Analysis of Higher Education Students' Errors in English Writing Tasks

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study is to analyse the errors of higher education students in English writing tasks. In the study, the paragraphs in the exam papers of 57 preparatory class students, studying at a state university in Turkey in 2017-2018 academic year, were analysed. The study was conducted using qualitative research method. Case study was used in the research. Document analysis was used to collect data. The collected data were analysed in line with Surface Strategy Taxonomy and errors were identified and classified. As a result of the error analysis process, it was observed that the students made a total of 381 errors on 57 exam papers; 192 of them were misformation errors, 113 were omission errors, 65 were addition errors and only 11 were misordering errors. Misformation was the most frequent error among the students with a percentage of 50.39. In addition, the percentage of omission errors was 29.66%, that of addition errors was 17.06% and misordering errors was 2.89%. The professionals teaching English as a foreign language should focus more on prepositions, verb "to be", spelling, articles, singular/plural forms of nouns, word formation, tenses, word choice and subject-verb agreement, which were the most problematic areas of language listed under the four main categories by developing efficient instructional techniques and materials. They should also respect learners' errors and set up a positive atmosphere where learners can easily express themselves in the target language without the fear of committing errors.

INTRODUCTION

There are lots of languages in the world and some of them have come to the fore due to the fact that they are spoken by millions and even billions of people. People generally learn the language spoken where they are born, however; the developments in the fields such as communication, transportation, tourism and trade forced people to learn the languages that they didn't need to learn in the past. English is the most popular one of those languages and for some it is the *lingua franca* (Modiano, 2004; Becker and Kluge, 2014) of our age.

Millions of people in the world speak English as their mother tongue while others must learn it as a second (ESL) or foreign language (EFL). Learning English as second or foreign language differs with respect to learners' attitudes towards English and the people who speak it as their native language, exposure to English, their sources of motivation and so on. The main focus of this study is learning English as a foreign language as English is not the primary language in the country where the study was carried out.

A considerable number of studies have been carried out on error analysis in writing (Miko, 2018; Hasan and Munandar, 2018; Al-husban, 2017; Suwastini and Yukti, 2017; Tiarina, 2017; Suhono, 2016; Alfiyani, 2013; Limengka and Kuntjara,

2013; Noviyanti, 2013 and so on) to identify different types of errors made by language learners in different parts of the world in recent years. Miko (2018) studied on 31 students at Ar-raniry State Islamic University to analyse students' grammatical errors in writing and the categories of errors were listed from the most frequent one to the least frequent according to Surface Strategy Taxonomy (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982) as misformation, omission, addition and misordering, respectively. The researcher suggested that teachers should pay attention to students with weak knowledge of grammar, determine what points should be corrected and recommend strategies on how to develop their grammar. Hasan and Munandar (2018) conducted a research to analyse the grammatical errors produced by nine students at English Department at a university in Indonesia and they specified troublesome areas as misformation, omission, misordering and addition. They concluded that students should pay more attention to the errors they make, their errors hinder the transmission of their ideas to readers and their sentences are ambiguous due to the errors. Another study carried out by Tiarina (2017) on higher education first year students revealed that omission was the most frequent error category followed by misformation, addition and lastly, misordering. It was stated that students should be exposed to English as

much as possible and they should be encouraged to use it. Similarly, Al-husban (2017) conducted a research on university first year students in Jordan to analyse their errors in writing in English and the research demonstrated that categories of errors was omission, addition, misformation and misordering, respectively with respect to their frequency. It was suggested in the study that teachers should develop efficient course materials and use effective instructional techniques to help students overcome the challenges in learning English. Suhono (2016) analysed the compositions of 36 students in English at a university in Indonesia at different semesters and identified 268 sentences containing errors. When the errors were categorised according to Surface Strategy Taxonomy, it was observed that the most frequent category was omission, and the others followed as misformation, addition and misordering. The sources of errors were mother tongue influence (interlingual errors), intralingual errors, misanalysis (wrong hypothesis) and incomplete rule application. Teachers were recommended to respect students' errors and guide them in language learning process to determine and overcome their errors. Finally, Alfiyani (2013) carried out a research on 20 students in Yogyakarta State University to find out their grammatical errors in writing in English and the major categories of errors were listed as omission, misformation, addition and misordering, respectively. Teachers were recommended to set up a positive atmosphere to facilitate language learning process. The studies above investigated the errors of language learners in different writing tasks in English in higher education. The dominant error categories were varied, misformation and omission usually being in the first two ranks and addition and misformation in the last two. The main recommendations of the studies were respecting learners' errors and helping them overcome their errors by using efficient instructional techniques, setting up a positive atmosphere and developing effective materials.

Individual language learners make common errors as well as the ones rarely observed in different settings as their native languages vary and thus all the studies on error analysis contribute to literature from a different perspective. What distinguishes this study from most of others is that it was carried out on false beginners attending preparatory class in higher education, it used the paragraphs in the exam papers of students to get data and it followed *Surface Strategy Taxonomy* developed by Dulay, Burt and Krashen in 1982 in analysing errors.

