

77. Turkish L1 speakers' use of the article in Spanish: An error analysis¹

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APA: Çelikler Işık, B. (2024). Turkish L1 speakers' use of the article in Spanish: An error analysis. *RumeliDE Dil ve Edebiyat Araştırmaları Dergisi*, (Ö14), 1336-1349. DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1456179.

Abstract

For Turkish learners of Spanish, the correct use of the article is particularly difficult area of grammar. Regardless of their level, such learners struggle to master this crucial aspect of the language. Accordingly, the present study combines a recent review of literature on article usage to investigate and classify errors in article use produced by Turkish students learning Spanish as a second foreign language (L2). The study was conducted at a private university in Türkiye during the fall term of the 2019–2020 academic year. The undergraduate participants (N=31) were enrolled on a range of degree programs and were taking Spanish as an elective at CEFR level A1. Data for the study came from the review exercises completed by the students in the final week of classes. For the purposes of this study, three activities were analyzed: one open-ended writing task and two controlled exercises. The analysis revealed that the most frequent errors involved gender agreement in noun-article pairs, incorrect article selection, omission, or inappropriate addition of the article. The theoretical and pedagogical implications of these findings for Turkish L1 learners of Spanish as a foreign language are discussed in order to provide a reference for SFL instructors tasked with helping their students overcome the difficulties that typically arise when encountering this element of grammar.

Keywords: the article in Spanish, grammar, error analysis, contrastive analysis, Spanish language

¹ **Statement:** It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation process of this study and all the studies utilised are indicated in the bibliography.

Conflict of Interest: No conflict of interest is declared.

Funding: No external funding was used to support this research.

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Source: It is declared that scientific and ethical principles were followed during the preparation of this study and all the studies used are stated in the bibliography.

Similarity Report: Received – www.intihal.net, Rate: %23

Ethics Complaint: editor@rumelide.com

Article Type: Research article, Article Registration Date: 03.01.2024-Acceptance Date: 20.03.2024-Publication Date: 21.03.2024; DOI: 10.29000/rumelide.1456179

Peer Review: Two External Referees / Double Blind

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Anadili Türkçe olan öğrenciler (D1) tarafından İspanyolca tanımlık sisteminin kullanımı: Bir hata analizi³

Öz

İspanyolca öğrenen Türk öğrenciler için tanımlık sisteminin doğru kullanımı oldukça zor bir dil bilgisi ulamıdır. Seviyesi fark etmeksizin her öğrenci, dilin bu önemli unsuruna hâkim olmakta sorun yaşamaktadır. Bu nedenle yapılan bu çalışma ikinci yabancı dil (D2) olarak İspanyolca öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin tanımlık kullanırken yaptıkları hataları arařtırmak ve sınıflandırmak üzere tanımlık kullanımına ilişkin güncel alanyazın taramasını bir araya getirmektedir. Arařtırma, 2019-2020 akademik yılı güz döneminde Türkiye'deki bir vakıf üniversitesinde gerçekleştirilmiştir. Arařtırmaya katılan kişiler (S=31) farklı lisans programlarına kayıtlı, CEFR A1 düzeyinde serbest seçmeli olarak İspanyolca dersi alan öğrencilerden oluşmaktadır. Arařtırma verileri, müfredat programının son haftasında ders tekrarı amacıyla dersin öğretim görevlisi tarafından öğrenciler için hazırlanan alıştırma aktivitelerinden elde edilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın amaçları doğrultusunda öğrencilerin hatalarını saptamak için bir adet açık uçlu yazılı anlatım çalışması ve iki adet kapalı uçlu soru grubu olmak üzere toplamda üç adet aktivite analiz edilmiştir. Bu çözümleme, en sık yapılan hata türlerinin ismin cinsiyetini belirleyen tanımlıkların kullanımı, yanlış tanımlık seçimi, tanımlık eksiltme veya gereksiz ekleme hataları olduğunu ortaya koymuştur. Bu arařtırma bulgularının teorik ve pedagojik çıkarımları, İspanyolca'yı ikinci yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin tanımlık sistemi karşısında sıklıkla yaşadıkları zorlukların üstesinden gelmelerine yardımcı olabilmeleri adına İspanyolca'yı yabancı dil olarak öğreten eğitimcilere örnek olarak sunulmuştur.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İspanyolca tanımlık, dil bilgisi, hata analizi, karşılařtırma analiz, İspanyolca

Introduction

In Türkiye, interest in the culture, language, and literature of the Hispanic world has grown markedly over recent decades. Accordingly, the number of people learning Spanish as a second language (SFL) in formal educational settings has also increased rapidly, with many learners enrolling at language schools and universities across the country. However, this growth in demand has highlighted the difficulties that Turkish learners face when learning Spanish due to the considerable structural differences between the two languages (Horta Sanz, 2002: 34). In addition to issues common to SFL learners from a range of L1 backgrounds, Turkish students also encounter various problems deriving from their specific conception of the Spanish language.

