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## Error Analysis of Turkish Learners' English Paragraphs from Lexical and Grammatical Aspects<sup>1</sup>

Zülal Ayar<sup>a 2</sup> 

<sup>a</sup>Ankara University, Ankara, Turkey

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### Abstract

This research aims at exploring grammatical and lexical errors of seven adult Turkish EFL learners who took a one-month intensive English course at a research and application centre of a state university in Ankara. In this study, the target group at A1 proficiency level was selected with convenience sampling to reveal the most common error type(s). To that end, take-home papers collected in the third week of the course program were investigated at five consequent stages abiding by a model developed by Ellis (1997) to identify written errors. During the scrutiny, grammatical errors were categorized into verb-related errors, prepositions, articles, spelling/punctuation/capitalization, word order, possessives, use of language domain and subject-verb agreement respecting Alasfour's (2018), Diaz-Negrillo and Fernandez-Dominguez's (2006) ICLE/ Louvain and Dulay, Burt and Krashan's (1982) errors taxonomies, whereas lexical errors were grouped traditionally as interlingual and intralingual errors. The results indicate that the most frequent errors of the participants were verb-related errors, whereas subject-verb agreement was listed as the least-conducted error after contracted forms. With regard to lexical errors, which were the only items examined in terms of transfer issue, interlingual errors outnumbered intralingual errors. Accordingly, some implications and suggestions have been provided for further studies at the end of the study.

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**Key Words:** Error analysis; grammatical error; lexical error; EFL learners

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<sup>2</sup> Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [ayarz@ankara.edu.tr](mailto:ayarz@ankara.edu.tr)

## **Introduction**

Although a majority of teachers propound tenacious efforts to combat mistakes and eradicate errors from learner output in different phases of learning adhering to a wide range of strategies, it might transfer its stance into a daunting process with their reappearance in the end. It is hence quite fundamental to identify sources of errors, types and let learners discover their own mistakes rather than spoon-feeding or directly leading them to any coping techniques which vividly elucidate what correct steps to take. In that case, specific errors of grammar and lexis with some parameter values which cripple learners' writing ought to be briefly defined at the beginning in accordance with the scope of this examination.

To begin, grammatical errors largely embody distinct forms of the misuse of language domains, articles, tenses, possessive pronouns, countable-uncountable nouns, word order and punctuation. Referring to lexical errors, singular-plural words, translations, collocations, meaning types, and relevancy of words with congruent contexts would come to minds (Nattama, 2002). On the basis of the dichotomy of intralingual versus interlingual translation originated by Richards (1971, 1974), Keshavarz (2004) and Touchie (1986) cite intralingual errors as overgeneralizations, ignorance of rule restrictions, false analogies, hyper-extension, hyper-correction and faulty categorizations. On the other hand, Chelli (2003) lists interlingual errors as language transfer, and cross-linguistic interferences. Taken together, every one of these error types might stand in the way of transmission of meaning or the message between interlocutors during the communication. Hence, these two errors are worth being analysed in EFL context to inform teachers about their frequency, and then incite them to strategize about error control as has already been underscored by Demirel (2017), Jurianto (2015), Lim (2010), and Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) to name but a few.

## **Literature Review**

Under the influence of schools of thought in psychology in the middle of 20<sup>th</sup> century, adopting the policy of tolerance and leaving room for linguistic errors in language studies would be regarded infeasible in learning process, thus they were to be eliminated from learner output. This view would be correlated with Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) coined by Lado (1957) hinging upon behaviourism and structuralism (Han, 2004). CAH posited that similarities between target language and L1 would ease learning. However, on the contrary, it resulted in interferences and transfers of structures or rules (Gass, Behney & Plonsky, 2013). That is, despite the fact that CAH seemed to introduce a 'disclosure' to learner errors at first, it did neither predict, prevent and even detect potential language problems nor arrive at a

favourable outcome in the long run. Correspondingly, Chomsky (1965) alleged the creativity of learners in language learning process which was again contrary to behaviourism. Finally, these elements yielded to an impaired credit of behaviourism in Second Language Acquisition (SLA) (Mede, Tatal, Ayaz, Çalışır, & Akın, 2014). Then, Error Analysis (EA) developed by Corder (1967, 1973) offered a fresh perspective to researchers and teachers in that errors were significant items on the way to understand problem(s) in learner's failure and specify inaccurate knowledge (Choroleeva, 2009). Furthermore, Corder (1973) distinguished errors from mistakes accounting for the fact that errors were serious learning deficiencies that would intervene acquisition process; on the other hand, mistakes referred to simple failures, such as slip of the tongue or a dichotomy in using (in) definite articles which did not interfere or hinder learning. Therefore, errors were appointed to be the focal point in language education and required to be well-resolved to boost success. Concerning this issue, further investigations about how EFL learners internalize linguistic knowledge gained importance to help teachers foresee error hints.