Error analysis has a significant role in foreign language learning and the idea of making use of errors in language learning process has had a great contribution to the field as it is evident in lots of studies. The main aim of this study is to identify the types and frequencies of errors made by English preparatory class students in higher education in Turkey where English is taught as a foreign language. Accordingly, following the identification of errors, they are categorised, evaluated and some recommendations were made on the basis of the errors.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are four skills to be mastered while learning a foreign language; listening, speaking, reading and writing. These four skills are divided into two categories as; receptive skills and productive skills (Nunan, 1991). Receptive skills are listening and reading while productive skills are speaking and writing (Harmer, 2007). Learners are required to master all of these four skills to be able to use the target language competently. While mastering these skills, the order of acquisition is listening, speaking, reading and finally writing as is the case with mother tongue acquisition. These four skills, as Rivers (1981) suggests, are four clusters of ability that enable individuals to comprehend and articulate the spoken language for correct and efficient interpersonal communication.

Receptive Skills

Listening and reading are categorised as receptive skills in language learning process. As Ur (2009) indicates, it is important to strive to develop listening skill in a foreign language and students should study in listening conditions similar to those encountered in real life. Reading, on the other hand, is "a complex process that involves readers' abilities to interpret, recall, think, and manipulate the information of a written text." (Gonzalez Meza, 2017, p.22). Teaching reading is significant especially in terms of speed reading and comprehension. Learners use reading skill every day and it is not just limited to written or printed materials as the readers read lots of texts on the screens of their smart phones and computers.

Productive Skills

Productive skills in language learning process are speaking and writing. Speaking a foreign language is one of the priorities of language learners and it is the combination of knowledge in the areas of grammar, vocabulary, syntax, semantics and pronunciation. So, it is hard to master speaking skill in a foreign language as it is used spontaneously.

Writing is one of the skills which is hard to master on the side of the learners (Sajid, 2016; Amiri and Puteh, 2017) as mistakes and errors aren't tolerated as much as they are in speaking, the other productive skill, which is spontaneous by nature. Writing can be considered as a planned process, so learners usually have enough time to reflect their real knowledge on the paper or screen. That's why the mistakes and errors in writing are relatively less tolerated when compared to speaking. Writing is defined "as a tool of communication to transfer messages or thoughts that are produced in written form in sequence of sentence in a particular order and linked together in certain ways." (Syam and Sangkala, 2014). Furthermore, Hyland (2003) believes that the performance in language development depends upon the improvement in writing skill. Thus, it can be concluded that writing skill is a reliable indicator of the level of language competence of an individual.

Writing is a productive skill, which is performed more consciously compared to the other productive skill, speaking. In speaking, most of the mistakes or errors can be tolerated as it is a spontaneous process. Fluency is considered important in speaking so speakers don't have much time to

elaborate their speech before they articulate it. However, while writing, students have enough time to go over their sentences. Therefore, writing provides better cues on errors compared to speaking. To put it another way, speaking mainly contains mistakes while writing contains errors. Thus, it can be said that writing is the right address to study foreign language learner errors.

It takes a long time to master a foreign language perfectly with its all four skills mentioned above as learners usually have difficulty in getting rid of the interference of their mother tongue in foreign language learning process. Therefore, they often make mistakes and errors. Yet, making mistakes and errors are understandable in the process of learning a second or foreign language (Rustipa, 2011) as it is expected to eliminate them in the long term. Researchers involved in linguistic studies try to find the causes of errors in the process of learning a foreign or second language to reduce the number of the errors as much as possible. So far, three approaches have come to the fore to determine the causes of errors in the field of applied linguistics; *contrastive analysis*, *interlanguage theory* and *error analysis*. Contrastive analysis, the theoretical foundations of which were formulated in Lado's (1957) book *Linguistics across Cultures*, is a theory which assumes that learner errors are caused by various factors between the mother tongue and the target language. Therefore, it is believed that a contrastive analysis should be carried out between the two languages focusing on the similarities and differences in order to predict potential errors. Interlanguage theory, on the other hand, refers to the transition period between the two languages before the learners are completely proficient in the target language and it is a dynamic process as the language learning process still goes on. As Rustipa (2011, p.20) suggests "interlanguage rules are shaped by L1 transfer, transfer of training, strategies of L2 learning (e.g. simplification), strategies of L2 communication (or communication strategies like circumlocution), and overgeneralization of the target language patterns." And lastly, the focus of this study, error analysis is the process of examining the errors learners make while learning a foreign or second language by identifying and classifying errors, determining the areas of difficulty in the target language and suggesting remedial practices. The details of error analysis are given below.

Error Analysis

It is widely believed that errors include hints for researchers that will help them determine areas of difficulty and possible sources of the errors. When the mistakes and errors of language learners are analysed carefully, the process of language acquisition can be understood better (Erdoğan, 2005). Before passing on to the analysis of errors in detail, it is essential to make a distinction between mistake and error. Ellis (1997) and Brown (2007) explained the difference between mistakes and errors. The common point in their explanations is that if the learner uses the incorrect form consistently and is unable to correct it, then it is an error. However, if the learner sometimes uses the incorrect form due to the reasons such as excitement, carelessness, lack of attention and fatigue and

can correct it whenever asked, then it is a mistake. "An error is a systematic deviation made by the learner who has not yet mastered the rules of the target language." (Rustipa, 2011, p.18). Mistakes can be corrected by learners themselves so, it is the errors that should be focused on to enable learners to master language skills.

Error analysis is a type of language analysis focusing on the errors learners make. Through error analysis, valuable information can be obtained regarding the language acquisition process of learners and areas of difficulty. This information can be used to eliminate those errors and also to help other learners by making generalisations when they encounter similar problems. People are recommended to take a blood or urine test when there is a problem in their body as the blood or urine that runs through their body bears valuable information about their ailments or disorders. Similarly, error analysis provides valuable information as it reveals the cognitive mechanisms involved in the process of learning a language, which is otherwise hard to obtain.

