



R.T.

UFUK UNIVERSITY

GRADUATE SCHOOL OF SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGE TEACHING

ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING PROGRAMME

**SYNTAX-BASED ERROR ANALYSIS ON WRITINGS OF  
UNIVERSITY PREP SCHOOL PRE-INTERMEDIATE LEVEL  
STUDENTS**

MASTER'S THESIS

HÜLYA GÜRBÜZ

SUPERVISOR

ASST. PROF. DR. BERRA ABBASOĞLU

ANKARA

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## BİLDİRİM

Hazırladığım tezin tamamen kendi çalışmam olduğunu ve her alıntıya kaynak gösterdiğimi taahhüt eder, tezimin kağıt ve elektronik kopyalarının Ufuk Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü arşivlerinde aşağıda belirttiğim koşullarda saklanmasına izin verdiğimi onaylarım:

- Tezimin tamamı her yerden erişime açılabilir.

11/06/2024

Hülya GÜRBÜZ

## DEDICATION



*To victims of violence against women...*

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## ÖZ

GÜRBÜZ, Hülya. Üniversite hazırlık sınıfında yabancı dil olarak İngilizce öğrenen orta altı seviye öğrencilerin yazılarının sözdizimsel –syntactic- hata analizi, Yüksek Lisans Tezi, Ankara, 2024.

Bu durum çalışmasının amacı, bir devlet üniversitesinin hazırlık okulunda İngilizce öğrenen, ana dili Türkçe olan öğrencilerin bir akademik dönem boyunca yazılarında yaptıkları sözdizimsel hataları irdelemektir. Nitel araştırma desenine göre yürütülen bu çalışmaya katılan öğrenciler, elverişli örneklem yöntemi ile, CEFR kıstaslarına göre A2 seviyesinden, başka bir deyişle alt orta seviyeden seçilmiştir. Müfredat gereği bir akademik yarı yıl boyunca öğrenciler, CEFR tanımlıklarına uygun olarak hazırlanan sorulara cevaben akademik yazım kurallarını gözeterek paragraf uzunluğunda yazılar yazmıştır. Toplam 28 öğrenciye ait 112 adet sınav kağıdından yaklaşık 11.000 sözcük hacminde bir öğrenen ara dil derlemi elde edilmiştir. Corder'ın (1974) hata analizi işleminin uygulanması neticesinde şu sonuçlara ulaşılmıştır. Toplam 1.052 adet sözdizim hatası sayılmış; en fazla hata, belirleyici türündeki dilbilgisi biriminde görülmüştür. Bunu, fiil ve edat hataları takip etmiş; cümlelerin öğelerinin dizilişi, bağlaç ve zamir türünde görece çok daha az sayıda hataya rastlanmıştır. Hataların %41,73'ü anadilden kaynaklı, %51,33'ü hedef dilden kaynaklıdır, %6,94'ünün ise kaynağı belirsizdir. Dilbilgisi birimine göre hata sıklığında dönem içerisinde değişiklikler meydana gelmiştir. Belirleyici hataları tüm sınavlarda en önemli yeri tutarken fiil kullanımından kaynaklı hatalar dönem başında ikinci sırada yer almış, zamanla azalmış, ancak dönem sonunda aniden yükselmiştir. Edat kullanımından kaynaklı hatalar ise dönem içerisinde önce yükseliş, sonra düşüş göstermiştir. Sonuçlar alanyazındaki kimi çalışmalarla benzerlik gösterirken kimi çalışmalarla tezat sunmaktadır. Türkçeden kaynaklanan hataların çok olmasının, öğrencilerin İngilizcenin başlangıç seviyesi olması ile ilgili olduğu düşünülmektedir. Aynı şekilde İngilizcenin özelliğinden kaynaklanan hataların çok olması da öğrencilerin hedef dile uyum sağlamaya çalışma çabası olarak yorumlanmaktadır.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** yabancı dil olarak İngilizce, sözdizim, tanımlık, hata analizi, ana dilden kaynaklı hatalar, dil içi hatalar, uzunlamasına çalışma, Türkçe, CEFR

## ABSTRACT

GÜRBÜZ, Hülya. Syntax-based error analysis on writings of university prep school pre-intermediate level students. Master's Thesis, Ankara, 2024.