In terms of the studies in the literature, Alhaysony (2012) operated an error analysis gathering data from 100 female EFL learners in a local university. Depending on their descriptive essays on six discrete topics related to life and the culture in Saudi Arabia, written samples adduced that article errors were the most frequent ones in the study. Additionally, Mahmoodzadeh (2012) administered a contrastive analysis on 53 Iranian EFL learners at intermediate level to enlighten us about cross-linguistic influences between Persian and English. Through a translation task, it was discovered that participants could not succeed in producing English prepositions (N=63, 23.33%) due to their scarcity in L1 use. As to Mungungu (2010), he implemented a comparative study and investigated linguistic errors in 360 English essay writings of 180 African EFL learners. In the end, tenses, prepositions, articles and spelling errors were respectively detected to be the most encountered types. Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) discovered in like manner that tense (32.0%) and agreement errors (29.8%) were much higher than any other grammatical errors in 300 essays of 150 students. Likewise, Demirel (2017) aimed to scrutinize Turkish EFL learners' 150 academic essays in a corpus study. According to classification of error types adopted from discrete publications of scholars, the most frequent errors were distinguished as verb related errors.

Abushihab (2014) examined the errors of Turkish EFL learners studying in ELT department of a state university. The results demonstrated that while articles were ranked the first (29%), prepositions (28%) and tenses (15%) were also detected to be the major sources of errors. Jurianto (2015) also planned to explore 39 EFL learners' lexical errors in their own

English narrative writings conforming to lexical error taxonomy developed by James (1988). Subsequently, he reported that the number of formal errors (with 11 sub-types) and semantic errors (with 3 sub-types) exceeded the others considering their frequency in each paper. Besides, Koban (2011) searched lexical errors as well as grammatical ones of Turkish ESL learners via 17 compositions. She resolved that prepositional, tense and verb related errors largely appeared due to intralingual transfer, while lexical errors and failures in word order emerged due to L1 interference. Finally, Erkaya (2012) reported mother tongue influence on target language acquisition within the frame of cross-linguistic analysis, too. As a result, word choice was noted to be the most frequently-committed error type leading learners to misunderstandings in L2. In the same vein, this research was delineated to contribute to the literature and unearth learner errors with the aim of enhancing success in foreign language classes by revealing the answers of these two research questions:

1. What are the most common grammatical errors of Turkish EFL learners?
2. Do lexical errors of Turkish EFL learners result from L1 interference or intralingual transfer?

### **Methodology**

This research was generated to indicate grammatical and lexical errors of EFL learners participating in one-month intensive English course. They were incorporated in the design employing convenience sampling and the study was implemented abiding by Ellis's (1997) five-step model. In turn, data were analysed employing the classifications of grammatical errors designed by Alasfour (2018), Diaz-Negrillo and Fernandez-Dominguez (2006) and Dulay, Burt and Krashan (1982). With reference to lexical error types, they were traditionally dichotomized as interlingual and intralingual errors. In doing so, basic descriptive statistics were utilized to display each error, its group, number and frequency.

### **Participants and Setting**

Data were gathered from adult Turkish EFL learners at A1 (elementary) level in a research and application centre of a state university in Ankara, Turkey. The researcher intentionally selected this group regarding them convenience samples from a whole population adopting one of the non-probability sampling methods. Their levels were determined via a proficiency exam assessing their productive skills. The participants, who had to take ten hours of English lessons per week to complete one-month intensive course, were in their third week when the experiment was generated by the researcher. Seven Turkish EFL learners out of 13 submitted their take home papers (writing assignments) to the researcher and provided the

opportunity of operationalizing this descriptive, small-scale study so that grammatical and lexical errors with some of the parameters could be identified and investigated in the end.

### **Data Collection**

As the fourth edition of *New Headway* was utilized as the main course book by instructors in the courses to teach four basic language skills and sub-skills as a whole, the objectives embraced in the content were adapted much the same during the experiment. The first lessons aimed at teaching copula verb 'to be' along with some other basic verbs, such as 'have, go, like, live' to explain how to build a sentence in English. Afterwards, possessive adjectives and genitive 's were presented by practicing some opposite adjectives after negative and contracted forms of copula verb within the context of family life. At the end of the lesson, they were expected to create their own blogs as homework with a guided writing exercise in a clear outline. The following week, a new unit about work routines and jobs with the practice of present simple tense (negative and question forms) was introduced to the class. In addition to learning essential structures to make sentences, they were to improve (their writing style by employing object pronouns and possessive adjectives. By means of regular writing exercises in the syllabus, participants got used to composing second drafts of each task. Otherwise, this implementation could have unmotivated learners to take part in the research or attend the course eagerly.

