Turkish Studies *- International Periodical For The Languages, Literature and History of Turkish or Turkic*
Volume 9/12 Fall 2014, p. 101-111, ANKARA-TURKEY

AN ANALYSIS ON GRAMMATICAL ERRORS OF TURKISH EFL STUDENTS' WRITTEN TEXTS*

*Zeynep ÇETİN KÖROĞLU***

ABSTRACT

Errors and mistakes in foreign language use is the reflection of learners' language learning process. Learners can profit from their errors if appropriate feedback is provided after errors or mistakes have committed by learners. Even in modern times errors have not been tolerated in language classrooms and seen as a deficiency in language use. However, according to important scholars errors present a view which is related with learners' discovery of a foreign language. Within the light of this perspective the current research aimed to analyze Turkish EFL learners' errors with error analysis approach. Besides, this study investigated grammatical errors in a corpus 23 persuasive essays written by 23 Turkish EFL students at Gazi University, Turkey. The participants were fourth-year student teachers of Arabic language teaching department. They had educated approximately same number of years of education in primary, secondary and high school education. Their exposure to English language is quite limited especially in listening and speaking skills. The instrument used in current study is students' written persuasive essays. Participants' grammatical errors classified, identified and categorized. The result of the study shows that participants made intralingual errors, L1 transfer in preposition use, interlingual errors especially overgeneralization, ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules. Error Analysis approach has been utilized in present research and the results show that Turkish EFL students committed mostly interlingual errors in their persuasive essays.

Key Words: Error Analysis, Turkish EFL students, English, language acquisition, interference.

---

*Bu makale Crosscheck sistemi tarafından taranmış ve bu sistem sonuçlarına göre orijinal bir makale olduğu tespit edilmiştir.

** Arş. Gör. Gazi Üniversitesi, Gazi Eğitim Fakültesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı, El-mek: zeynepcetin86@gmail.com

İNGİLİZCEYİ YABANCI DİL OLARAK ÖĞRENEN TÜRK ÖĞRENCİLERİN YAZILI METİNLERİNDEKİ DİL BİLGİSİ HATALARI ÜZERİNE BİR ANALİZ

ÖZET

Yabancı dil kullanımında hatalar ve yanılgılar öğrenenin dil öğrenme sürecinin bir yansımasıdır. Hatalar ve yanılgılar yapıldıktan sonra uygun geri dönüt verilirse öğrenen hatalarından yarar sağlayabilir. Modern zamanlarda bile sınıf ortamında hatalar hoş görülmemekte ve dil kullanımında bir eksiklik olarak algılanmaktadır. Fakat önemli araştırmacılara göre hatalar yabancı dil öğrenenin dili keşif süreciyle ilişkili bir bakış açısı sunmaktadır. Bu bakış açısının ışığında mevcut çalışma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin hatalarını hata analizi yaklaşımıyla analiz etmeyi amaçlamıştır. İlaveten çalışma İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen 23 Türk öğrencinin yazmış olduğu 23 ikna deneme yazısında bulunan dil bilgisi hatalarını araştırmaktadır. Katılımcılar Gazi Üniversitesi, Arap Dili Eğitimi Bölümü dördüncü sınıf öğrencileridir. İlkokul, ortaokul ve lise eğitimlerinde yaklaşık olarak aynı eğitim geçmişine sahiptirler. İngiliz diline maruz kalma durumları özellikle dinleme ve konuşma becerileri için oldukça sınırlıdır. Mevcut çalışmada kullanılan araç öğrencilerin yazılı ikna edici deneme yazılarıdır. Katılımcıların gramer hataları sınıflandırılmış, tanımlanmış ve kategorize edilmiştir. Çalışmanın sonucu katılımcıların diller arası hatalar, ilgeç kullanımında birinci dil transferi, dil içi hatalar özellikle aşırı genelleme, kural sınırlama ihlali ve kural uygulamasının eksikliği hatalarını yaptıklarını göstermektedir. Bu çalışmada hata analizi yaklaşımı kullanılmıştır ve çalışmanın sonuçları İngilizceyi Yabancı Dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrencilerin ikna edici denemelerinde genellikle diller arası hatalar yaptıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: hata analizi, İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen Türk öğrenciler, İngilizce, dil edinimi, karışma.

