their word order is acceptable.

**a.** kumə:ɾə pɔta kiyəːnənəva

Kumara –S the book-O reads-V-

Kumara reads the book.

**b.** kumə:ɾə kiyəːnənəva pɔta

Kumara –S reads-V- the book-O

Kumara reads the book.

**c.** pɔta kiyəːnənəva kumə:ɾə

the book-O reads-V- Kumara –S

Kumara reads the book.

However, the following deviant word order is not acceptable in Sinhala.

**d.** kiyəːnənəva pɔta kumə:ɾə

reads-V- Pres the book-O Kumara –S

Kumara reads the book.

It is marked that the word order in phrase, clause and sentences in most of the languages is interrelated with grammar of the same language.
1.3. Greenberg’s Word Order Universals

Greenberg’s seminal paper titled *Some universals of grammar with particular reference to the order of meaningful elements* (1966) is the foundation upon which all subsequent work on word order universals has built. According to Hawkins (1983:19) Greenberg using 30 language samples, sets up forty five (45) universal statements involving syntax and morphology of which twenty five (25) implicational statements involve word order.

This study is based on only the Greenberg’s universals involve word order since it provides a framework for checking the word order in a particular language and also a solid base for a comparative study of languages. Some of Greenberg’s universal statements, which are considered important in the present study, are as follows.

(2a-s) In languages with prepositions, the genitive almost always follows the governing noun.

(2b-s) In languages with postpositions, it almost always precedes.

(3) Languages with dominant VSO order are always prepositional.

(4-s) With overwhelmingly greater than chance frequency, languages with normal SOV order are prepositional.

(7) If in a language with dominant SOV order there is no alternative basic order, or only OSV as the alternative, then all adverbial modifiers of the verb likewise precede the verb. (This is the rigid sub type of SOV)

(9 a-s) With well more than chance frequency, when question particles or affixes are specified in position by reference to the sentence as whole, if initial, such elements are found in prepositional languages.
(9 b-s) If final, such elements are found in postpositional languages.

(11a) Inversion of statement order so that verb precedes subject occurs only in languages where the question word or phrase is normally initial.

(11b) Such inversion occurs in yes-no questions only if it also occurs in interrogative word questions.

(12) If a language has dominant order VSO in declarative sentences, it always puts interrogative words or phrases first in interrogative questions; if it has dominant order SOV in declarative sentences, there is never such an invariant rule.

(13) If the nominal object always precedes the verb, then verb forms subordinate to the main verb also precede it.

(16b) In languages with dominant order SOV, an inflected auxiliary always follows the main verb.

(18-s) When the descriptive adjective precedes the noun, with overwhelmingly more than chance frequency, the demonstrative and the numeral do likewise.

(20a) When any or all of the items –demonstrative, numeral, and descriptive adjective –precede the noun, they are always found in that order.

(20b) If they follow, the order is either the same or its exact opposite.
(22a) If in comparisons of superiority the only order or one of the 
alternative orders is standard-marker- adjective, then the language is 
postpositional.

(22b-s) With overwhelmingly more than chance frequency, if the only 
order is adjective-marker-standard, the language is prepositional.

(24) If the relative expression precedes the noun either as the only 
construction or as an alternative construction, either the language is 
postpositional or the adjective precedes the noun or both.

( 27a) If a language is exclusively suffixing, it is postpositional.

(27b) If it is exclusively prefixing, it is prepositional. (1966:78-109)

1.4. Summary

Conclusion would be that the word order is a topic which comes under 
gramma of a language and also grammar is the rules of a language 
which is accepted by the relevant language community.

It is widely accepted that the Greenberg’s universals are statistical in 
nature. However, the work of Greenberg has proved to be pioneering as 
it opens up a whole field of research particularly in word order of 
languages in the world. It should be highlighted that only some of his 
universal statements are used in the present study in order to analyze the 
word order in Sinhala and English.