The errors typically produced by Turkish SFL learners arise, in large part, from the fact that Turkish and Spanish are quite different languages with respect to morphological agreement and determiners. Article

³ **Beyan (Tez/ Bildiri):** Bu arařtırma yazarın doktora tezinden üretilmiştir. Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduđu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiđi beyan olunur.

Çıkar Çatışması: Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.

Finansman: Bu arařtırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.

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Kaynak: Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduđu ve yararlanılan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiđi beyan olunur.

Benzerlik Raporu: Alındı – Turnitin, Oran: %23

Etik Şikayeti: editor@rumelide.com

Makale Türü: Arařtırma makalesi, **Makale Kayıt Tarihi:** 03.01.2024-**Kabul Tarihi:** 20.03.2024-**Yayın Tarihi:** 21.03.2024; **DOI:** 10.29000/rumelide.1456179

Hakem Deđerlendirmesi: İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme

usage in Spanish is one category in which students are particularly prone to errors, which often become fossilized. Research has shown that students whose L1s lack articles produce more errors when using this linguistic category. As Hamu Haddu explains (2017: 1), “The Turkish language lacks an article system comparable to that of Spanish and its use presents a problem for Turkish students learning Spanish as a foreign language.”

The research presented in this article aimed to identify the issues encountered by Turkish SFL learners when using and acquiring articles in Spanish as foreign language and to generate plausible explanations related to the presence and/or absence of articles in the L1. It was hoped that systematically linking learner errors to the similarities and differences between articles in the two languages would help reduce the prevalence of interference errors in this area.

Comparing Spanish and Turkish

A member of the Altaic family of languages, the development of Turkish has been influenced by Persian and the Arabic languages, among others. Following the disintegration of the Ottoman Empire, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, founder of the Republic of Turkey, instituted numerous modernizing, pro-Western reforms, one of which was to change the written form of the language. Modern Turkish shares a large vocabulary with other Turkic languages as well as structural features such as vowel harmony, agglutination, and linguistic branching. However, Turkish nouns and adjectives are not gendered and are thus masculine and feminine at the same time: a single word (*o*) is equivalent to the Spanish pronouns *él* (he) and *ella* (she), while Spanish nouns and adjectives, in most cases, have both forms. For instance, in Turkish, *öğretmen* (teacher) corresponds to *profesor* (m) and *profesora* (f) in Spanish, while *iyi* (good) equates to *bueno* (m) and *buena* (f).

As an agglutinative language, Turkish follows subject-object-verb (SOV) word order, so a typical declarative sentence such as “Alberto is eating an apple” is expressed as *Alberto* (S) *bir elma* (O) *yiyor* (V). By contrast, in fusional languages such as Spanish where many combinations of verb, object, and subject are admissible, it is difficult to classify word order:

In Spanish, the Romance language with the greatest syntactic freedom, the clarity of the endings allows a wide number of combinations within the limits imposed by the system. Although in the written modality the logical arrangement is not strange, in the oral one there is a marked tendency to thematization or topicalization by putting the element that is considered most remarkable before. (Cuadrado, 2005: 175)

Nevertheless, because Spanish predominantly assumes subject-verb-object (SVO) word order, the equivalent sentence (“Alberto is eating an apple”) would be *Alberto* (S) *está comiendo* (V) *una manzana* (O).

To further explore the differences between the two languages, Spanish (left) and Turkish (right) versions of the following text are presented below:

Yo vivo en un barrio muy popular.¹ Mi casa está en el centro del barrio.² Por eso, no necesitamos coche, siempre monto en bicicleta.³ Cerca de mi casa hay una escuela que se llama Mustafa Kemal.⁴ La escuela tiene un jardín grande.⁵ Me gusta mucho jugar al fútbol en el jardín de la escuela.⁶

Ben popüler bir mahallede yaşıyorum.¹ Evim mahallenin merkezinde.² Bu sebeple arabaya ihtiyaç duymuyoruz, her zaman bisiklete biniyorum.³ Evimin yakınında Mustafa Kemal adında bir okul vardır.⁴ Okulun büyük bir bahçesi vardır.⁵ Okulun bahçesinde futbol oynamayı çok severim.⁶