Introduction

Language consists of four basic skills' functional integrity; writing, listening, reading and speaking (Kılıçarslan & Yavuz, 2014). Language learning is a process which includes trials and errors like learning ride a bike. If child falls down he/she may get feedback and make new attempts to reach better condition in process. However, language learners' errors had not been accepted before the emergence of the generative-transformational theory in linguistics and the cognitive movement in psychology (Huang, 1974). As Corder (1967, p.167) errors 'provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language'. As it is understood, learners' errors provide information about the learning process and chance for teacher to see procedures of both teaching and learning. Corder (1967) mentions the usefulness of error analysis in three aspects: to the researcher, to the teacher and to the learner himself. According to İnan (2014) writing problems result in ignorance of writing, lack of time for writing in classroom activities and students' ignorance of writing assignments. A researcher or linguist can develop approaches and methods due to results from error analysis research. Language teacher may develop language teaching

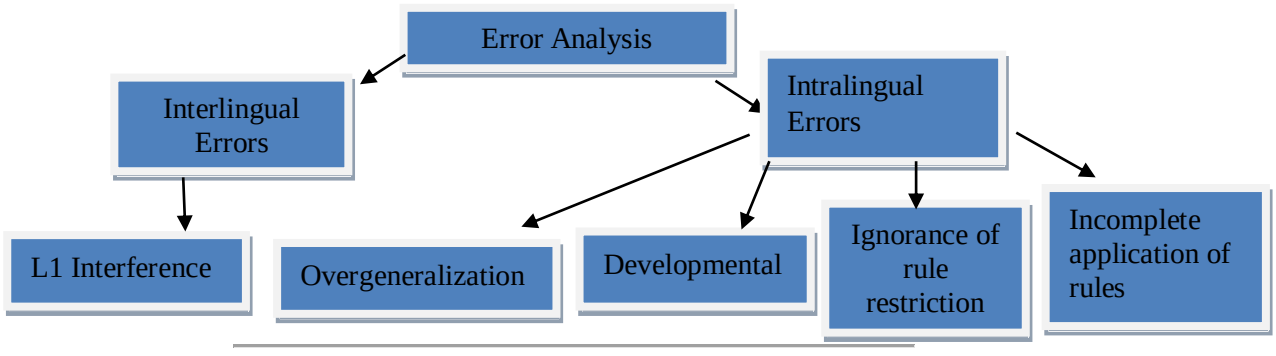
material to develop students' errors. Language learner can realize language learning process. For these reasons, present research focused on the grammatical errors common in Turkish EFL learners' written texts and make an analysis of students' grammatical errors and possible solutions. After primary, secondary and high school education in which English is taught as a foreign language in Turkey, a university student should have almost reached target language like stages in L2 production. The aim of the study is to investigate the nature of Turkish EFL students' grammatical errors in their persuasive essays.

In literature, the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and the Error Analysis Hypothesis are developed to determine the source, types and pattern of errors (Mutema&Mariko, 2012). Mclaughlin (1987) states that the Error Analysis Approach seeks to determine the source of errors in order to learn more about interference and development, while the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis is concerned more about finding the nature of learner errors. In Error Anlaysis, types of error correction and time for correction are another important point (Bölükbaş, 2011). Thus, the Error Analysis Approach is used in this research to determine the source types and possible solutions to students' errors.

Review of Literature

The Error Analysis approach is regarded as a weaker version of The Contrastive Analysis Approach. Thus, The Error Analysis Approach emerges as a counter argument of the assertions made by Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis. Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) was formulated by Charles Fries in 1945 and was later popularized by Robert Lado in the late 1950s (Mutema&Mariko, 2012). According to Ellis (1997) Contrastive Analysis is a set of procedure which compare and contrast the two languages' linguistic systems to identify similarities and differences. CAH asserts that learning of a second language influenced by the first language. It is said that similarities cause transference, differences cause interference of L1. Error Analysis was established in the 1960s by Stephen Pit Corder and colleagues. As an alternative to CAH and accepted as a weak version of it, error analysis hypothesis seeks to find out more about the nature of learners' errors. Dulay and Burt (1972) in McLaughlin (1987, p. 67) states that '…the majority of errors that children make reflect the influence of the target second language more than the influence of the child's first language'. As it is understood, learners' errors is not merely the results of L1 transference or interference, errors are also results of learner's knowledge gap in their target language (Ellis, 1997). Another important term is coined by Selinker in (1969) is interlanguage which is defined as 'the interim grammars constructed by second language learners on their way to the target language. Interlanguage is riddled with errors as the learner tries to reach target language-like forms and errors are regarded as development rather than caused by interference of the L1. Error Analysis thus tries to identify and describe errors in a learner's interlanguage. Error analysis tree can be fully portrayed the paradigm.