This study aimed at exposing the frequency, type and source of syntactic errors committed by CEFR pre-intermediate preparatory class L1 Turkish adult EFL learners in writing exams. It was conducted as a case study adopting descriptive qualitative approach. 28 students were reached via convenience sampling and their exam papers were collected in four consecutive written exams throughout a semester. A small learner corpus of around 11.000 words were derived from the participants' paragraph-length written outputs. Error analysis yielded a total of 1.052 syntactic errors in four exams, the highest number of errors occurring in the second exam and the smallest number in the last exam. The highest frequency of errors was seen in determiners, particularly articles, followed by verbs and prepositions. The least erroneous categories were word order, conjunctions, and pronouns. In the curve of errors, determiners constituted the most prevalent error type across all exams, while verbs became the second, third or most frequent type of errors in different exams. Similarly, prepositions were the second or third most common error type. As regards the source of errors, 51,33% accounted for intralingual errors and 41,73% interlingual errors. The remaining 6,94% was identified with neither source. High L1 error rates might be due to the lower proficiency level of learners, and higher L2 errors conform with the existing literature in that developmental errors outweigh crosslinguistic errors made by learners in second language acquisition contexts.

**Keywords:** EFL, interlanguage, syntax, error analysis, articles, error analysis, writing, interlingual, intralingual, Turkish adult learners, CEFR, longitudinal study

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

|            |                                     |
|------------|-------------------------------------|
| <b>EFL</b> | : English as a Foreign Language     |
| <b>ELT</b> | : English Language Teaching         |
| <b>ESL</b> | : English as a Second Language      |
| <b>L1</b>  | : First Language                    |
| <b>L2</b>  | : Second Language                   |
| <b>SLA</b> | : Second Language Acquisition       |
| <b>TL</b>  | : Target Language (Second Language) |



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## INTRODUCTION

This section provides the background to the study, statement of the problem, the purpose and research questions of the study, the significance of the study and the key concepts and terms used in the study.

The following sections follow a certain order. Chapter 1 lays the theoretical foundation for the study by explaining the most basic concepts, a synopsis of error analysis, and earlier studies in this area. Chapter 2 provides the methodological framework of this study. It justifies the research preferences from the main inquiry approach up to the data analysis. Chapter 3 represents the core part of the study, findings. It is shaped around the research questions to depict a coherent picture of the situation under scrutiny. The findings are also supported with direct quotations from the learner data to help readers do sound reasoning about the mistakes and their sources in relation to the English-Turkish language pair. Finally, Chapter 4 is reserved for the interpretation of the study findings so that the whole endeavour can be meaningful for the audience. The results obtained in this thesis are discussed in reference to other studies including both confirming and contradictory findings. That section ends with recommendations and the study conclusion.

### Background to the Study

Language is a means of communication. Different from animal communication, human language is performed in the forms of listening, speaking, reading and writing. Besides intracultural communication, intercultural communication has taken up a considerable place in modern civilizations. Learning and teaching of foreign languages has got its share accordingly. Among others, English language as lingua franca has always occupied applied linguists' mind. Numerous approaches and methodologies have been proposed to teach English as a foreign language (EFL) effectively so far. In the last century, a different skill or sub-skill received significant attention from linguists and educators depending on the underlying pedagogical philosophy every time a new approach was pioneered. The four main skills took their turn as the focus of language learning and teaching. Similarly, sub-skills such as vocabulary and grammar were given a varying weight.

As the world evolved into a more communicative place towards the new millennium, productive skills, i.e. speaking and writing, became more valued due to language users'

pressing need for expressing themselves in written and spoken form more than ever before. This, however, did not decrease the importance of grammar as it serves to send and receive the message accurately in both spoken and written communication.

Grammar is “a description of the structure of a language and the way in which linguistic units such as words and phrases are combined to produce sentences in the language” (Richards & Schmidt, 2002, p. 251). “Grammar is conveniently divided into two portions: morphology and syntax. Syntax may be roughly defined as the principles of arrangement of the constructions formed by the process of derivation and inflection (words) into larger constructions of various kinds” (Gleason, 1958, p.128). To put in another way, syntax is one of the two crucial aspects of grammar which deals with the ordering of words in a sentence.

As implied above, sentence structure is no less important than other aspects of language. However, the way learners’ errors including syntactic errors are handled went through a change during the last century. The earliest approach to learners’ errors was Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) put forward by Charles Fries and developed by Robert Lado (Akdoğan, 2021, p. 2). As suggested by Dulay et al. (1982), CAH was rooted in the behaviourist view of learning and it was popular up through the 1960’s. This hypothesis held that language learning is basically behaviour development and thus errors are caused by the learner’s mother tongue (p. 140).

The popularity of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis declined when observant educators and researchers recognized that a considerable number of student errors could not be solely attributed to their native languages. When S. Pit Corder emphasized the importance of learners’ errors in 1967, a new movement emerged. This new psycholinguistic approach was called Error Analysis (EA) and it endeavoured to account for learner errors by drawing attention to the diverse origins of learners’ errors. Ultimately, it has transformed the perception of errors from being entirely undesirable to acquiring a relatively special status as a research object, curriculum guide, and an indicator of learning stages (Dulay et al., 1982, pp. 139-141).