I live in a popular part of town.¹ My home is in the center of town.² That's why we don't need a car; I always travel by bike.³ There is a school called Mustafa Kemal near my home.⁴ The school has large grounds.⁵ I really love playing football in the school grounds.⁶

Analyzing the structure of these two texts, the first thing that stands out is sentence word order and the use of articles. In sentence 1, the Spanish subject (*yo*) is followed by a conjugated verb (*vivo*): “**Yo vivo en un barrio muy popular**”; the Turkish version also begins with the subject (*ben*), but the agglutinated verb (*yaşıyorum*) must be placed at the end of the sentence: “**Ben popüler bir mahallede yaşıyorum**.”

Regarding the use of articles, we can compare the following sentences:

Yo vivo en un barrio muy popular (Spanish) vs. Popüler **bir** mahallede yaşıyorum (Turkish).

Cerca de mi casa hay una escuela que se llama Mustafa Kemal (Spanish) vs. *Evimin yakınında Mustafa Kemal adında bir okul vardır*. (Turkish)

La escuela tiene un jardín grande (Spanish) vs. *Okulun büyük bir bahçesi vardır* (Turkish).

The Turkish sentences below all use *bir* (a/an/one), the equivalent of the indefinite article or the indeterminant numeral (*uno*) in Spanish. In fact, Turkish only has an indefinite article, with no form corresponding to the definite article (Morimoto, 2011: 21). In certain situations, the indefinite article is omitted. In the following example, adapted from Goad and White (2009), the sentence “*Bir kitap satın aldım*” (I bought a book), equivalent to the Spanish “*He comprado un libro*,” could also be formulated as “*Kitap satın aldım*,” or “*He comprado un libro*” (or “*el libro*”). In the second sentence, *kitap* without *bir* can also correspond to the sense conveyed by the definite article: whether the indefinite or definite sense is intended depends on the communicative context.

Turkish thus uses the indefinite article to indicate different grammatical categories as described below:

1. Comparing the use of articles in Spanish and Turkish, *bir* in Turkish can be interpreted as the indefinite article or the indeterminant numeral. For example, in the sentences “*Juan es un chico muy guapo*” (Spanish) and “*Juan çok yakışıklı bir çocuk*” (Turkish) meaning “Juan is a very handsome boy,” the indefinite article is used in the indefinite sense, with *un chico* or *bir çocuk* showing the speaker's expectation that the listener is encountering this information for the first time. However, *bir* can also be understood as denoting number, as in “*Sınıfta bir öğrenci var*”, corresponding to “*Hay un estudiante en la clase*” (“There's a/one student in the class”).

2. The Spanish plural indefinite articles *unos/unas* equate to *bazı* or *birkaç* in Turkish, meaning “some” or “a few.” For example, the sentence “In my class, there are a few/some children who speak Spanish” equates to “*Sınıfımda İspanyolca konuşan birkaç çocuk/bazı çocuklar var*” in Turkish and “*En mi clase hay unos chicos que hablan español*” in Spanish.

3. In Turkish, all nouns are pluralized by affixing the *-lar* or *-ler* morphemes to the end of the noun: the former when the last vowel of the noun is *a, ı, o,* or *u,* and the latter when it is *e, i, ö,* or *ü.* This rule is exemplified by the phrases *bazı çocuklar* (*unos chicos*; some children) and *bazı öğrenciler* (*unos/unas estudiantes*; some students).

4. However, when using *birkaç* to show the plurality of the noun (as in the Spanish article *unos/unas*), the noun itself remains in the singular form (without *-lar/-ler*); for example, *birkaç kediler* (*unos gatos*; a few cats).

5. Because Turkish has no form corresponding to the definite article, speakers utilize the context to determine which sense is meant. For instance, “*araba pahalı*” (“the car is expensive;” “*el coche es caro*”).

6. Turkish uses a noun suffix (*-ı, -i, -u, -ü*) to signify the accusative case and provide the sense of the definite article. In these types of sentences, the noun is the direct object of the verb. Following the rules for vowel harmony, the letter used depends on the final vowel in the word. When the noun ends in a consonant, the suffix is added directly. For example, “*Topu* (Top-u) satın aldım” (“*He comprado la pelota*,” “I bought the ball”) or “*Kalem-i* (*Kalem-i*) satın aldım” (“*He comprado el lápiz*,” “I bought the pen”). If the noun ends in a vowel, the suffix is combined with linking phonemes; for instance, “*Kutuyu* (*Kutu-y-u*) açtım,” (“*He abierto la caja*,” “I have opened the box”) or “*Hahyı* (*Hah-y-ı*) temizledim” (“*He limpiado la alfombra*,” “I cleaned the carpet”).