Figure1. Error Analysis Tree



There are several recent researches have been carried out in relation to Error Analysis Hypothesis. A research is carried out by Mutema and Mariko in (2012) and results show that language learners committed quite a number of errors such as overgeneralization, omission, misinformation and disordering. Another research is carried out by Hussain et all (2013) in Multan, Pakistan. This research is based on Error analysis and its results show that learners at intermediate level commit errors of each and every type due to L1 interference, faulty of teaching methods and testing systems. Another error analysis research is made by Abushisab and others in (2011) at Alzaytoonah private university of Jordan. The results show that participants committed mostly prepositions errors which comprised 26 % of total errors. Another research investigates written errors of Cantonese ESL learners. Chan (2010) states that lexicogrammatical errors type commonly found among Hong Kong Cantonese ESL learners. Another research carried out by Benzigar (2013). In his research, Benzigar analyzed rural Madurai tertiary learners' free writings to find the learners' written competence in English. According to results of research learners produced high amount of errors and researcher has formed error taxonomy for analysis these errors. Benzigar analyzed students' errors due to grammatical, syntactic, lexical and orthographical (2013). Results show that participants made mostly grammatical errors and the reason is applying mother tongue rules English language structures. Another research on Error Analysis is carried out by Abushihab (2014). In his study 20 Turkish EFL learners participated in research and results show that students made mostly grammatical errors. The other research which has a different design in its methodology is carried out by Cowan, Choo and Lee. In their study the authors used ICALL (Intelligent Computer-Assisted Language Learning) to provide a long lasting improvement in L2 learners' ability to edit persistent grammatical errors from their writing. A pre-test and post-test was administered by treatment with ICALL and the results show that Korean L2 learners had significant improvement in recognizing and correcting their errors.

As it is a well known fact that writing as a productive skill has a spiral process it is not a linear one. Writing is highly complex and difficult task as compared to other skills such as reading, speaking and listening. Besides, L2 writing is quite different than L1 writing in nature. As Silva (1993) points out second and foreign language writing tend to be more difficult and less effective that L1 writing. Thus, the currents research aims to find out Turkish EFL learners' grammatical errors in their target language written texts. The author posed the following research questions;

1) Do Turkish EFL learners make grammatical errors in their L2 free writing?

2) Which grammatical error type has been done more frequently than other error types by Turkish EFL learners in their L2 writing?

Methodology

In present study, error analysis has been utilized to investigate Turkish EFL students' grammatical errors. Participants' intra-lingual errors have been analyzed according to Pit Corder's error analysis approach. Participants' intralingual errors and interlingual errors have been analyzed. Those errors include transfer, overgeneralization and simplification errors.

Participants demographic:

The participants of the study are 26 Arabic language student teachers who were 4th graders at Gazi University. In terms of gender representation, participants of the present study consist of 22 female and 4 male students. All the participants were EFL students who learn English at secondary school and high school. Participants' exposure to English is quite limited especially in listening and speaking.

Data Collection

Data of present study collected in 2012-2013 fall term, education year. The study was conducted with 26 students who were Arabic language student teachers at Gazi University, Turkey. 23 student's persuasive essays included to study and 3 students' essays were excluded because of their English proficiency level which was lower than average. 23 participant's English proficiency levels are intermediate.