Corder (1967) suggested that learner errors matter for three things. Primarily, they serve as indicators of the learner’s progression and areas of deficiency. Secondly, errors offer insights into the learner’s strategies for language acquisition and their effectiveness.

Thirdly, errors are an inherent aspect of the learning process, serving as tools through which learners gain proficiency in the language.

Bearing these in mind, researchers and educators across various countries have dedicated extensive time to identifying errors in student writings and conversations thus far. These errors have been meticulously analysed, serving as a foundation for the development of theories and informing classroom practices (Dulay et al., 1982, pp. 139-141).

### Statement of the Problem

Dulay et al. (1982) say, “Errors are the flawed side of learner speech or writing. They are those parts of conversation or composition that deviate from some selected norm of mature language performance” (p. 138). They add that despite their diligent efforts to correct their students' or children's language mistakes, educators and parents recognised that errors are an essential aspect of the learning process. It is widely understood that language acquisition necessitates the systematic occurrence of errors as a fundamental step in the learning journey (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 138).

As cited in Dulay et al. (1982), sometimes researchers make a distinction between “mistake” and “error” based on Chomsky’s definition of “mistakes” and “errors”. Chomsky asserted that the former arise due to factors such as fatigue and inattention called “performance” factors, while the latter stem from a lack of understanding of the target language rules called “competence” factors. Despite the importance of such a distinction, the literature uses the term “error” to refer to any type of deviation from a selected norm of target language performance regardless of the characteristics or causes of the non-native like form (p. 139). The usage was adhered in this thesis.

The new mindset of error analysis gained a new dimension as Selinker coined the term “interlanguage” to refer to the special dialect of an L2 user (Selinker, 1969; Selinker, 1972). As stated in Karahan (2011, pp. 10-11), “interlanguage” denotes the distinctiveness of the linguistic system formed by second language learners, occupying a structurally intermediate position between the native and target language. While various terms have been used to describe the legitimacy of learners' second language (L2) systems, the concept emphasizes that learners are establishing their own autonomous linguistic systems. This neither aligns with the native language system nor the target language system but resides in between the two (pp. 10-11).

Karahan (2011) says, “The first most important feature of interlanguage is that it has its own legitimate system in which learners are no longer looked on as producers of malformed, imperfect language with mistakes, but as intelligent and creative beings who proceed creatively through logical and systematic stages of language acquisition” (p. 10).

She adds that a second crucial aspect is the systematic and dynamic nature of interlanguage, which undergoes changes as learners receive more input, constantly revising and testing their hypotheses about the L2 system. Interlanguage is independent, not rooted in the knowledge of the native language (L1) or the target language (L2). Every L2 learner experiences the process of interlanguage (Karahan, 2011, p. 11).

Lastly, interlanguage is a linguistic system reflecting the psychological process of foreign language learning. It encapsulates the evolving mental and cognitive aspects involved in the acquisition of a second language (Karahan, 2011, p. 11).

These developments have sparked scholars’ interest all over the world resulting in an immeasurably large research body on error analysis (Amiri & Puteh, 2017; Dulay et al., 1982; Duskova, 1969; Ellis, 1982; Gürsel, 1998; Long & Sato, 1984; Richards, 1971; Saltık, 1997; Terzioğlu & Bensen Bostancı, 2020; Wang, 2013; Wu & Garza, 2014; Yılmaz, 2004;). There are clear benefits of analysing foreign language learners’ interlanguage characteristics. However, there is still more room to investigate Turkish EFL learners’ interlanguage in terms of syntax. This thesis will be a contribution to the existing literature by bringing under light the syntactic errors committed by L1 Turkish learners of English as a foreign language (EFL).

### Aim of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore written syntactic errors committed by L1 Turkish learners of university level English as a foreign language (EFL) in a small-scale corpus consisting of students’ writing skill exams. The particular purpose of the study is to attain a full understanding of syntactic features exhibited by preparatory class students including the linguistic category, frequency and trajectory of such errors along with their possible interlingual or intralingual source appearing in four consecutive written exams.

### Significance of the Study

Corder (1967) argued that errors are essential for learners as they serve as a mechanism for learning. Therefore, errors have become a crucial aspect of learner language, offering valuable insights into the language acquisition process. By examining and analysing learners' errors during the process of acquiring the target language, educators can gain a deeper understanding of their nature and identify strategies for correction and improvement (Cited in Çepni, 2014, p.1). Corder (1982) argues that such understanding is necessary for making informed decisions about the development and enhancement of language teaching materials and techniques (Cited in Çepni, 2014, p. 1).