In the past, the errors in the process of learning a new language were regarded as faults to be overcome. Corder (1974), however, had a different view on errors and pointed out that they were important indicators to facilitate the process of learning a language. Also, according to Allen and Corder (1974) errors are indispensable parts of language learning process as they serve as precious feedback for learners and feedback is the key to successful learning (Brown, 2007). Teachers should encourage learners to take risks and make errors without hesitation (Brown, 2007). Thus, they can learn from their mistakes.

Types of errors

Learning a foreign language requires mastering the four basic skills in the target language; speaking, listening, reading and writing. While learning a foreign language, one may not use the target language correctly as "the language produced by foreign language (FL) learners almost inevitably contains errors of various types" (Hemchua & Schmitt, 2006, 3). There are different types of errors peculiar to each of these skills. As this study focuses on the errors in writing, the typical errors in writing skill are taken into consideration. These errors can be classified as; lexical errors, semantic errors, grammatical errors and mechanical errors.

Using words correctly while writing in a foreign language is pretty important so as to convey the intended meaning well and common lexical errors include misspelling, borrowing from L1, coinage and calque (or literal translation) (Llach, 2007). Semantic errors are the ones concerning the meanings of words, phrases and sentences. Mechanical errors are mainly related to punctuation and capitalisation (Maner, 1996). Finally, "grammatical error is a term used in prescriptive grammar to describe an instance of faulty, unconventional, or controversial usage, such as a misplaced modifier or an inappropriate verb tense" (Garner, 2012).

When the causes or sources of errors are considered, Richards (2004) categorised the sources of errors into three as; *interlanguage error* (the interaction between the target language and students' mother tongue), *intralanguage error* (errors that

mainly occur within target language) and *developmental error* (error occurring from faulty comprehension of distinction in the target language). On the other hand, Brown (2007) stated that there are four different sources of errors; intralingual transfer, interlingual transfer, context of learning and various communication strategies the learners use. Other classifications can also be made regarding the causes or sources of errors but the main point to be emphasized here is the fact that there are more than one sources of errors in FLL.

The importance of errors

Errors provide one of the most valuable materials to be studied on in terms of successful learning. By studying the errors, areas of difficulty can be determined and teachers can get hints for the next phase of the language learning process. Error analysis has become a major area of study thanks to the contributions of S.P. Corder. Corder (1974) states that errors provide source of information to researchers, teachers and learners. What's more, Hourani (2008) indicated that errors were important in three different dimensions. First of all, they demonstrate teachers how much progress students made. Secondly, they provide evidence for researchers on how language is learned or acquired and what strategies or techniques learners use in exploring the language. Lastly, they are important for the learners themselves as they make use of their error to learn the correct form of the language. James (1998; as cited in Tiarina, 2017), on the other hand, explained that errors were important in two different dimensions. Analysis of errors explains teachers what to do in teaching the foreign language and informs researchers how the process of learning progresses. Finally, Peng (1976) emphasised that error analysis helped teachers to conduct remedial teaching in teaching a foreign language. When all these ideas are considered as a whole, although making errors are not desirable, it can be asserted that errors are regarded as valuable materials to be studied in the process of learning a foreign language.

The process of error analysis

It is quite important to follow a systematic process while analysing learners' errors. Therefore, Corder (1974, as cited in Londono Vasquez, 2008) suggested five steps in the process of error analysis. They are 1. collection of a sample of learner language, 2. identification of errors, 3. description of errors, 4. explanation of errors, and 5. evaluation of errors. Unless such steps are followed, error analysis will not yield objective results.

While analysing learner errors, three error analysis models can be employed; comparative taxonomy, communicative effect taxonomy and surface strategy taxonomy. In comparative taxonomy, the errors of language learners are compared with those of children learning their mother tongue and two error categories are listed; developmental errors and interlingual errors. The effect of errors on communication is observed in communicative effect taxonomy and the difference between the errors that affect and don't affect communication is emphasized. As for surface strategy taxonomy, which was put forward by Dulay, Burt and Krashen in 1982, it is important to reveal that surface structure of the target

language is changed in a systematic way and learners' errors are not the result of laziness or sloppy thinking but there is a logic behind them (Putri, 2019). The most common errors to be handled in surface strategy taxonomy are addition, omission, misformation and misordering.

METHOD

Research Design

Qualitative research method was used in this study. Qualitative research requires reaching research results based on codes, categories and themes by going through the data in detail (Merriam, 1998). Case study was employed in the study. As Creswell (2007) puts it, case study is a type of qualitative research design through which the researcher examines thoroughly one or several cases which are limited by the researcher by using multiple data collection tools (observations, interviews, audio-visuals, documents, reports). Lodico, Spaulding and Voegtle (2006, p.269) define case study research as "a form of qualitative research that endeavours to discover meaning, to investigate processes, and to gain insight into and in-depth understanding of an individual, group, or situation." There are several methods of collecting data in qualitative studies and document analysis was used to collect data in this study. As Bowen (2009, p.27) pointed out, "document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic material." In this study, the paragraphs written by students on printed paper were analysed.

While conducting the research, the literature on error analysis was reviewed in detail. After getting the required permission from the authorities, exam papers of students were collected. Each paper was read carefully and then, the errors were identified and categorised. Finally, the identified error categories were compared with those obtained in similar studies in the literature.

