INTRODUCTION

The goal of this study is to examine the similarities and differences in word order in Sinhala and English; therefore the research is titled as “A Contrastive Study of Word Order in Sinhala and English”.

A contrastive study is “the comparison of the linguistic systems of two languages, for example sound system or the grammatical system” (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1978).

Contrastive Analysis was developed and practice as an application of structural linguistics to language teaching and is based on the following assumptions:

a. the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language.

b. these difficulties can be predicted by contrastive analysis.

c. teaching materials can make use of contrastive analysis to reduce the effect of interference (Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English 1978).

The contrastive analysis has been applied to other areas of language like discourse analysis etc.

The contrastive analysis can be used to understand the similarities as well as the differences between the learner’s native language and the target language as well in the areas of phonology, morphology, syntax etc.

Because of the constraints of space and scope, the researcher intends to do a contrastive study of Sinhala and English at the syntactic level with reference to their word order which is one of the aspects of contrastive analysis.

Sinhala pronounced /siŋhəla/, 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 (1964:5), 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 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 Pāli, Mahārāṣṭri, Sauraseṇi, Magadi, Ardamagadi, Paisaśi, 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 (1975: 5).

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.

According to Fairbanks (1968:1) 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 (1982: 9).

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

According to Baugh (1993: 4) 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 (2005:6) 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.

Following sentence illustrates the unmarked word order (SVO) of English which is most common and can be described as the dominant order or unmarked order.
1. Sunil eats rice
\[ S \ V \ O \]

The subject Sunil in the above example comes first; the verb eats appears in the second position and the object follows the verb. This general word order can be changed depending upon the context. Emphasized sentences give examples for such instances. In example 2 below the object has been moved from its medial position to the front position changing the word order OSV.

2. Chocolate, I like

Non-normal front shifting of this kind has a function; it detaches the textual function ‘Theme’ from the subject and attaches it to the object by moving it to a marked position leading to the promotion of the affected receiver. According to Verma (1996:143) this kind of thematization is a syntactic mechanism which isolates one of the constituents or ‘roles’ as theme and brings it into some kind of focus or prominence by shifting it into the initial position. This kind of change can be called extra position in English. The sentence “I like chocolate” can be put in Sinhala as follows:

3. I like chocolate
\[ mamə-S kæmətyi-V chokələʈʋələʈə-O \]

However, in the following sentence, the object occupies the initial position for the purpose of emphasizing and it would be:

4. Chocolate, I like
\[ chokələʈʋələʈayi-O mamə-S kæmətyi-V \]
According to the Wikipedia, The Free Encyclopedia, in many languages, changes in word order occur due to topicalization or in question. However, most languages are generally assumed to have a basic word order called the unmarked word order; other marked word orders can then be used to emphasize a sentence element.

The sentence number 3 means that I like chocolate as I like other sweets but sentence number 4 stresses that I prefer chocolate to other sweets. In Sinhala particularly in this context, the particle /yi/ is suffixed as in /chokəlatableyi/ in order to emphasize the object.

More examples of OSV are being used in English for emphasis:

A: I cannot see Smith (SOV)
B: What about Mary?
A: Mary I can see (OSV rather than I can see Mary-SVO)

The change of word order can also be applied to different types of grammatical categories. In sentence 5, for example, there is a sentence with its component words arranged in their regular order and none of these is then particularly emphasized; but in 6, the word quickly is at the initial position to which special attention is thereby directed.

5. John went quickly along the street
6. Quickly went John along the street

The SVO order in English can also be changed in an imperative sentence as in example 7. There the verb comes first and the rest follows it.

7. Take a bus

Another instance of change of word order is in interrogative sentences. In indicative sentences in examples 8 and 9 auxiliary verbs appear in between subject and finite verb giving the S-Auxv-FV-O word order but
in interrogative sentences in examples 10 and 11, the auxiliary verbs come in the initial position results the word order Auxv-S-FV-O.