It seems that error analysis has an unquestionable place in language learning. As English is the most common language, the majority of error analysis research has been focused on this language. There exists a substantial body of literature, both in Turkey and internationally, concerning errors made by EFL students in both written and oral discourse, across a range of criteria (Amiri & Puteh, 2017; Duskova, 1969; Gürsel, 1998; Saltık, 1997; Terzioğlu & Bensen Bostancı, 2020; Wang, 2013; Wu & Garza, 2014; Yılmaz, 2004;). The literature encompasses numerous local and international studies that aim to investigate errors of all kinds (Atmaca, 2016; Çepni, 2014; MacDonald, 2016; Ngarsou, 2022; Olsen, 1999; Özışık, 2011; Tapılatu, 2023). On the contrary, error analysis studies focusing on specific linguistic domains, such as grammar or syntax, are outnumbered by those that explore other aspects of language (Al-Shormanı & Al-Sohbani, 2012; Altunay, 1989; Çetin Koroğlu, 2014; Karahan, 2011; Nkgadima, 2022; Özgen, 2010; Reguieg, 2021; Yalçın, 2010). Considering the relevance of syntax in accurate communication, there is a limited number of studies carried out on syntactic errors of Turkish students in EFL contexts. In addition to that, to the best of my knowledge and from what I could gather during my literature review, there is a scarcity of studies specifically delving into syntactic errors made by pre-intermediate level students in Turkey. This indicated a clear gap in the literature.

Taking these into account, this study will help narrow down the literature gap by shedding light on the syntactic errors and their causes made by L1 Turkish speakers of L2 English as a foreign language at tertiary level. It will lend a contribution to knowledge about the cognitive processes involved when Turkish individuals learn and use English as a second language. It is also expected to help both decision-makers and language instructors in the study area adjust the curriculum and teaching of English syntax if needed.

## Research Questions

This thesis aims to find out the syntax errors in introductory level EFL students' paragraphs in a higher education institution. To accomplish the purpose of the study, the following research questions were used:

- 1- What type of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) do pre-intermediate prep class tertiary level students commit in paragraph writing? What are the frequencies of their errors respectively?
- 2- What might be the sources of their errors (interlingual or intralingual transfer)?
- 3- Do the types of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) vary throughout one semester?
- 4- Do the frequencies of syntactic errors vary throughout one semester?

## Definition of Key Concepts and Terms

Most of the definitions here draw on the book Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics by Richards and Schmidt (2002).

- L1: (first language) a person's mother tongue or the language acquired first. Often this term is used synonymously with *native language* (p. 221).
- L2: (target language) a person's second language (p. 310).
- Interlanguage: the type of language produced by second- and foreign-language learners who are in the process of learning a language (p. 293).
- ESL: English as a Second Language (p. 196). In this study, it is used interchangeably with "EFL".
- EFL: English as a Foreign Language (p. 190).
- ELT: English Language Teaching (p. 192).
- Error: (in the speech or writing of a second or foreign language learner), the use of a linguistic item (e.g. a word, grammatical item, a speech act, etc.) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning (p. 201).

- Mistake: a non-standard use by a learner when writing or speaking and which is caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance (p. 201).
- Error Analysis: the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners (p. 201).
- Syntax: a major component of the grammar of a language (together with lexicon, phonology, and semantics), syntax concerns the ways in which words combine to form sentences and the rules which govern the formation of sentences, making some sentences possible and others not possible within a particular language (p. 579).
- Syntactic errors: mistakes or inaccuracies in the arrangement of words, phrases, or clauses within sentences. These errors typically involve violations of the grammatical rules governing the structure and order of words in a language. Syntactic errors can include issues such as incorrect word order, faulty sentence structure, or errors in agreement between different parts of a sentence. In this study, syntactic errors encompassed mistakes involving the absence, redundancy or misuse of constituents within sentences, such as subjects, verbs, objects, modifiers, and other grammatical elements. Moreover, mistakes regarding inflectional suffixes including third person singular “-s “ and possessive marker “ ‘s “ were considered to be syntactic errors.
- Second Language Acquisition, also SLA: the process of acquiring a second or foreign language (p. 514). In this study, it is used interchangeably with the term “second language learning” when referring to learning a language other than the mother tongue.
- Corpus: In this study, it refers to the collection of students' samples of language collected by the researcher.
- Interlingual error: (in error analysis) an error which results from language transfer, that is, which is caused by the learner’s native language (p. 294).
- Intralingual error: one which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language, rather than from language transfer (p. 294).