Study Group

The study group consisted of 57 preparatory class students, who were chosen using criterion sampling, attending a state university in Turkey in 2017-2018 academic year. The reason of choosing English preparatory class students for the study is that they often write paragraphs and sometimes compositions in English as they only study English in preparatory class. They took an exam to be exempt from preparation class but they failed although they were exposed to the required level of English when they were in secondary and high school. There were 72 students in preparatory class in total and only 57 papers were worth analysing to identify the errors in writing skill as remaining 15 students didn't write any sentences into the space provided.

Data Collection

After the permission requirements are met, the final exam papers of the students involved in the study were collected. Then, the paragraphs in the papers were analysed. As stated before, document analysis was used to collect data. A sum of

57 papers were analysed. Also, a sum of 1256 sentences and 5784 words were analysed in order to identify errors.

Analysis of Data

While analysing the papers of students, the five steps in error analysis suggested by Corder (1974) were followed. These steps are as follows; collection of language samples, identification, description, explanation and evaluation of errors. First, exam papers belonging to the students were collected with the help of the lecturers who taught English to the participating students in 2017-2018 academic year. Next, the errors that were spotted in the paragraphs were counted and examined. Then, the errors were classified into categories as is the case with other studies in the literature on error analysis. Finally, the errors were evaluated. The paragraphs written by students were evaluated by not only the researchers but also four experts two of whom specialised in English language teaching and the remaining two in curriculum and instruction with a high proficiency in English. A consensus was reached among the researchers and experts regarding the categories of errors. Finally, QSR NVivo programme was used to display the types and frequencies of errors as figures, which can be viewed in findings part.

Students' errors in writing task were analysed in detail in accordance with Surface Strategy Taxonomy suggested by Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982). The identified errors were classified under the categories named omission, addition, misformation and misordering.

Validity and Reliability of the Study

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that a qualitative study should be credible, transferable, consistent and confirmable so as to be valid and reliable. Credibility refers to the fact that the data obtained in the study reflects the real situation (Holloway and Wheeler, 2002). In this study, expert opinions were taken on the data obtained and a sum of 57

students participated in the study to increase the credibility of the study. Transferability, on the other hand, indicates to the level that the results of the study can be transferred to different conditions and situations with different subjects (Bitsch, 2005). As Bitsch (2005) suggests, detailed explanations and purposeful sampling targeting the right sampling facilitates transferability. Detailed explanations were made in this study and a large group of higher education students learning English as a foreign language were the sampling of the study. Consistency is another requirement to be fulfilled for a valid and reliable qualitative study. Consistency refers to the evaluation and interpretation of the findings based on the data obtained in the study (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). In this study, the consistency of the data was checked taking into consideration the evaluation and interpretation of the data in similar studies with similar samplings and subjects. Also, expert opinions contributed to the consistency of the study as a consensus was reached regarding the evaluation and interpretation of the data. Confirmability is the last requirement to be fulfilled in the study. Korstjens and Moser (2018, p. 121) state that confirmability refers to "the degree to which the findings of the research study could be confirmed by other researchers." The support of the experts also helped to increase confirmability and the fact that two researchers have agreed on the findings of the research and their interpretation was another contribution to the confirmability of the research.

FINDINGS

In this part of the study, the errors identified in the exam papers of students, their categories, frequencies and direct examples are given. A sum of 381 errors were identified. 22 error categories were defined as a result of error analysis. The figure displaying 22 error categories and their frequencies is given below.

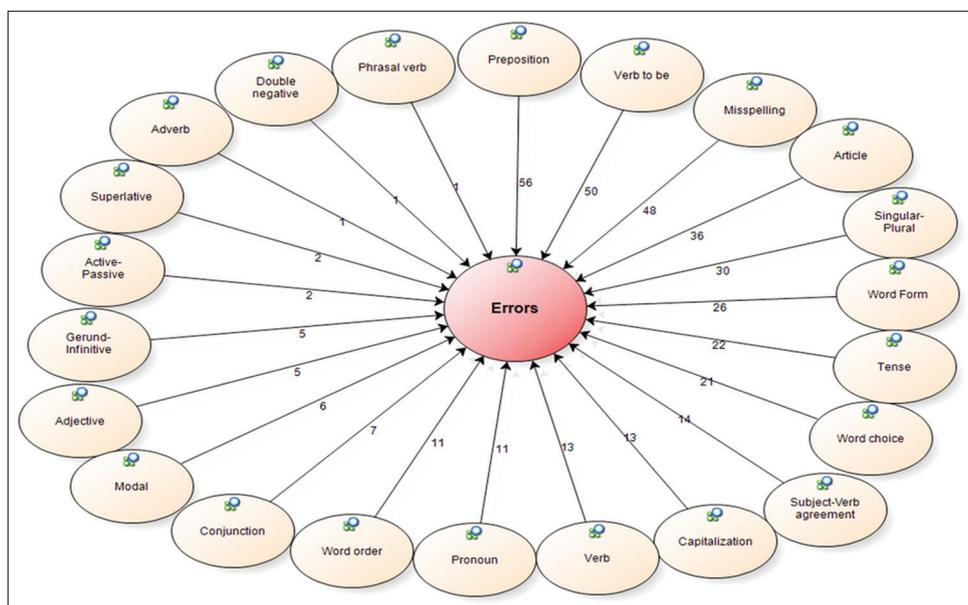As is seen in Figure 1, the most frequent error type is preposition errors (f=56). The second most frequent error