The participants did two writing tasks which administered at two different times with 1 month's interval. In first writing task, they are asked to write persuasive essays to convince their best friends to come their hometown instead of another city for holiday. In second writing task, they are asked to write descriptive essay in which they are expected to report a natural disaster as a news reporter. A word limit was set as a 300- 350 for students. The participants produced 23 persuasive essays and 23 descriptive essays totally. Participants' descriptive essays were excluded because of unrealistic sentences which exist in their essays.

Data analysis and Results:

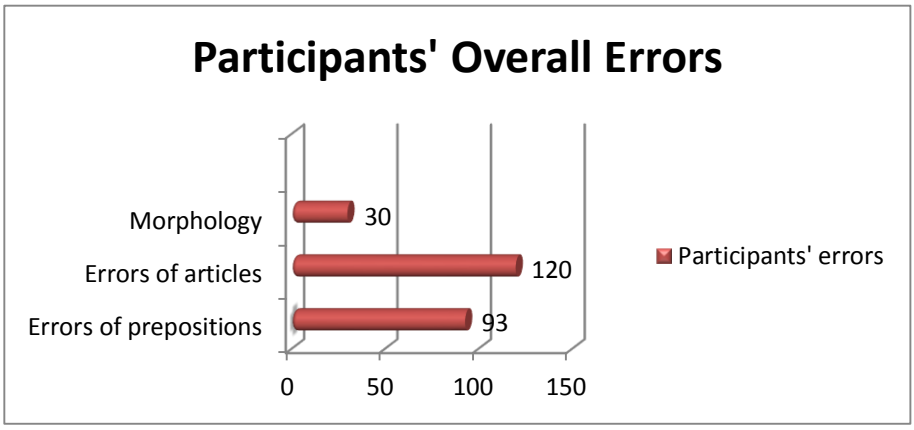
Table 1 shows analysis of grammatical errors based on classification of error types, number of errors which have been committed by participants and percentage of errors.

Table 1. Analysis of grammatical errors

Type of errors	Number of Errors	Percentage
Errors of prepositions	93	33,0 %
Errors of articles	120	42,7 %
Morphology	30	10,6 %
Spelling	38	13,5 %
Total	281	100 %

The results reveal that the most common grammatical errors which participants committed were in articles (42,7 %), errors of prepositions (33,0 %), spelling (13,5) and morphology (10,6 %). Results are presented graphically below in Figure1.

Figure 2. Participants' Overall Errors

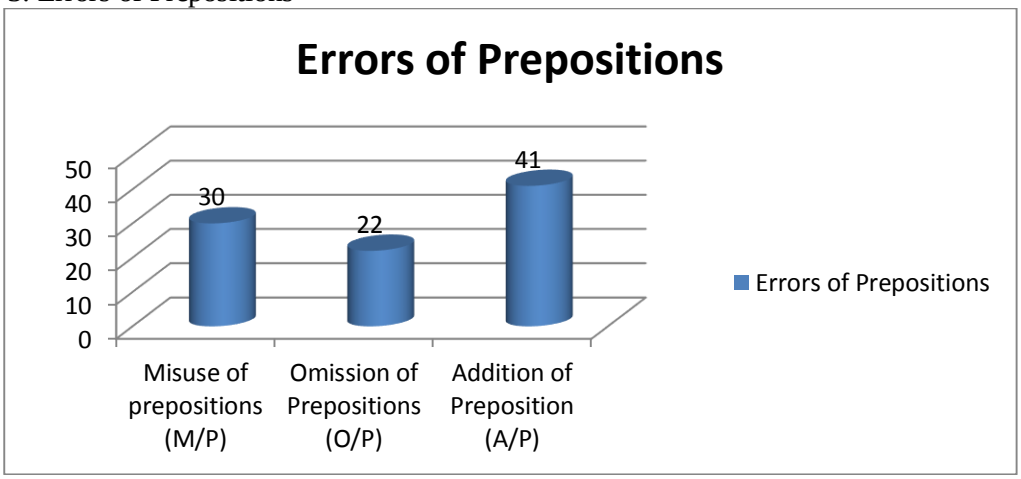


Each error type will be analyzed in detail.

Prepositions

This section reflects a problematic area for the participants. Most of the subjects misused prepositions, omitted necessary prepositions or added unnecessary prepositions. Non-native speakers of English find prepositions among the most difficult forms to master in learning (O'Dowd, 1998). These errors of participants presented in Figure3.