Concerning the third week, the researcher prompted learners to practice present simple tense with low preparation games to make them personalize the language as well as stating adverbs of frequency. They would additionally enrich expressions in writing skill using basic collocations as in the contents of that week. Having learned how to organize a composition, the learners were assigned to write an 80-word paragraph as a project about their hometown, the capital city or one of their favourite cities in Turkey to be handed next week. In accordance with the given instruction in books, they were reflected the questions below:

- How big is it? Where is it?
- What is it famous for?
- Does it have any problems?
- What do you like best about it?

In the fourth and last week of the program, the teacher provided direct written corrective feedback to learners highlighting interferences and other probable reasons behind the errors.

## Data Analysis

The researcher planned to design the current study regarding the five-step examination model developed by Ellis (1997): collecting data, identifying errors, classifying errors, analysing errors, and explaining errors. The reason behind embracing this model as a guidance was the explanation made by Ellis himself: "classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any stage of their development and to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time" (ibid, p.23). To this end, subsequent to a comprehensive literature review, she analysed all errors and arranged them from high-frequent to the least. Though grammatical and lexical errors were parsed and figured as interlingual and intralingual at the outset of the study, on account of limited sample size and inadequate examples of the errors for each type from the data, she had to narrow down dissection of transfer errors and thus assessed them only from the lexical aspect. In other words, though error analysis was conducted on both of the foregoing parameters, errors of grammar encompassed just the failures in verb uses, word orders, agreement (subject-verb and noun-pronouns), prepositions, articles, possessives, spelling/punctuation/capitalization, contracted forms, and use of language domains without incorporating structural interferences between two languages precisely, whereas the latter was only related to the misuse of words and translations. During the analysis, and classification of grammatical errors, the aforementioned models were also taken into account. Furthermore, considering inter-rater reliability, one of the colleagues with master's degree in ELT worked on the data and classified errors as the second coder. Finally, they reached a consensus about error groups and percentages of each category were ranked to be interpreted by the researcher.

## Findings and Discussion

Having examined the data in light of the first research question, verb related errors (tenses, missing verb part-s-) (N=11, 28.9 %) appeared as the most common type among word order, agreement, prepositions, articles, genitives, punctuation and spelling, and parts of speech as is seen in table 1. It follows that the participants must have missed utilizing copular verb 'to be' or assumed that its use would be restricted in a dependent clause or act as a complement, subjects and objects in sentences as was already reported in implications of studies executed by Demirel (2017), Mahmoodzadeh (2012), Mungungu (2010) and Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017).

Table 1

*Errors types and their frequency in the study*

Error categories in the study	f	%
A. Verb related errors	11	28.9
B. Erroneous complementation of prepositions	6	15.7
C. Articles	6	15.7
D. Spelling/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	5	13.1
E. Word order	5	13.1
F. Possessives	2	5.2
G. Parts of speech	2	5.2
H. Agreement errors (subject-verb & noun-pronoun agreement)	1	2.6
I. Contracted forms	0	0
	38	100

Note: Some of the errors were stated in two different categories

According to this finding, it ought to be emphasized that learners did not get used to the rule-governed typology in English which hardly ever modifies itself. Another trouble from the lens of learners must be how to determine the predicate in a sentence referring to A (28.9 %) and E (13.1 %) in the table and form or reform it depending on time expressions. In addition to the errors in identifying words as predicates, learners did not even point out predicates accurately within their statements, thus 'verb missing' errors (as a sub-type of A) turned out to be the foregone conclusion in their writings. Besides, another substantial matter in the study was articles which attach pivotal significance to maintain eloquent and effective communication. However, Turkish learners could not prove that they had an impeccable understanding of using definite and indefinite articles (15.7 %) as is seen below in table 2.

Table 2

*Error types and examples from writing assignments*

Examples of errors	Error categories
The best education in Ankara. Its administrative limits largely unchanged since 1960 ...is very nice which known 'bridge with ten drawer'	A

Ankara is the second city about...	<b>B</b>
Ankara is capital city in Turkey	
The transportation is provided among highway, ...	
Ankara is coldest city ...	<b>C</b>
Sao Paulo is capital city of...	
It is the cheapest city in the Turkey	
..... highway, freeway, subway	<b>D</b>
Newyork is the most crowded city in ...	
42 million tourists annually in the city and its suburbs visit	<b>E</b>
...since 1860. has an estimated...	
Ankara has some problems because a city crowded	
Because İstanbul city is old very.	
He name is Eric Garcetti	<b>F</b>
It's city wall is very...	
İstanbul is the most population city	<b>G</b>
The Hollywood film endustry production film in the world.	
There are Atakule.	<b>H</b>
-	<b>I</b>