7. Since there is no definite article in Turkish, only *-ler/-lar* is added to signify plural noun objects. If the noun is not a person but an animal, or an abstract concept, the verb is used in the singular form. For example, “*Los coches son caros*” (“The cars are expensive”) would be expressed as “*Arabalar pahalıdır*.”

Spanish language learning in Turkey

English is the predominant foreign language in Turkey’s professional and educational fields. However, since the *Instituto Cervantes* in Istanbul opened in September 2001, interest in learning Spanish as a second or third foreign language has grown considerably. According to Agdanlı (2016), this interest is primarily due to closer economic and political ties between Spain and Turkey alongside the increasing presence of Hispanic culture in the Turkish media. Likewise, Sari Seo Lecoq (2013) identified the inauguration of the *instituto* as a milestone for the dissemination of Spanish language and culture in Turkey while tracing the intensification of Turkish-Spanish relations back to the administration of Turgut Özal, the Turkish prime minister who came to power after the 1980 coup. The same author noted a growing interest in Spanish literature (particularly from Latin America) in the Turkish publishing world, although this did not challenge the overall dominance of English literature, in line with the global picture (Sari Seo Lecoq, 2013).

Before 2001, the teaching of Spanish in Turkey was limited to two departments of Spanish Language and Literature—one at Ankara University since the mid-1970s, and another at Istanbul University established in the late 1980s. Ankara University’s Language Teaching Center also offered Spanish courses along with other foreign languages in various locations as part of its highly successful TÖMER program. By the 1990s, Spanish was being offered as an optional subject in some Turkish universities, including Istanbul Technical, Bosphorus University, and Bilkent University in Ankara.

Spanish is now widely spoken by Turkish students and professionals in a range of fields. According to “*Spanish: A Living Language*,” an annual report published each year by the Cervantes Institute, the number of non-native Spanish speakers in Turkey had almost doubled between 2010 and 2022, from 8,000 to 15,000. Relatedly, Navarro Carrascosa’s survey (2017: 5) found that most Spanish teachers working in Turkey (86.5%) believed that interest in learning the language had increased in the last five years; none of these teachers reported any loss of interest in Spanish across the country.

Research on articles in teaching Spanish as a foreign language (SFL)

Research on the article in Spanish language teaching falls into two categories, (1) descriptive analyses of articles (e.g., Leonetti, 1999; Padrón Than, 1999; Solís García, 1999) and (2) the process of article acquisition among learners of Spanish (Fernández López, 1997; Mayberry, 1998; Salaberry & López-Ortega, 1998; Rodríguez García, 2013; Lu, 1997; Lin, 2005; Lu & Lu, 2012). In the first group, Leonetti’s construct of the *uniqueness condition* (1999: 39) is of particular significance. The uniqueness condition holds that the ability to identify the referent helps determine whether to use or omit the article. If the referent is known by both the sender and the receiver, the definite article is chosen and when this knowledge is not shared (i.e., when the information is new), the indefinite article is used.

Likewise, according to Solís (1999: 698), article usage is determined by expressive values. They tested speakers with no specialist knowledge of language, presenting them with the following statements: “*A book entertains/The book entertains*.” The participants’ perception of generalization differed, with the majority of those questioned finding the first option (“The Book Entertains”) as “more” generalizing than “A book entertains.” That is to say, the definite article is used when a referent is presented with a personal assessment that does not depend on the receiver, and the indefinite article when the sender wishes to express a personal assessment. In any case, Padrón Than (1999: 561) demonstrated that the definite article is more difficult to acquire, and that the most frequent SFL student errors are the omission or overuse of this form of the article. Similarly, Fernández López (1997: 92–97) reported that SFL student errors in definite article use were much more frequent than when using the indefinite article, with these errors primarily due to the following:

- The unnecessary use of the article with nouns that are clear from the context (*No tuve las vacaciones*, “I didn’t have a holiday”, “*Luego regresamos a la casa*”, “Then we return home”)
- The omission of the article for definite names (“*Me olvidé el problema que tenia*”, “I forget the problem that I had”)
- The omission of articles with proper nouns (“*Fuimos a Plaza Mayor*”, “We went to The Plaza Mayor”)
- The combination of the article with another determiner (“*todos los días*”, “every day”)
- The omission or unnecessary use of the article in set expressions (“*un dolor tremendo de la cabeza*”, “a terrible headache”; “*para tomar desayuno*”, “to have breakfast”)