Figure 1. Categories and frequencies of errors

type consists of the errors concerned with the use of verb "to be" (f=50). Misspelling errors (f=48), article errors (f=36), singular/plural errors (f=30), word form errors (f=26), tense errors (f=22), word choice errors (f=21), subject-verb agreement errors (f=14), capitalisation errors (f=13), verb errors (f=13), pronoun errors (f=11), word order errors (f=11) and other errors followed the major error categories. These errors, which were analysed in accordance with Surface Strategy Taxonomy, were classified under the categories of omission, addition, misformation and misordering as seen in Figure 2.
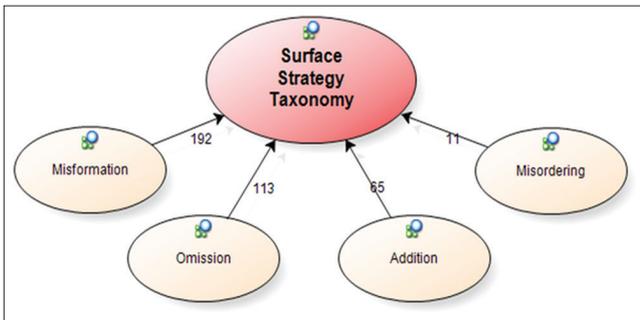

Figure 2. Error types in surface strategy taxonomy

As it is seen in Figure 2, a sum of 381 errors were identified in students' exam papers. Among the errors, there were 192 misformation errors (50.39%), 113 omission errors (29.66%), 65 addition errors (17.06) and only 11 misordering errors (2.89%). Examples for the errors were given in the upcoming pages.

As it was stated above, 192 out of 381 errors were misformation errors, making this category the most frequent error category. Misformation denotes selecting the wrong word or affix in the right form. There are subgroups under the category misformation such as misspelling, word form, tense, word choice, subject-verb agreement, capitalisation, preposition and so on. These subgroups under the category misformation and their frequencies are given in figure below.

As is demonstrated in Figure 3, the most frequent error type under the category of misformation is misspelling

(f=48). Word form (f=26), tense (f=21), word choice (f=21), subject-verb agreement (f=14), capitalisation (f=13), preposition (f=9) and singular/plural (f=8) and others follow misspelling as the main types of errors. Some examples of the errors taken from students' exam papers are given below with correct use.

Misspelling:
Student 6 (S6): They *mey* rest.
Correct Use: They *may* rest.

S5: Your *perspectif* will change.
Correct Use: Your *perspective* will change.

Word Form:
S48: I want to have a good *live*.
Correct Use: I want to have a good *life*.

S14: We should use social media *safety*.
Correct Use: We should use social media *safely*.

Tense:
S26: Have you ever *think*.
Correct Use: Have you ever *thought*?

S51: I took it, but it *is* wrong.
Correct Use: I took it, but it *was* wrong.

Word Choice:
S18: *Break down eyes.*
Correct Use: *Deterioration of eyesight.*

S28: While I am lifting *high kilos.*
Correct Use: While I am lifting *heavy things.*

Subject-Verb Agreement:
S26: People *thinks*.
Correct Use: People *think*.

Capitalization:
S57: I want to live in *canada*.
Correct Use: I want to live in *Canada*.

Preposition:
S43: I lived there *in* six months.
Correct Use: I lived there *for* six months.

Singular-Plural:
S1: You learn a lot of *thing*.
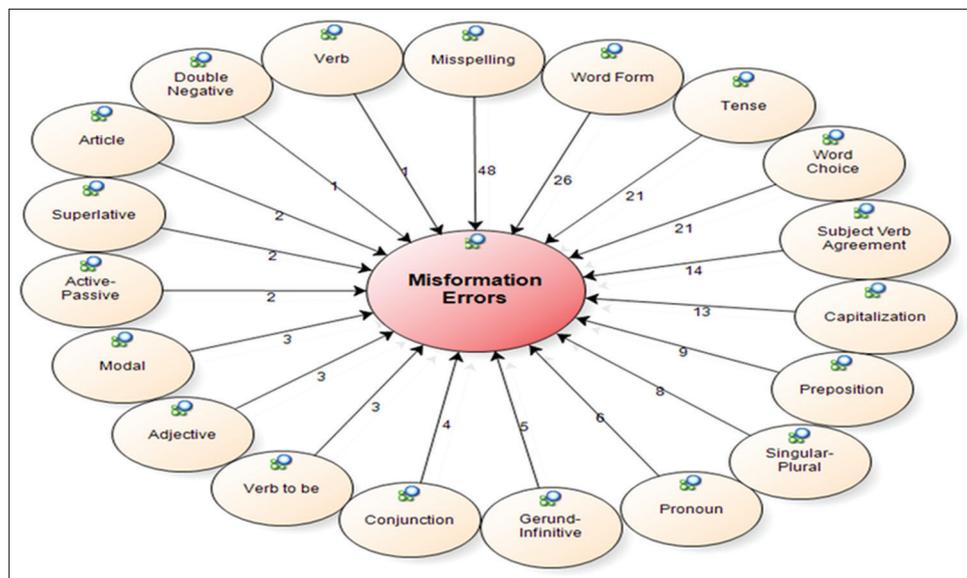**Correct Use:** You learn a lot of *things*.