# CHAPTER 1

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### 1.1. Second Language Writing

Writing is one of the four basic language skills and it plays a central role in both foreign language and second language acquisition but it has not received due attention in language classes (Abbaszad-Tehrani, 2010, p. 7). Scholars stated views on the nature of writing. According to Chastain (1988, p. 244, as cited in Abbaszad-Tehrani, 2010, p.7), learners can benefit from this means of communication only after having a command of the writing system and the grammar of the language. Writing is a sub-field in its own right with challenges peculiar to itself. Prerequisites of this higher-level cognitive ability are expressed concisely by Bell and Burnaby (1984, as cited in Abbaszad-Tehrani, 2010, p.7). They point out that one needs to be able to use sentence-level variables (i.e. content, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, punctuation, spelling and letter formation) and textual devices (i.e. coherence and cohesion) at the same time.

Writing, as in the words of Harklau (2002), is a “literate modality” in language learning. As the name suggests, it requires being able to read and write, unlike “oral modalities”, namely listening and speaking. While spoken language has a place in all learning settings regardless of naturalistic or non-naturalistic nature, it is not necessarily true of literate modalities, especially writing, because they are applicable in the instructed language learning environment. This facet of writing makes it relevant to classroom-based L2 learning. Therefore, it often becomes a curricular module for ESL/EFL learners who choose to absorb a language in a school or a semi-formal educational organisation. As quoted by Harklau (2002, p. 342); Silva, Leki, and Carson (1997) contend that writing has a practical meaning as it is performed for “mundane” and “communicative” purposes, so L2 users have to make room for it in their academic and intellectual lives even though it is not always paradigm-shifting.

Also, writing is important for individuals’ self-expression. Halliday (1993, p. 101) says that literacy “expands one’s meaning potential”. Besides aural and verbal communication capabilities, writing allows L2 users to get their point across with an extra convenience. Writing allows for sharing one’s thoughts in a revisable format, different from the other channels.

Another remarkable reason for valuing writing in second language teaching was pointed out by Harklau (2002). Based on her classroom research, she argues that students get almost no linguistic feedback from teachers during or after spoken communication. However, teachers provide feedback on their written output regularly. In this way, students can take the advantage of reflection on their uses of language forms (pp. 331-332).

There are other reasons for appreciating the importance of writing. As cited in Abbaszad-Tehrani, 2010, Mosallanejad (1999) thinks that it serves the crucial purpose of acquiring a new language. Writing is one of the two productive skills and it uses similar brain functions as speaking. Due to this psychological parallelism, writing supports the development of speaking as well. She adds that writing follows a developmental path. Learners go through stages of differential difficulty before reaching a relatively mature level of expressing ideas and facts (p. 10).

Having all these in mind, writing stands out as an essential component of learning and teaching process in a language course. It deserves a reasonable amount of scholar consideration. Harklau (2002) claims that we need to research writing to understand how second language learners learn to write, but as importantly, to find out more on the pivotal role of writing in mastering a language.

## **1.2. Syntax versus Grammar**

These terms are sometimes confused. In fact, there is a meronymous relation between them; that is to say one is subset of the other. To put simply and clearly, “Syntax is a subdivision of grammar. Grammar comprises the entire system of rules for a language, including syntax. Syntax deals with the way that words are put together to form phrases, clauses, and sentences” (<https://prowritingaid.com/grammar-vs-syntax>).

Inevitably, syntax and grammar are related, and this relationship is described by Gleason (1958). To him, “Grammar is conveniently divided into two portions: morphology and syntax” (p. 128). When this definition is reformulated, it becomes obvious that syntax is the part remaining after deducting morphology from grammar. This study was carried out with this awareness.

Also, the literature review revealed that previous studies do not follow a uniform logic in setting apart syntax and grammar. In some studies, the coverages of the two

notions even coincide with each other. The overlapping is generally caused by enlarging the coverage of syntax by borrowing headings from morphology. Similarly, the current study was founded on a large portion of grammar beyond a narrow interpretation of syntax restricted to ordering of elements in a sentence. It was done with the expectation of richer study data and more interesting results.

As for the borders between the grammatical subsets, Gleason says, “Syntax may be roughly defined as the principles of arrangement of the constructions formed by the process of derivation and inflection (words) into larger constructions of various kinds. The distinction between morphology and syntax is not always sharp” (p. 128). Though different fragmentations are proposed in different sources, the principle above was adopted in this study. Apparently, trying to distinguish syntax from morphology poses difficulties. Therefore, decisions had to be made by the researcher in drawing a line between syntax and morphology during the practical stage of the study (see Chapter 3).