Just like Fernández López (1997), Goitia Pastor (2006: 411) concluded from his study of American SFL learners that the use of the definite article is more difficult than the indefinite one for foreign students. On the other hand, Mayberry’s (1998) research—still the only one to study the acquisition of the Spanish definite article among L1 English speakers—established four progressive stages in this process: (1) the omission of the article, (2) excessive use of the article, (3) variation in the use/omission of articles and (4) grammaticalization of the L1 English speakers’ use of Spanish articles.

Research questions

To analyze article errors made by Turkish undergraduates, the following research questions were formulated:

- (1) Do Turkish SFL students make more errors with the definite article (vs. the indefinite article) due to its absence from their L1?
- (2) Do Turkish SFL students make more frequent errors with definite/indefinite article selection than with gender agreement?
- (3) Do Turkish SFL learners make more errors with the inappropriate omission and addition of the definite article more frequently than other error types?

Methodology

This mixed-methods study recruited 31 undergraduates studying a range of subjects (business administration, logistics, architecture, etc.) at a private university in Turkey. The participants were enrolled in an SFL program (Spanish II) working at CEFR level A1. The data were generated from a larger group of review exercises completed in the last week of classes to revise for the final course examination. The research data was obtained between September 23 and December 27, 2019. For this reason, the ethics committee approval was not requested. Three tests of specific interest to this research were analyzed. Task 1 required students to produce a written introduction to themselves and their families. Task 2 comprised six controlled response items in which students described the time shown on a clock face. Finally, task 3 was another controlled exercise requiring the students to briefly describe the location of various places on a neighborhood map. Tasks 1 and 2 were completed by 31 students and task 3 by 10 students.

The error analysis framework used in this study was based on Vázquez's sixfold classification (1992, 1999) of errors into their linguistic, etiological, communicative, pedagogical, pragmatic, and cultural dimensions. Vázquez (1999:21) divided linguistic errors into five types: errors of addition, omission, juxtaposition, false placement, and false selection. On this basis, the present study classified SFL learners' errors in article usage as shown in Figure 1, below.

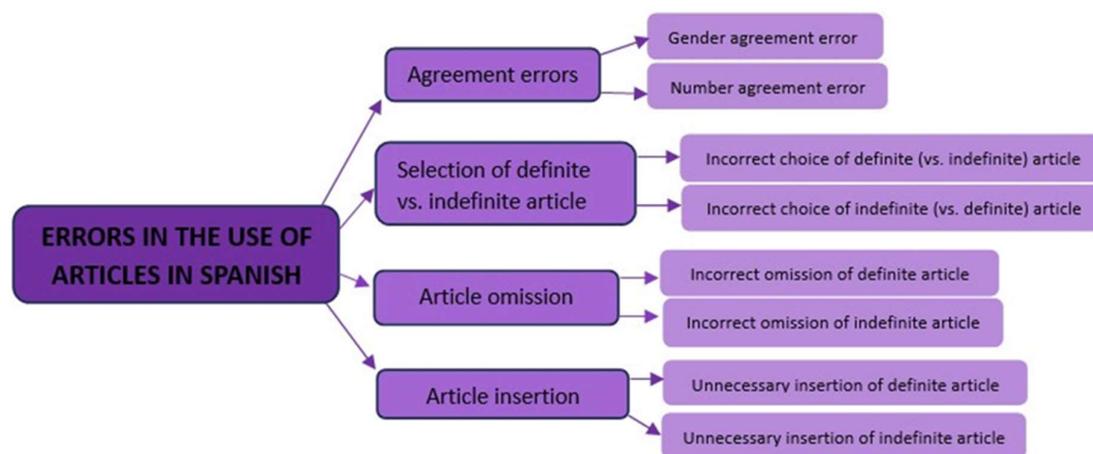


Figure 1. Classification of SFL learners' errors in article usage

The analysis followed the six-step process originally proposed by Corder (1967). Corder's process consists of first compiling the corpus, then identifying, cataloging, describing, and explaining any errors, and finally (assuming the analysis has a didactic or pedagogical purpose) proposing solutions (Corder, 1967). The process was facilitated in the present study by using Microsoft Access 2010. Data from 72 task responses distributed across 31 students were numbered and labeled according to whether they were answering one of the controlled grammar exercises or the open-ended writing task. The responses were then categorized into one of four options: (1) No error; (2) No article error + other grammatical error(s); (3)

Article error(s) + no other grammatical error(s); and (4) Article error(s) + other grammatical error(s).

