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## **A Longitudinal Linguistic Study of Children below Age 4: Challenges Identified at the Level of Data Gathering**

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### **Abstract**

This socio-linguistic study documents the real-life challenges experienced by researchers when conducting developmental linguistic research. The study asks: “what are the challenges encountered during the data gathering phase of a monolingual multi-participant longitudinal linguistic study of native speakers of Sinhala, aged between 9 months to 4 years?” Fifty participants were randomly selected from the Matara-Kekanadura MOH area. Home visits were made once in every two weeks over a period of four months, and one-hour audio sessions were recorded focusing on the natural speech of the children. However, this is a parallel study to the main objective of the field visits. The study focuses on two kinds of challenges faced by sociolinguists when conducting research: internal and external challenges. Internal challenges consist of those connected to the researcher and the data collecting team themselves. They are consequences of the degree of dexterity the researcher has to handle and adjust to the fieldwork environment, their expertise, and their capacity to be responsible for their own safety. External challenges emerge when the research team engages with the participant’s community. This study discusses four specific types of external challenges: the behaviors of the participants, the behaviors of their family members and neighbors, noise disturbances and the cultural environments of the participating families. The study finds that the choice of the study population, the geographical area and the methods chosen to conduct fieldwork bear significantly on the data and findings. Manipulating these three factors in future research will therefore result in differences in the data and findings.

**Keywords:** *Challenges, Data gathering, First language acquisition, Longitudinal linguistic research, Sinhala*

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