Figure 3. Subgroups under the category of misformation and their frequencies

The second most frequent error type is omission errors. It is observed that students made 113 omission errors, which makes up 29.65% of total errors. Omission errors are characterised by the absence of a word or structure, the existence of which is necessary for the sentence to be correct. Figure 4 given below shows the types of omission errors with respect to their frequencies.
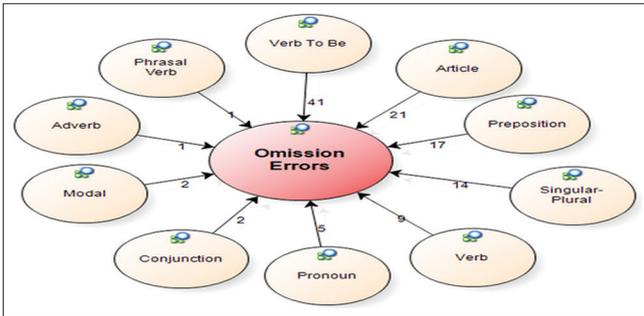

Figure 4. Types of omission errors

As can be seen in Figure 4, the most frequent types of omission errors are; verb "to be" errors, article, preposition, singular/plural, verb, pronoun, conjunction, modal auxiliary, adverb and phrasal verb errors. The most frequent (f=41) type of omission errors is verb "to be" errors. Some examples concerning this type of errors are given below with their correct use.

Student 7 (S7): What bad.
Correct Use: What *is* bad?
S38: Some people very angry.
Correct Use: Some people *are* very angry.
Omission of articles is the second most frequent (f=21) error type encountered in the study. Some examples involved in this category are given below;
S40: I think most important skill is….
Correct Use: I think *the* most important skill is….
S44: You have nice hearth.
Correct Use: You have *a* nice hearth.
Examples for other types of errors given in the figure above such as prepositions, singular/plural, verb, pronoun, conjunction, modal auxiliary, adverb and phrasal verb are given below.
Prepositions:
S17: He wants money your friends.
Correct Use: He wants money *from* your friends.
Singular/Plural:
S20: They can do a lot of *thing*.
Correct Use: They can do a lot of *things*.
Verb:
S24: If the war the World.
Correct Use: If the war *breaks out* in the world.
Pronoun:
S45: I want to keep it.
Correct Use: I want *her* to keep it.
Modal Auxiliary:
S17: We use social media safely.
Correct Use: We *must* use social media safely.
The third most frequent error type observed in students' papers are *addition* errors. The frequency of this type of errors is 65. The most common errors under this category

are; preposition, article, singular-plural, verb to be, verb, adjective, conjunction, modal auxiliary and tense errors. The figure demonstrating error types under the category of addition errors together with their frequencies is given below Figure 5.
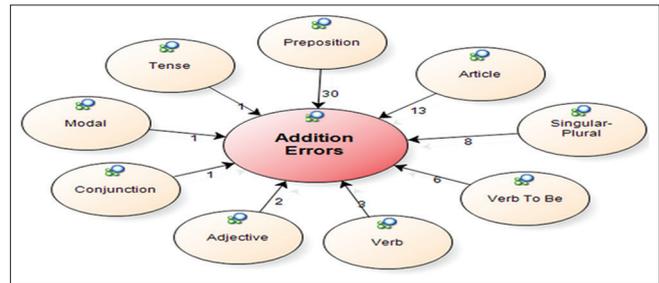

Figure 5. Error types under addition category

As can be seen in the figure, the most frequent error type is preposition errors (f=30). Thirty sentences having preposition errors were observed in exam papers. Some examples are given below.
Student 7 (S7): They go *to* abroad.
Correct Use: They go abroad.
S5: I suggest *for* everyone.
Correct Use: I suggest everyone.
On the other hand, a sum of 13 sentences were spotted including article errors, which is the second most frequent error type under addition errors category. Some citations exemplifying this type of errors are given below.
S19: *The* a man fly like a bird.
Correct Use: A man flies like a bird.
S38: I love *the* kids.
Correct Use: I love kids.
Examples of singular-plural errors and others shown in the figure above are given below consecutively.
Singular-Plural:
S31: *Childrens* are addicted this game.
Correct Use: *Children* are addicted to this game.
S20: very good *peoples*.
Correct Use: very good *people*.
Verb To Be:
S44: You will *be realize*.
Correct Use: You will realize.
Verb:
S7: They need to *get* relax.
Correct Use: They need to relax.
Conjunction:
S49: *If* when I made a big mistake.
Correct Use: When I made a big mistake.
The least frequent category among the four major categories is *misordering* errors. It is a kind of error characterised by misplacing one of the elements of a sentence and it is concerned with syntax. No figure is given for this category as there is only one error type, which is misordering. Some examples are given below containing errors pertaining to this category.
Student 8 (S8): Which *have we got skills* for future?
Correct Use: Which *skills have we got* for future?
S3: We will see, what *happen will.*

Correct Use: We will see, what *will happen*.
S21: What kind of *do you have talent*?
Correct Use: What kind of *talent do you have*?

When the findings are examined as a whole, it was observed that the most frequent error categories were misformation, omission, addition and misordering, respectively. It is remarkable that, except for misordering errors, there were error types common in all three major error categories, which were; verb "to be", articles, prepositions, singular/plural, verbs, conjunctions and modal auxiliaries. In addition, pronoun errors were common in both misformation and omission categories; tense and adjective errors were common in both misformation and addition categories.