Figure 3. Errors of Prepositions



Some of interlingual errors of prepositions are presented in examples (1)- (5);

1) **On** your last letter **(on instead of at)**
2) **In** air **(in instead of on)**
3) I would like to mention **from** Istanbul in my letter briefly **(from instead of about)**
4) Istanbul's population is estimated to be **between** 12 and 19 million people **(between instead of around)**
5) You should come **in** my city **(in instead of to)**
6) I hope you are pleased **from** there **(from instead of in)**

In examples (1), (2), (3) and (6), the participants have literally translated the Turkish equivalents; in (1) 'mektubunda (on your last letter), (2) 'havada' (in air), (3) 'Istanbuldan bahsedeceğim' (mention from Istanbul) and (6) 'umarım oradan menmunsundur' (Pleased from there). These four examples present negative transfer from Turkish. The participants made errors of prepositions In (4) and (5) due to the lack of mastering the necessary rules of prepositions in English. The participants did not seem to master fully prepositions in English. Examples show misuse, omission and addition of prepositions in their persuasive essays.

Figure 4. Errors of Articles

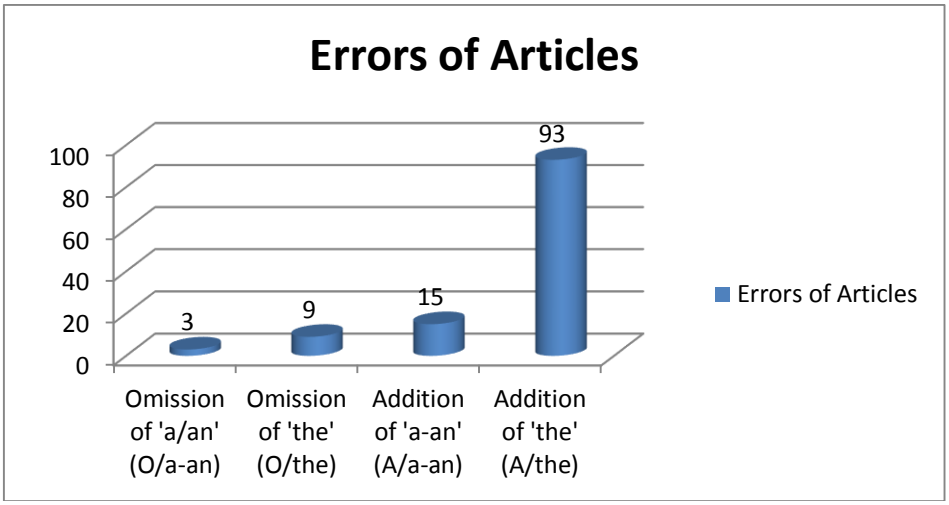


Figure 4 shows participants' errors of articles. Actually, errors of articles section have the highest percentage (42,7 %) among error types. Especially addition of 'the' is mainly committed mistake by participants with 93 tokens. This result is not surprising since Turkish language has no article use while English has definite and indefinite articles. In English, the use of articles depends on the noun pre-modified by the article. Definite article is used with specific reference. The indefinite article with generic reference is used with a singular countable noun when the reference represents the whole class. On the other hand, in Turkish, there is 'bir (1)' as an article. Besides, there is not a similar usage of indefinite article 'the'. As Figure 4 represents Turkish EFL learners committed errors mostly in use of indefinite article 'the'. As Reehan, Chodorow & Leacock (2006) states that mastering the English articles are a difficult task for non-native speakers, especially when learners' L1 does not include articles. Some participants omitted 'a-an' and 'the. Some others added 'a-an' and 'the' in a wrong way. Examples are provided below in (7)- (14).