8. I will see him later today

   S       Auxv       FV       O       Adv

9. You can come tomorrow

   S       Auxv       FV       Adv

As it is obvious in sentences 10 and 11, if the auxiliary verb is placed before the subject, the mood of the sentence will be interrogative. This is called the subject-verb inversion in English.

10. Will I see him later today?

    Auxv       S       FV       O       Adv

11. May the chairman come today?

    Auxv       S       FV       Adv

Another instance of change of word order is found in Wh questions. In some cases, Wh word appears as the subject in the initial position of the sentence.

12. Who can come tomorrow?

13. Who is busy today?

Wh elements are used in the initial position of the following interrogative sentences, causing the word order as Wh-Auxv-S-FV.

14. What will he take to the school?
15. Where has he gone?
16. When can you come here? (More details are in chapter 3).

Therefore, it is clear that in any language though it is with a high degree of inflexibility in their word order, there may be some peculiarities where Sinhala and English is also a case in point.

a. Research problem

Are there similarities and dissimilarities in Sinhala and in English with respect to the word order?

b. Aims and Objectives of the Study

1. To understand the different properties in the two languages in respect of word order.

2. At the end of the study, it will be possible to identify the similarities and differences of the two languages in respect to the word order, which may minimize the difficulties faced by the Sinhala learners of English as well as the translators.

3. To introduce the Sinhala learner of English (L₂ learner hereafter) the comparative concepts of two languages, Sinhala and English thereby to facilitate them to acquire English.
c. Hypothesis of the Study

1. A language is a unique entity. It has its own characteristics. Sinhala and English are no exceptions.

2. Both languages have some kind of freedom in their word orders. This factor might help to contribute in theorizing about some common items of the two languages.

3. A particular word order is not static and it changes according to the context and what the speaker intends to convey.

4. If similarities and differences between Sinhala and English with reference to word order are brought out, that can facilitate the learning of English in Sri Lanka.

d. Data, Scope and the Methodology of the Study

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 has drawn examples for English from native samples. However, Quirk’s detail classification of grammatical categories discussed in A Comprehensive Grammar of the English Language (1985) is used as a model for analysis and comparison in the present study since it is comprehensive.

e. Significance of the Study

The contrastive study of word order in Sinhala and English is significant since it can bring out the peculiar features of two languages. However,
no research in this area has been taken up so far. Still references have been made to the word order factor in works with a linguistic background. However, a great deal of research is found involving English word order and several European and Asian Languages but there is hardly any study concerning a contrastive study of word order in Sinhala and English in particular. This comparative study has three advantages. Firstly, it might throw some light on language universals. Secondly, it will serve to bring out the peculiarities of two languages concerned. Finally, it can help us establish translation rules for Sinhala and English. Such comparison will definitely add to the knowledge of two languages and more importantly enhance the knowledge of L2 learners whose mother tongue is Sinhala thereby facilitating them acquire L2 language is therefore going to be of significant use. Also this study has utmost relevance in Sri Lankan context because Sri Lanka was one of the Colonies of England whose Colonial language (English) has remained indispensable even after independence and often in spite of the outright hostility to the political and cultural values that the European languages represent.

f. Organization of the Thesis

This dissertation contains six chapters. The introductory part of this study deals with a general introduction to the study and also elaborates the features in both languages. It also points out the aims and objectives, hypothesis, data, scope and the methodology and also the significance of the study.

The first chapter is about the theoretical framework of the study where the concept of word order, word order changes, word order and grammar and the Greenberg’s word order universals on which the present study is based on are discussed.
The second chapter being the survey of literature deals with books, research work and articles, which have close affinity to the topic of the present research.

The third chapter investigates the word order in English at various levels such as phrase level, clause level and also sentence level.

The fourth chapter is about the word order in Sinhala at various levels.

The fifth chapter is a contrastive study where the similarities and dissimilarities in word order in Sinhala and English are discussed comprehensively.

The sixth chapter being the concluding chapter summarizes the whole study by way of conclusions. At the end of the thesis, a bibliography is included.

To illustrate the structures of some grammatical units tree diagrams and tables are largely used instead of traditional labelled bracketed system.