Next, the students' article errors were classified into errors of agreement, article choice, omission, or inappropriate addition/insertion of the article (more than one option could be chosen for each response). If no article error was identified, the data was coded NA (not applicable). Descriptive statistics were then applied to determine the frequency of each error type, which were then qualitatively described.

Results

The present study analyzed article errors contained in data from 72 review task responses submitted by SFL students working at CEFR level A1. Figure 2 shows the distribution of these errors across the sample.

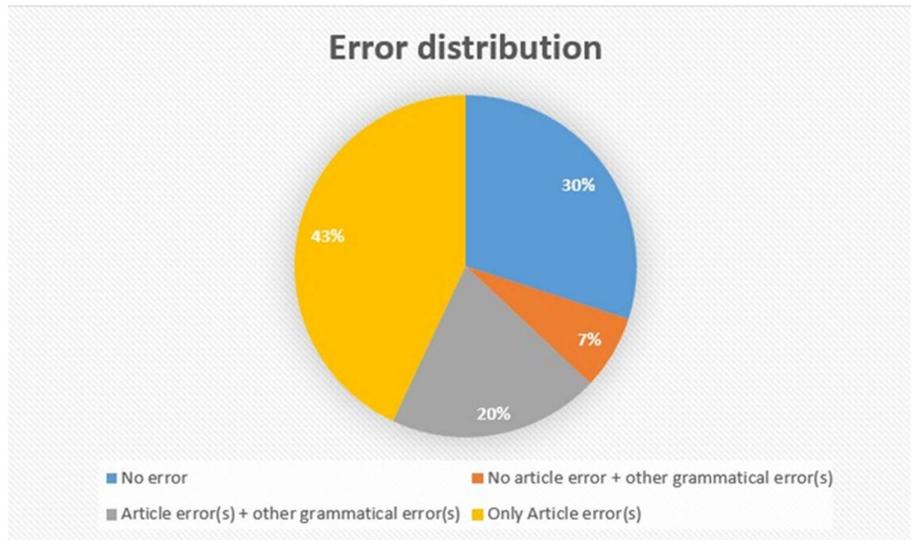


Figure 2. Overall distribution of student errors

As Figure 2 demonstrates, no errors were present in 20 (30% of the total) of the review task responses while 5 tests (7%) contained grammatical errors unconnected to article usage. However, 32 of the tests (43%) only contained article errors and 15 (20%) included errors in both article usage and other areas of grammar. Table 1 shows that the students' errors were concentrated in the areas of agreement and inappropriate omission of the article. The other two error types (i.e., in the students' choice of definite

vs. indefinite article and inappropriate insertion of the article) were rare. Each error type is detailed in the table below.

Type of article error	Number of entries	Total number of errors
Agreement with gender/number	22	48
Choice of article type (definite/indefinite)	1	2
Omission of article	30	70
Unnecessary insertion of article	3	4

Table 1. Distribution of article errors made by Turkish L1 SFL students

1. Agreement errors

Table 2 shows how each type of article agreement error was distributed across the sample. Overall, slightly more responses contained gender agreement errors (observed in 12 responses) than number agreement (10 responses). However, the total agreement error count linked to number (28) was higher than for gender agreement errors (20).

Agreement error type	Number of entries containing error	Total number of errors
Gender agreement	13	20
Number agreement	10	28

Table 2. Distribution of article agreement errors

Errors with number agreement were particularly prevalent in task 2, the time-telling test. Some examples of these errors (in red) were as follows; the correct form of the article is provided in brackets after each error: “*Es (Son) la (las) dos y media,*” / “*Son la (las) dos y media,*” (“It’s half past two”) “*Es las (la) una en punto,*” (It’s one o’clock) and “*Son (Es) las (la) una y diez*” (It’s ten past one). Importantly, while students erroneously used the singular rather than the plural article and the plural rather than the singular, the former error type was more frequent.

