ABSTRACT

This study examines various reference devices employed by native speakers of German and Sinhala in tracking participants in discourse. Firstly, reference devices available in each language to signal the continuation and/or discontinuation of referents will be discussed in detail. Further, possible difficulties arising in the process of identifying referents in each language and various techniques used by native speakers to avoid these problems will also be discussed. In the final section, the contrastive aspects as well as the unique features of reference devices of the two languages will be looked into. The identity of the speaker (first person) and the addressee (second person) is generally evident in discourse and does not cause much difficulty to decode who it is being referred to. Hence the focus will be mainly on devices employed to identify third persons referred to in discourse i.e. personal pronouns and other devices such as nouns, zero anaphora, honorific and kinship terms. The role of pronouns in identifying referents in discourse will be discussed at length. Further, a sociolinguistic interpretation of reference devices employed in Sinhala will also be provided because social norms are as important as formal grammatical rules in this process. This study focuses only on the spoken variety of the two languages.