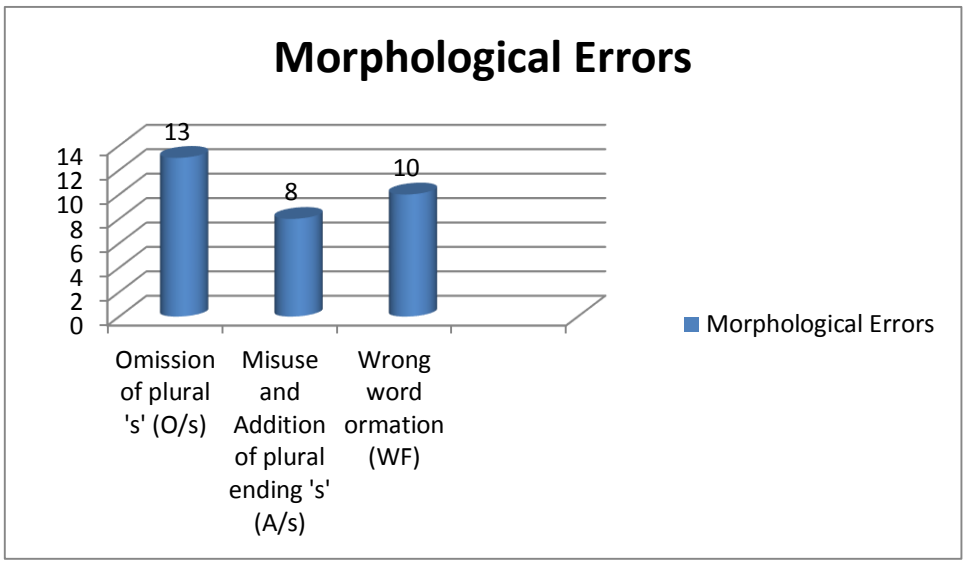
7) **The** word Adana **(Addition of the article 'the')**
8) I'm sitting in **the** classroom **(Addition of the article 'the')**
9) The postman brought **the** letter **(Addition of the article 'the')**
10) In **the** Mersin **(Addition of the article 'the')**
11) There are **the** ruins of temple **(Addition of the article 'the')**
12) **The** beautiful little town **(Addition of the article 'the')**
13) **The** coast road **(Addition of the article 'the')**

As it is seen in examples, participants tend to use the article 'the' with many words. Thus, English language has not clear cut rule of articles non-native speakers of English use article 'the' excessively. As Hamdi (2012) states article usage depends on heterogeneous factors such as lexical and countability of head noun in the noun phrase.

Morphological Errors

This type of error section constitutes 10,6 % of the total errors. Besides, morphological errors section is the least committed errors of the study. Figure 3 presents distribution of errors.

Figure 5 Morphological Errors



As examples indicates some participants did not know that the suffix‘s’ must be applied to the countable plural noun.

14) There is a five church **(omission of plural –s)**
15) There are a lot of shopping center**(omission of plural –s)**
16) My best wish to you**(omission of plural –s)**
17) The other season**(omission of plural –s)**
18) I see you every nights in my dreams **(addition of plural –s)**

Word formation errors have been presented in (19)- (21).

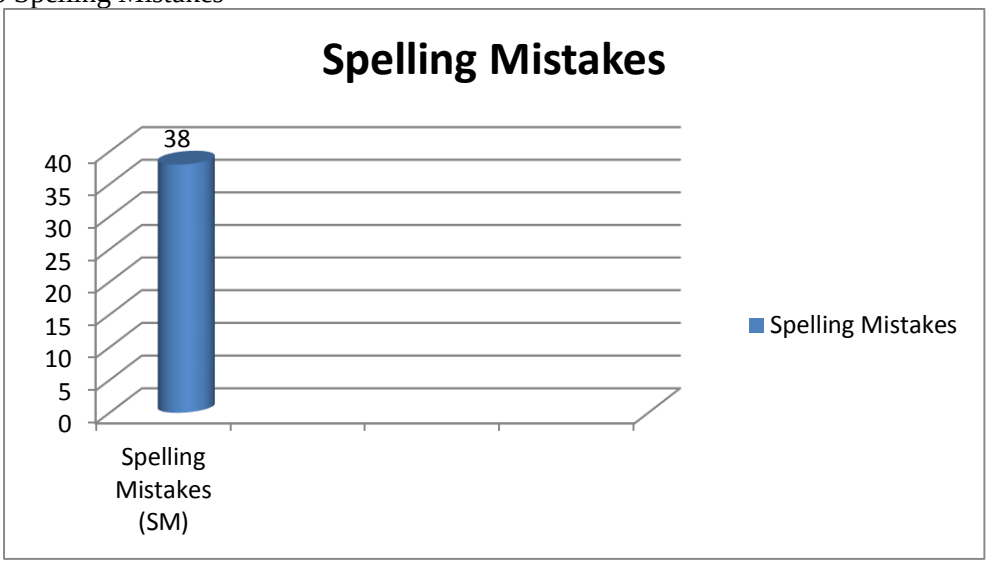
19) Coming to our country next mounth **(mounth instead of month)**
20) It poss a long time **(poss instead of passed)**
21) You need to see here definitly **(definitly instead of definitely)**