Meanwhile, gender agreement errors (in red) were distributed across the three review tasks. The correct form is given in brackets after each error. For instance, from the time-telling task: “*Es el (la) una,*” “*Son los (las) siete y media,*” and “*Son los (las) ocho.*” In these examples, the learners incorrectly identified the gender of the time, using the masculine article instead of the feminine. In the map task requiring learners to describe the location of various places, the following examples were observed: “*La peluquería está derecha la (del) hospital*” and “*No, la estación de bomberos está enfrente de la (del) supermercado,*” again suggesting that learners who did not know the gender of the noun opted to use the masculine article instead of the feminine. The same issue was observed in the “self and family” writing task, as these examples show: “*Yo tengo una (un) gato,*” “*Soy estudiante en la Universidad Isik en la (el) departamento ingeniería y economía.*”

2. Errors in choosing between definite/indefinite article

Only one error with article choice was observed across the sample, in the map task (2): “*Un supermercado entre de un escuela.*” (The correct form is “*El supermercado está enfrente de la escuela*” “The supermarket is in front of the school”)

3. Article omission errors

Table 3 shows the distribution of errors in the area of article omission—the most frequent error type observed across the sample.

Omission error type	Number of entries containing error	Total number of errors
Incorrect omission of definite article	29	69
Incorrect omission of indefinite article	1	1

Table 3. Distribution of article omission errors

As Table 3 shows, the indefinite article was erroneously omitted in one sample only. Students predominantly omitted the definite article, an error that occurred across all three tasks and most frequently in the “self and family” writing task. Two examples from the time-telling task (correct forms given in brackets after each error) were *Son Ø (las) doce y media*” and “*Son Ø (las) tres i media*,” while the map description activity produced “*Ø (El) Hospital está cerca del circuito*,” “*No, Ø (Los) Bomberos enfrente de Ø (del) teatro*,” and “*Sí, Ø (el) supermercado está enfrente de la estación de bomberos*.” Here, the learners have not used the definite article with the subject of the sentence.

Interestingly, the open-ended “self and family” writing task generated many errors of article omission with the verb *gustar*, such as “*Me gustan Ø (los) gatos mucho*,” “*Me gusta Ø (el) fútbol*,” and “*Me gustan Ø (los) futbolistas*.” This task also produced omission errors with proper nouns (“*Estudio en Ø (la) Isik Universidad*,” or “*Yo soy estudiante en Ø Universidad de Isik*”) and, in some cases, when stating the telephone number: “*Mi móvil es Ø (el) 0506-666-66-61*.” In addition, some learners omitted the definite article from the subject of the sentence: “*Ø (El) nombre de mi padre es Gurcan*.” Finally, the single inappropriate omission of the indefinite article contained in the sample was as follows: “*Tengo Ø (un) perro*.”

4. Article insertion errors

Only four instances of this error type were observed—all in responses to the “self and family” writing task. One of these was linked to the generic use of nouns with the verb *gustar*: “*Me gusta leer el libro de psicología*.” In this example, the student omitted the definite article. Two other occurrences in which the definite article was used unnecessarily were related to describing a person’s age “*Tengo el veintitrés años (...)*” and “*Tiene el cuarenta y siete*.”

Discussion

This research aimed to identify the errors produced by Turkish learners of Spanish as a foreign language when using grammatical articles. Accordingly, the study analyzed the responses (72 in total) to three different review tasks produced by 31 Turkish-L1 undergraduate SFL students working at CEFR level A1. The research questions and their responses are listed below.

(1) Do Turkish SFL students make more errors with the definite article (vs. the indefinite article) due to its absence from their L1?

It was observed that Turkish SFL students at A1 level made more errors with the definite than the indefinite article—likely because the former has no equivalent in Turkish, while the latter does. Overall, 123 article errors were identified across 56 task responses: 70 of these (found in 30 responses) were errors of omission, 48 were of agreement (gender and number—mostly with the indefinite article), and 4 arose from incorrect insertion of the indefinite article. Only one error was linked to incorrectly choosing the definite rather than the indefinite article. Thus, the first question was answered affirmatively.

(2) Do Turkish SFL students make more frequent errors with definite/indefinite article selection than with gender agreement?

The results showed that students made more errors with gender agreement (28 errors across 13 responses) than when choosing between the definite and indefinite article (1 occurrence only), thereby generating a negative answer to this question.

(3) Do Turkish SFL learners make more errors with the inappropriate omission and insertion of the definite article more frequently than other error types?

The Turkish students in this study generated more errors of omission (70 instances) and inappropriate insertion of the definite article (4) in Spanish than either agreement errors (48) or definite/indefinite article selection (1), producing an affirmative answer to the third research question.