### 1.2.1. Syntax in Writing

The aim of this section is to provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of syntax, its significance in communication, and the ability to differentiate between "grammatical" and "ungrammatical" expressions. This understanding is crucial for laying the groundwork for the analytical examination in Chapter 3. Since the intention is to offer a practical investigation into the written language proficiency of adult Turkish learners, only essential points relevant to the analysis are highlighted in this section.

*As Fromkin et al. (2010) put into words,*

*The part of grammar that represents a speaker’s knowledge of sentences and their structures is called **syntax**. ... The rules of **syntax** combine words into phrases and phrases into sentences. Among other things, the rules specify the correct word order for a language. (p. 78)*

For example, “English is a Subject–Verb–Object (SVO) language.” The English sentence *The President nominated a new Supreme Court justice* is grammatical since the words occur in the right order, whereas the sentence *President the new Supreme justice Court a nominated* is ungrammatical as the word order is not correct for that language (Fromkin et al., 2010, p. 78).

In his work, Altunay (1989, p. 5) cites Atabay et al. (1981) by asserting that a deep understanding of a language's inherent nature hinges significantly on comprehending its syntactic structures and associated challenges. He goes on to cite Fromkin and Rodman (1983) stating that these structures, inherent to any language, are governed by a set of guidelines known as syntactic rules, which dictate how morphemes and words are assembled to convey specific meanings (p. 5). Notably, even though two sentences may contain identical words, like *The man walked the dog* and *The dog walked the man*, their meanings can diverge significantly. Proficiency in recognising and adhering to grammatical rules enables English speakers, as well as speakers of other languages, to discern grammatically incorrect utterances. Despite this ability, the mechanism by which our brain differentiates between grammatical and ungrammatical expressions remains a secret (pp. 5-6).

Altunay (1989) adds that syntactic rules encompass various aspects, including ensuring sentence grammaticality, regulating word and morpheme arrangement, managing structural ambiguity, acknowledging sentence paraphrases, delineating grammatical functions within sentences, and facilitating a speaker's capacity to produce and comprehend an infinite array of potential utterances (p. 6).

In the present study, sentence analysis was carried out by taking into account the criteria above. Samples in compliance with any of the restrictions were labelled as syntactically erroneous. More specifically, the following grammatical elements and constituents were covered under syntax and syntactic errors: noun phrase (including determiners, nominalisation, number, pronouns, prepositions, possessive case “-’s”), verb phrase (including main verb and auxiliary verb, copula, verb conjugation, subject and verb agreement, verb and verb construction, third person singular “-s”), and word order (including affirmative, negative and interrogatives; phrases, clauses and other formations). On the other hand, some issues such as tense selection and word choice were not included within the scope of syntax.

### **1.3. Error Analysis in Writing**

In simplest terms, errors are “the flawed side of learner speech or writing” (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 138). In other words, linguistic forms deviating from some selected norm of mature language performance are called errors (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 138). This definition brings along the question of distinction between *errors* and *mistakes* (Corder,

1967). According to Ellis (1997), an error takes place when the deviation is caused by lack of knowledge, which represents a lack of competence, whereas a mistake occurs when learners fail to perform their competence (p. 51).

How can errors and mistakes be distinguished then? One way might be to assess the systematicity of the learner's performance. If they consistently prefer the wrong form, it would indicate an error. Conversely, vacillating between the accurate and inaccurate uses would suggest a mistake. Another way might be to ask the learner to rectify their own deviant utterances. Where they are unable to do so, the variances are regarded errors; where they are successful, they are taken for mistakes (Ellis, 2003, p. 17).

Corder (1967) suggests restricting error analysis to the study of errors eliminating mistakes from the analysis (Cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 51). However, as stated by Dulay et al. (1982), it is often difficult to tell apart an error and a mistake without careful analysis (p. 139). Therefore, the term "error" is used to refer to any non-standard use throughout this thesis.

Corder (1967), the founder of Error Analysis, defined Error Analysis as a type of linguistic analysis that focuses on the errors learners make. According to Corder (1974, p. 125, as cited in Çepni, 2014, pp. 5-6), the study of errors is a part of the investigation of the language learning process. In this respect, it is a methodological resemblance of the study of first language acquisition as it gives a picture of the linguistic development of a learner, hinting at learning process at times.