One of the important reasons for morphological errors is overgeneralization and misapplication of rules. Another reason is learners’ L1 interference.

Spelling Mistakes

Brown (1993, p. 205) differentiates between mistakes and errors. ‘A mistake refers to a performance error that is either a random guess or slip in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly’. All people make mistakes, in both native and second language situations. Figure 4 presents participants’ spelling mistakes in their persuasive essays. According to Gass (2013) mistake is slip of tongue while error is a repeated mistake. However, language learners’ mistakes can easily turn to errors if it is not corrected.

Figure 6 Spelling Mistakes



As figure 4 represents students' spelling mistakes constitutes 13,5 % of total errors. Examples are provided below in (22)- (26)

22) Okey **(instead of okay)**
23) Aktivite **(aktivite instead of activity)**
24) Sixtly **(sixtly instead of sixth)**
25) Entertaiments **(entertaiments instead of entertainments)**

In relation to the research questions of the present study, findings reveal that Turkish EFL learners make grammatical errors in their free writing.

Research question 1: Do Turkish EFL learners make grammatical errors in their L2 free writing?

Second research question of the study is;

Research question 2: Which grammatical error type has been done more frequently than other error types by Turkish EFL learners in their L2 writing?

As findings show Turkish EFL learners have difficulty particularly in article use and preposition use.

Pedagogical Implications

The findings of the current study provide data for the interlanguage grammars of Turkish EFL learner; reveal the extent of the cross linguistic influence and non-L1 related causes. As the findings revealed some errors mostly committed by participants of the study. As it is seen indefinite article 'the' has the highest rate among other errors. In this case, students' gaps in knowledge have an important role. On the other hand, misuse of preposition category has another high rate which reflects students' L1 transference. According to results article use is the most complex area for Turkish EFL students. Thus, this topic should be taught in detail and language teacher should provide extra teaching material to teach the topic. This study shows Turkish learners have problem

with prepositions too. As Hamdi (2012) states popular textbooks fail to provide semantic analyses of prepositions and their various applications in different domains such as space, time and abstraction. Thus, a better explanation of prepositions is needed in classroom. As Selinker states (1992) Errors are indispensable to learners since the making of errors can be regarded as 'a device the learner uses in order to learn'. One way to turn error to a chance for students, teacher should give feedback. The feedback can be cognitive, affective, negative or positive. If feedback does not provided by language teacher, errors may fossilize unfortunately. Besides, present study reveals that Turkish language learners have some problems with basic grammatical rules in English. Through this analysis, language teacher identify learners' linguistic difficulties and can develop solutions to a particular stage of their learning.

Conclusion

Present study reports on the results of a study which identified common grammatical errors in Turkish EFL language learners' written English output. As important scholar argued that mother-tongue influence in L2 learning is inevitable but inadequate mastery of target language and universal process may also be other important factors. The current research attempted to identify, categorize and analyze Turkish EFL students' grammatical errors in English persuasive essays in order to find out the sources of these errors and possible ways to to correct these errors. It is observed that the most problematic area is articles which comprises 42,7 % of total errors. The following most problematic area is prepositions which comprises 33,0 % of total errors.

This study shows that Error Analysis can reveal EFL learners' learning process in grammatical structure of target language. Besides, language teachers can develop possible solutions to common errors of language learners.

The current study also contributes to EFL research in Turkish context and the knowledge of language pedagogy.

REFERENCES

ABUSHIHAB, I (2014). An Analysis of Grammatical Errors in Writing Made by Turkish Learners of English as a Foreign Language. *International Journal of Linguistics, 6* (4), 213-223.