Overall, the responses to RQs 1, 2, and 3 indicate that article errors made by low-level Turkish SFL students are likely to center on the definite article, which does not exist in their mother tongue. Such learners therefore require access to learning materials that focus on this grammatical category, as detailed below.

While the present research questions were based on prior studies into SFL students' use of articles in Spanish, the literature has very rarely considered how Turkish students acquire articles. However, one such investigation was conducted by Hamu Haddu (2017), who examined the use of the article by Turkish learners of Spanish working at level B1. The author analyzed responses to a written composition task and three sentence completion exercises in which learners chose between the forms *el*, *un*, and \emptyset . Hamu Haddu's findings demonstrated (1) that Turkish learners are likely to experience particular difficulty with the unnecessary use and inappropriate omission of the article (reported in 38.6% of responses) and (2) that the indefinite article was used more accurately than the definite article. The first of these results was confirmed by the sample (N=70) analyzed in the present study, in which the most frequent error was also inappropriate omission of the article.

Similarly, Yener Goksenli (2017) carried out a contrastive analysis of errors among SFL Turkish and German L1 students. The latter produced fewer errors than the Turkish speakers in both the use/omission of the article and the use of the definite article based on the second mention of objects or people. However, both groups produced similar numbers of errors when attempting to choose between the definite and indefinite articles. Turkish students are more likely to choose the definite article, even if it is incorrect, because no equivalent to this type of article exists in their native language. Although Yener Goksenli's results reported overuse of the definite article and the current research found that article omission was the most widespread error, both studies indicate their common cause to be the lack of the definite article in the students' native language.

Another relevant study of Turkish SFL learner errors was conducted by García Barrena and Seone Leal (2015). Approximately 5% of their corpus consisted of errors with the definite article and its omission in particular. Similarly, Pineda Cabrera (2017) reported that Turkish students tended to make more errors of omission and addition of the definite article than other types of article errors in Spanish. These findings were corroborated by various examples from the current study (correct word given in brackets after the error), including “Ø (*El*) *Pelo es corto* (omission of definite article) and *Tiene el (las) gafas* (gender agreement error).

Finally, it is instructive to compare the present study’s findings with earlier research into the use of articles among other L1 students of Spanish. Fernández’s (2007) extensive study on an adult group consisting of German, Japanese, Arabic, and French L1 speakers examined the omission or unnecessary insertion of articles. The author contended that the choice between the forms “*el*” (the) and “*un*” (a, an) presented few difficulties for the students she sampled, and that most errors centered on the definite rather than the indefinite article. According to Fernández, only the Japanese learners presented significant and fossilizable errors in the use/omission of the article (2007: 156). This difficulty, according to the author, is attributable to the fact that Japanese does not contain articles. Similarly, Turkish also contains no definite article, and these results are therefore relevant to the present findings that students made (1) more errors with the definite than the indefinite article and (2) more errors of omission of the definite article while not encountering difficulties when choosing between the definite and indefinite article.

Conclusion and suggestions

The present study sought to investigate Turkish SFL students’ errors when using articles. Turkish and Spanish are from different language families and Turkish L1 students regularly produce errors when constructing sentences in Spanish, as of the beginning of in A1 level. These errors cover phrase formation to verb conjugation and although they can be partially corrected, they may fossilize and settle even at advanced levels. The most frequent errors made by Turkish SFL students working at CEFR level A1 were linked to their use of articles, which differ markedly in the two languages. Due to the lack of an equivalent in Turkish, students may particularly struggle to grasp the grammar of the definite article. Although the errors made can be partially corrected and reduced through modeling, detailed explanation, and practice activities, the article remains a challenging area of Spanish for Turkish learners. Students often continue to overuse or omit the definite article and sometimes confuse the definite and indefinite articles.

It is hoped that this research will enable SFL teachers to understand how learners of a similar profile acquire the article in Spanish, what type of errors they make, and how these errors can be overcome. Because Turkish does not contain a definite article, it is recommended that Spanish teaching-learning materials should be designed specifically for Turkish SFL learners to facilitate their understanding of how articles function in Spanish. Furthermore, it would benefit students to compare the two languages via examples of the definite and indefinite articles alongside their rules for omission and inclusion.

Due to the current lack of published materials for Turkish SFL students on this area of grammar it is recommended that detailed explanations and practice activities on this topic be prepared for those working at CEFR A1 level. The activities suggested in this paper and in the doctoral thesis of the author, based on familiar topics (e.g., time, days of the week, gender, professions, nationalities, and using verbs such as “like”) will enable Turkish students to use articles in Spanish more accurately and effectively.

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