In an early and influential paper, Corder (1967) highlighted the significance of errors in three key aspects: Firstly, they offered valuable insights to educators regarding the extent of a learner's progress. Secondly, they provided researchers with valuable evidence concerning the mechanisms of language acquisition. Thirdly, errors served as tools through which learners explored the rules of the target language. While the first point aligns with the conventional purpose of Error Analysis (EA), the second point introduces a novel perspective, particularly intriguing for second language (L2) researchers, as it illuminates the process of L2 acquisition. It is important to acknowledge that during the 1970s, many researchers conducting error analyses remained committed to language teaching. In fact, the endeavour to gain deeper insights into L2 acquisition through error analysis stemmed from a desire to enhance pedagogical practices (Ellis, 1997, p. 48).

Error analysis is carried out by following these steps:

1-Collection of a sample of learner language

2- Identification of errors

3- Description of errors

4- Explanation of errors

5- Evaluation of errors.

Step 5 was excluded from EA research as it has its own methods of enquiry (Corder, 1974, as cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 48).

Today, most teachers and scholars agree that there is more to language learning than mechanical drills. Learners need practice and it is a realistic way of improving language skills. One can literally perform their language by speaking or writing. Error analysis comes into play at this point because it is for use in analysing language learner's output for mistakes. Different from its forerunner of learner errors, error analysis brings to light the inner mechanisms functioning behind foreign/second language learning. It is inspired by the area of child language acquisition and it assumes that language learning process can be best understood by looking deeply into learners' non-nativelike speech or script.

Error Analysis (EA) is a relatively new turn in analysis of learners' errors and has sparked researchers' interest since its onset (see sections 1.4. and 1.5.). Thus far, it has led to countless studies in both written and spoken language despite having vagueness in some aspects. Many teachers and researchers focus on spoken and written extracts of learners' language including inaccurate as well as accurate uses. They collect and analyse real examples of language use in the hope of finding useful hints for all pedagogical actors.

Error analysis studies on L2 writing are copious. They have been conducted for a multitude of pedagogical purposes at macro and micro levels. As a result, a large literature has been created with a lot of results that might serve as a guide for SLA theoreticians and educators. They imply benefits of error analysis for various issues including remedial actions (Cizer & Boeru, 2017; He, 2016; Zafar, 2016), attitude

towards errors (Ngarsou, 2022), teaching paradigm assessment (Saeheaw, 2014), effect of nontextual matters on professional competence in English for specific purpose (ESP) contexts (Utkina & Kostareva, 2021), teaching planning and correction techniques attuned with students' needs (García-Pastor & Selisteán, RT, 2015), incorporation of context-specific teaching aids (Terzioğlu & Bensen Bostancı, 2020), and appraising difficulty of writing (Khatter, 2019) among others.

Error analysis is being heavily used in L2 writing contexts all over the world with a wide range of implications. It is hardly possible to refer to all of them in a limited space and time. Yet there seems to be room for new attempts in this area.

#### **1.4. A Brief Review of Approaches of Analyses of Errors**

According to Keshavarz (2012, p. i), two primary approaches have been adopted in studying learners' errors: Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis (EA). He further asserts that the former was underpinned by behaviourist theory and refers to its underlying assumption in the words of Lado (1957) as following:

“The student who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simpler for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult” (Cited in Keshavarz, 2012, pp. 8-9).

CAH enjoyed popularity during the 1960s, but it fell out of favour in the next decade. Among other reasons, it was shown that many errors were not due to transfer (Dulay & Burt, 1974a, as cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 308) and that many expected errors did not actually occur (Jackson & Whitnam, 1971, as cited in Ellis, 1997, p. 308). In addition to the absence of empirical proof, the theoretical climate of the late fifties and the early sixties provided the rationale for Error Analysis Approach (Dulay et al. 1982, p. 140).

Chomsky (1959) criticised Skinner's behaviouristic theory of language acquisition by arguing that it fails to explain the creative aspect of language use. He claimed that the stimulus-response relationships overlook innate linguistic abilities and cognitive processes. Instead, he proposed the existence of a "language acquisition device" that enables humans to generate infinite grammatically correct sentences.

While Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis focused solely on comparing the learner's native language with the target language, which are fully developed languages, Error Analysis (EA) introduced a methodological framework for examining learner language. Consequently, EA serves as a suitable foundation for exploring learner language and second language (L2) acquisition (Ellis, 1997, p. 48). Building upon the emerging cognitive theory of language acquisition, scholars proposed that second language learners should be viewed as actively constructing linguistic rules based on the data they encounter, gradually refining these rules to align with the target language system. This perspective suggests that errors made by learners should not be interpreted as indicators of failure; rather, they offer insights into the developmental processes of the learner's linguistic systems. Presently, theories of language acquisition increasingly prioritise the learner's perspective. Error Analysis remains relevant, as errors, as manifestations of the learning process, can provide valuable clues about underlying learning mechanisms and the strategies employed by learners (Er, 1990, as cited in Sığınç, 2008, p.7).