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Discussion

As was stated above, data on errors in writing tasks were collected from 57 higher education students attending the preparatory class of a state university in Turkey. Students were asked to write a paragraph on up-to-date subjects. All the paragraphs written by students were analysed in accordance with the rules of English grammar. The first three most frequent error types were preposition, verb "to be" and misspelling errors. A sum of 22 error types was identified with varying frequencies.

The most frequent error type observed in this study was preposition errors. These errors may stem from the different positions of prepositions in a sentence in English and Turkish. Unlike English, Turkish is an agglutinative language, which means that affixes with a variety of functions like tense, personal pronoun, modal auxiliaries, prepositions of place and time are added or "glued" to the root forms of words. Prepositions are added as suffixes to the end of the root word in Turkish and it is still a single word. However, it is comparatively hard to teach a Turkish student to place the preposition before a word. This is called mother tongue interference (Ellis, 1997) or interlingual transfer (Richards, 2004) by the leading scholars in the field of linguistics. Making a distinction among the prepositions and choosing the correct one is another challenge for learners at this stage. The second most frequent error type was verb "to be" errors. These errors can be accounted for by the fact that there are no auxiliary verbs in Turkish. The functions of auxiliary verbs such as tense and positivity-negativity are reflected by suffixes in Turkish, therefore, auxiliary verbs aren't needed. In addition, all the words used in a sentence have a meaning in Turkish. The words or structures that don't affect the meaning of a sentence directly may be ignored by a student whose native language is Turkish. The third most frequent error type is misspeling errors. It may stem from carelessness, writing fast and different pronunciation rules in Turkish and English. Each letter in a word in Turkish represents a sound and must be pronounced. However, not all the letters in the words in English are pronounced. Therefore, the students may be inclined to write only the letters that are directly pronounced in words and omit the ones that are not pronounced as is the case with their native language. Another group of errors made by the students is the one concerning the use of articles. No articles are used in Turkish having the same functions as those in English. So, students may have neglected the use of articles as they seem redundant in a sentence in Turkish. Singular/plural errors were also made by the students in the paragraphs they wrote. Plural form is formed in Turkish in a similar way as it is made in English, using a plural suffix. However, there are no irregular plurals in Turkish and plural suffix can be added to even uncountable nouns. When used as a subject, plural suffix is added to the noun but when it is the object of the sentence or when it is preceded by an adjective of quantity, the noun doesn't take the plural suffix in Turkish. These differences may have led to the misuse of plural forms in sentences in English. Another major error category consists of errors regarding word form and word choice. The different syntactic structures of the two languages make it harder for the learners to form correct sentences using the right form of the words.

The data obtained in this study were analysed in accordance with Surface Strategy Taxonomy suggested by Dulay, Burt and Krashen in 1982. This taxonomy categorises learner errors into four as omission, addition, misformation and misordering errors. A sum of 381 errors were identified in this study and the most frequent error category was misformation errors (f=192, 50.39%). The second most frequent error category was omission errors (f=113, 29.65%). Addition (f=65, 17.06%) and misordering (f=11, 2.88%) errors followed these categories.

When the related literature was reviewed, it was observed that there are some studies on error analysis in EFL writing and some of those studies used Surface Strategy Taxonomy as is the case with this study. In a study carried out at a university by Limengka and Kuntjara in 2013, it was indicated that students made 181 misformation errors (68,05%), 54 omission errors (20,3%), 16 addition errors (6,02%) and misordering errors (3,76%). The findings of the study are similar to those obtained in this study with respect to the frequency and order of the errors. Noviyanti (2013) identified 99 misformation errors (%57,9%), 51 omission errors (29,8%), 13 addition errors (7,6%) and 8 misordering errors (4,7%), which again corresponds to the findings of this study. Suwastini and Yukti (2017) found out in their study that students made 217 misformation errors (52,29%), 152 omission errors (36,63%), 39 addition errors (9,4%) and 7 misordering errors (1,69%). Finally, a more recent study carried out by Miko (2018) at a university revealed that undergraduate students made 144 misformation errors (42,72%), 107 omission errors (31,75%), 68 addition errors (20,17%) and 18 misordering errors (5,34%). The findings of the studies listed above demonstrate that students have common errors in the process of learning a foreign language despite different backgrounds, levels and settings. It is also remarkable that the order of the frequencies of the four major error categories are the same in all four studies given above.

On the other hand, some research findings don't completely support the findings of this study. Alfiyani (2013) discovered that undergraduate students made 281 omission

errors (47,22%), 189 misformation errors (31,7%), 119 addition errors (19,98%) and 6 misordering errors (1%). In addition, in a study conducted by Suhono on 36 participants in 2016, it was found out that students made 131 omission errors (51,7%), 68 misformation errors (26,8%), 43 addition errors (16,9%) and 11 misordering errors (4,34%). In another study carried out by Al-husban on 33 first year undergraduate students in 2017, it was identified that there were 103 omission errors (31,3%), 82 addition errors (24,9%), 76 misformation errors (23,2%) and 68 misordering errors (20,6%) in student works. Finally, Tiarina (2017) observed in the study on university first year students that students made 27 omission errors (47%), 16 misformation errors (28%), 12 addition errors (21%) and only 2 misordering errors (4%). These studies indicate that misordering is the least frequent error category among students. Addition errors follow misordering errors except for one study, in which it is the second most frequent error category. When it comes to the most frequent one, omission errors prevail all the categories followed by misformation errors. When the frequencies and percentages of major error categories in all eight studies given in the two successive paragraphs above are taken into consideration, it can be stated that misformation errors are still the dominant category followed by omission errors as is the case with this study. Also, addition and misordering errors are the third and the fourth error categories, which again supports the findings of this study.