ABUSHIHAB, I. &EL-OMARI, H. A. & TOBAT, M. (2011). An analysis of Written Grammatical errors of Arab learners of English as a foreign language at Alzaytoonah Private University of Jordan. *European Journal of Social Sciences*. *20* (4), 543-552.

BENZIGAR, M. (2013). The Rural Madurai Undergraduates' English Writings: An Analysis. *Research Journal of English Language and Literature (RJELAL), 1* (4), 102-107.

BROWN, H. Douglas. 1993. *Principles of Language Learning and Teaching.* San Francisco: Prentice Hall Regents.

BÖLÜKBAŞ, F. (2011). Arap Öğrencilerin Türkçe Yazili Anlatim Becerilerinin Değerlendirilmesi. *TURKISH STUDIES* –International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish, ISSN: 1308- 2140, (Prof. Dr. Ramazan Korkmaz Armağanı), Volume 6/3, Summer 2011, www.turkishstudies.net, DOI Number: 10.7827/TurkishStudies.2415,p.1357-1367ANKARA-TURKEY.

CHAN, W. Y. A. (2010). Toward a taxonomy of written errors: investigation into the written errors of Hong Kong Cantonese ESL Learners. *Tesol Quarterly, 44* (2), 295- 319.

CORDER, S. P. (1967). The significance of learners' errors. *IRAL*,5 (4).

COWAN,R., CHOO, J., & LEE, S., G. (2014). ICALL for Improving Korean L2 Writers' Ability to edit Grammatical Errors. *Language Learning & Technology, 18* (3), 193-207.

ELLIS, R. (1997). *Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford University Press: Oxford.

HAMDI, S. (2012). An Analysis of written Grammatical errors of Tunisian learners of English in EFL Context. *CALR*, 4(1),18.

HUANG, T. (1974). A contrastive analysis of the syntactic errors in English made by Chineese students and its implications for the teaching of English syntax to Chinese. Unpublished Ph.D dissertation. Southern Illinois University at Carbondale.

HUSSAIN, Z. HANIF, M. &ASIF, S. Et all (2013). An Error Analysis of L2 Writing at Higher Secondary Level in Multan, Pakistan. *Interdisciplinary journal of contemporary research in Business. 4* (11).

İNAN, K. (2014). Yabanci Dil Olarak Türkçe Öğrenen İranlilarin Yazili Anlatimlarinin HATA Analizi Bağlaminda Değerlendirilmesi. *TURKISH STUDIES* –International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish, ISSN: 1308- 2140,Volume 9/9, Summer 2014, www.turkishstudies.net, DOI Number: 10.7827/TurkishStudies.7319, p. 619-649, ANKARA-TURKEY.

KILIÇARSLAN, R. & YAVUZ, A. (2014). Türkçeyi Yabanci Dil olarak Öğrenenlerin Sosyal Medya Kullaniminda Yaptiklari Yazma Hatalari. *TURKISH STUDIES* –International Periodical for the Languages, Literature and History of Turkish, ISSN: 1308-2140,(Prof. Dr. Ahmet Buran Armağanı), Volume 9/3, Winter 2014, www.turkishstudies.net, DOI Number: 10.7827/TurkishStudies.6558,p. 863-877, ANKARA-TURKEY.

MUTEMA, F. & MARIKO, I. (2012). Common Errors in Second language (L2) speakers' written text. A case of first year Semester (L1:S1) Arts students at Midlands State University: An Error Analysis Approach. *MJAL, 4*(4).

MACLAUGHLIN, B.(1987) Theories of Second Language Learning. Edward Arnold Publishers: London.

O'DOWD, E. M. (1998). *Prepositions and particles in English: A discourse-functional account.* New York: Oxford University Press.

RAEHAN, N.,CHODOROW, M., & LEACOCK, C. (2006). Detecting errors in English article usage of non-native speakers. *Natural Language Engineering, 12*, 115-129.

SILVA, T. (1993). Toward an understanding of the distinct nature of L2 writing. The ESL research and its Implications. *Tesol Quarterly, 27*(4), 657-677.

SELINKER L (1992). *Rediscovering interlanguage*. London:Longman.