Considering the fact that even advanced Turkish EFL learners may experience the crisis of understanding and using prepositions in active skills, its position as a second ranked error (15.7 %) in the list of table 1 cannot be regarded weird. Moreover, as prepositions were introduced simultaneously with a fairly crucial grammar issue in the class, they might have been misconstrued and assumed as negligible elements in target language. The other motive instigating learners to skip prepositions in paragraph writing can stem from teacher's overstatement of the significance of vocabulary or not laying a lot weight on particles or adverbs at this proficiency level during the lectures. As a consequence, the results did not exactly chime in with Abushihab (2014) and Alhaysony (2012) who stressed prepositional errors strikingly due to their highest number of all the types in writings. Nonetheless, the findings were in parallel with Demirel (2017), Mungungu (2010), Owu-Ewie and Williams (2017) who noted verb related errors as the most common ones among learners.

After discussing the first research question, lexical errors were to be investigated as well to clarify the second question and report the prevailing hegemony of either interlingual



errors or intralingual errors in Turkish EFL context similar to Erkaya (2012), and Koban (2011).

Table 3

*Analysis of lexical errors*

Lexical errors	Interlingual	Intralingual
1. If you don't like <b>wetting yourself</b> in the rain,...	√	
2. It's home to <b>tall</b> rivers	√	
3. Diyarbakır is the most <b>candid</b> city	√	
4. It is also <b>home</b> to sunny weather, ...	√	
5. People go to the city wall should take a <b>photograph macine</b>	√	
6. The Hollywood film <b>endustry</b> ...	√	
7. There are <b>Anutkibir, TBMM,..</b>	√	
8. Newyork is the most crowded city in <b>ABD</b>	√	
9. The Tac Mahal is here where <b>Şah</b> Cihan ....	√	

The items in bold in table 3 illuminated some statements in which Turkish EFL learners were mistaken about how to practice words. It can be straightforwardly realized that despite feeling confident at vocabulary, as a matter of fact they were not competent enough to determine appropriate contexts to employ them in general sense. Therefore, the first lexical error will be directly correlated with collocations, since 'getting wet' or 'getting soaking/soaked' would be the best alternatives herein. The following expressions (number 2, 3, and 4) display incorrect word choices of learners by ascribing meanings of humanistic traits to unanimated objects. Respecting the rest of the elements in the list, they must have originated from word-for-word (literal) translations as Nattama (2002) emphasized. For instance, 'photograph macine' and 'endustry' rather than 'camera' and 'industry' must have evolved out of 'makine' and 'endüstri' in Turkish by giving due consideration to so-called unalterable language concepts. Additionally, cultural background of learners, socio-communicative components and learning process might have had impacts as well (Carriò-Pastor & Mestre-Mestre, 2014). These results imply that learners were by a majority disposed to transfer words due to their low proficiency level. Furthermore, owing to unfamiliarity with lexical items and fails in critical analysis, learners must have instantly uttered the first words coming to minds.

In short, interlingual errors outnumbered the other type as in the studies of Erkaya (2012), Koban (2011) and was underscored by Brown (1980).

### **Conclusion**

This exploration was to disclose the most committed errors of Turkish EFL learners not only from lexical aspect emphasizing interlingual or intralingual interferences but additionally in grammatical structures through the written assignments. The results reflected that verb-related errors in grammar, and replicated words causing negative transfer and interlingual errors in lexis were categorized as the most frequent ones. However, overall, the primary attention of teachers cannot be totally eradicating the errors directly adopting product-oriented approach, but regarding them as opportunities to realize the missing points of learners during the learning process. Therefore, the coordination between teachers and learners must be hand holding in revealing and fighting against errors to increase the level of achievement.

Considering these findings and widely acclaimed notion that lexical distortion and incompatible words may entail fossilized errors, teachers can be suggested to consider transfer issue and plan the lesson accordingly besides identifying learners and supplying immediate needs to increase achievement through language teaching strategies in EFL context. Another implication for language teachers will be to familiarize learners with word formation process and highlight the fact that L1 and L2 cannot be inextricably entwined in structure.

The other point to be declared is that merely seven students volunteered to take part in the experiment, and identification and interpretation of errors were conducted by the researcher and one of her colleagues. The sample size ought to be increased in further studies to portray different cases in broader contexts. As another suggestion for further research, the same design could be implemented on learners at pre-intermediate and intermediate levels to compare the differences between two proficiency levels. Moreover, transferred errors were only scrutinized and tabulated in lexis due to the scope of the study; yet transfer issue could be extended to check grammatical accuracy, and cover phonological, semantic, orthographic errors in the next analyses. Likewise, a qualitative instrument, such as an interview will also enrich the data to supply triangulation in research.

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