Conclusion

It is quite natural to make errors while learning a foreign language and it is an essential phase before mastering the target language completely. If learners are forced not to make errors during the process of learning a foreign language, they may avoid using the target language, which is fairly necessary to improve language skills. The more they practice, the fewer errors they will make. It is very hard to eliminate errors in the target language without using the language. What is more, errors provide us with valuable information regarding the difficulties learners encounter while learning the target language. This helps researchers to develop a more workable curriculum for a specific group of foreign language learners having the same native language. Moreover, these errors can aid teachers to spot what areas of language are problematic for students. Also, having determined areas of difficulty, teachers can use this information for their future students as students speaking the same native language are inclined to do same or similar mistakes.

It was observed in this study that students made one error in every four sentences they wrote. When the fact that they are predominantly false beginners is taken into consideration, it can be claimed that the number of errors are not too high. The different grammatical structures of Turkish and English can be regarded as the major cause of errors in this study. Prepositions, verb *to be*, articles, singular/plural forms and tenses are the main grammatical structures used in different ways in the two languages. Misspelling, word form, word choice, capitalisation and word order are other areas of language where errors are observed.

Mother tongue interference was shown as the major cause of errors in this study. In different categorisations of errors, errors caused by mother tongue interference can also be regarded as interlingual errors. According to Touchie (1986), interlingual errors are caused by the influence of the mother tongue. Corder (1974), states that interlingual error is caused by transfer error. According to Taylor (1983), inter-language transfer dominates in the early stages of language learning. Richards (2004) and Brown (2007) classified intralingual errors as one of the main sources of errors in addition to interlingual errors. On the other hand, the studies carried out by Gürsel (1998), Yılmaz (2004), Çepni (2014), Suhono (2016), Suwastini and Yukti (2017) and Mantarlı (2019) demonstrated that intralingual errors outweigh interlingual ones. Surprisingly, both interlingual and intralingual factors may be at play at the same time in the same error (Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006). However, as Surface Strategy Taxonomy was taken into consideration in this study, the errors were not categorised as interlingual or intralingual.

Recommendations

It is inevitable for foreign language learners to make errors and these errors should be tolerated. Unless the errors are tolerated, it will be difficult for learners to master a language self-confidently. It is not a widely accepted rule to correct each error immediately whenever they are made. Error correction should be performed sensitively as learners shouldn't be offended and discouraged in language learning process. Therefore, it could be a good idea to let students discover and correct their errors on their own and sometimes with peers. Also, some recent online applications, which show the mistakes and errors on the text as soon as it is written, can be used for this purpose. This way, students can figure out their errors better. Teachers can help students improve themselves in the troublesome areas of language.

It was observed in this study that misformation was the most frequent error among the students followed by omission errors, addition errors and misordering errors. One of the main implications of this study is that the professionals teaching English as a foreign language should heavily focus on prepositions, verb "to be", spelling, articles, singular/plural forms of nouns, word formation, tenses, word choice and subject-verb agreement, respectively as they were the most problematic areas of language listed under the four main categories given above. Also, they should respect learners' errors and set up a positive atmosphere where learners can easily express themselves in the target language without the fear of committing errors.

Ellis (2008) emphasizes that there is clear evidence regarding the contribution of corrective feedback to learning. So, it is essential to analyse learners' errors and provide learners with corrective feedback. This will both provide an insight into the difficulties learners face and help them to make a self-assessment regarding their language learning process. It will also enable researchers to predict possible future errors beforehand and take necessary measures while developing the curriculum and designing materials and activities in language learning process.

Foreign language teachers should be prepared to see errors in their students' works and tell their students that making errors is a part of language learning process. Students should also be convinced that their errors are valuable indicators of the problems they face in language learning process. Errors demonstrate where students and teachers need to focus on in order to overcome the errors as soon as possible. As a doctor needs to see the symptoms of a disease first so as to diagnose it correctly, language teachers also need to see the errors first to spot troublesome areas of language and implement the required interventions.

Writing is the most demanding area of language with respect to expectations from learners. Unlike speaking, students usually have enough time to think and produce sentences in writing. Therefore, students should be given enough time in order to minimise the risk of making errors due to time constraints. In addition, some students may have difficulty in writing even in their native language and they may have developed negative attitudes towards writing. So, teachers should try to neutralise students' negative attitudes towards writing so as to make sure that student errors result from lack of knowledge in English.

Implications for Future Research

This study was carried out at undergraduate, preparation class level. There is considerable research on error analysis at undergraduate level. However, each research is precious as each of the samplings involved in error analysis studies have distinctive characteristics and thus every study has the potential to contribute something new to the field of error analysis. Type of the language to be learned (L2 or foreign language), language level of the participants, age group, setting of the research, facilities available in the learning environment, and development level of the country in which the study is carried out are all important factors that play a significant role on language learning. So, studies on error analysis should be varied to get data from as many samplings as possible to increase the insight into the error analysis and language learning process.

The data for this study were obtained from exam papers of students. As stated above, students need enough time to produce grammatically correct sentences. As the students wrote the paragraphs in an exam, the time allocated to writing part of the exam may not have been adequate for students. This may have increased the number of errors they made. So, students should be given enough time to write whatever they are assigned to observe their real performance.

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