As Brown (2000) posited, Error Analysis was not immune from criticisms. According to some language researchers, it overly focuses on errors and excludes other important aspects of language learning. To start with, EA needs to consider both errors and non-errors to fully understand the learner's linguistic development. Overemphasis on errors can hamper language proficiency and undervalue correct performance, which is the primary goal of learning a second language. Another major drawback with EA is that it fails to account for the strategy of avoidance, where learners replace uncertain L2 elements with more confident ones to avoid errors. This can result in seemingly error-free output that does not necessarily reflect native-like competence (pp. 218-219). In spite of all the weaknesses pointed out, EA is still alive and well in the field of SLA, with many of the criticisms deflected by later researchers (Al-Sobhi, 2019).

### **1.5. Interlanguage**

In the realm of second or foreign language acquisition study, several cognitive accounts have been postulated. Perhaps the best known is interlanguage theory (Ellis, 1997, p. 30). The term “interlanguage” was coined by Selinker (1972) to refer to the language system that each learner constructs at any given point in development. The technical term implies that this form of language exists along a spectrum, with the native or previously learned language at one end and the desired target language at the other.

This "interlanguage" exhibits traits from both variations within the language constituting a unique systematic linguistic system (Selinker, 1972). In the same sense, Corder (1982) would name this language an idiosyncratic dialect shaped by the learner's individual competence.

## **1.6. Error Taxonomies**

For centuries, researchers have made attempts to explore types of errors and their sources across different learner languages. These efforts have resulted in several different categorisations including Corder (1971), Politzer and Ramirez (1973), Richards (1974), Dulay et al. (1982), Taylor (1986), and James (2013). Based on their comprehensive review of literature, Dulay et al. (1982) reported the most useful and commonly used bases for the descriptive classification of errors. They are (1) linguistic category; (2) surface strategy; (3) comparative analysis; and (4) communicative effect (p. 146).

### **1.6.1. Error Types Based on Linguistic Category**

Many error taxonomies are based on the linguistic item affected by the faulty use. The linguistic unit is either or both the language component (i.e. phonology, syntax and morphology-grammar together- semantics and lexicon, and discourse) or the particular constituent such as main clause or subordinate clause, noun phrase, the verb phrase, and other elements that comprise each language component (Dulay et al., 1982, pp. 146-147).

Curriculum developers have long used this type of categorisation to structure language lessons in textbooks and workbooks. Although there is a growing trend in second language course books to arrange content around thematic topics like renting accommodation or shopping, many are still organised according to linguistic category (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 147).

### **1.6.2. Surface Strategy Taxonomy**

As Dulay et al. (1982) put it, "A surface strategy taxonomy illustrates the ways surface structures are altered: Learners may *omit* necessary items or *add* unnecessary ones; they may *misform* items or *misorder* them" (p. 150) Examining errors through the framework of surface strategies offers considerable potential for researchers interested in discerning the cognitive mechanisms involved in learners' adaptation to the new language.

Furthermore, it brings to light the notion that learners' mistakes adhere to a logical pattern. These errors do not arise from a lack of effort or carelessness, but rather from the learner's reliance on provisional principles in generating the new language (p. 150).

The following paragraph expands on the four types of surface errors with respective examples.

**Omission:** “Omission errors are characterised by *the absence of an item that must appear in a well-formed utterance.*” (Dulay et al. 1982, p. 154) e.g. *I sick today.* This sentence lacks the “to be” and the intended variant must be *I am sick today.*

**Addition:** This type of errors is the opposite of omissions and it refers to the appearance of an unneeded item (Dulay et al. 1982, p. 156). e.g. *They didn't understood me.* This sentence was formed inaccurately due to the redundant use of the past form of the verb “understand”.

**Misformation:** These errors emerge as a result of “the use of *the wrong form of the morpheme or structure.*” (Dulay, et al., 1982, p. 158) e.g. *I weared my clothes.* A past tense marker was supplied here distorting the surface structure.

**Misordering:** As the name suggests, this type of errors is distinguished by the wrong placement of a morpheme or group of morphemes in an expression (Dulay, et al., 1982, p. 162). e.g. *What I will do now?* Apparently, this sentence shows the declarative sentence order rather than the interrogative, posing an inaccurate sample.

### 1.6.3. Comparative Taxonomy

This systematisation relies on “comparisons between the structure of L2 errors and certain other types of constructions” (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 163). It is used for sorting learner errors in accordance with their sources. Therefore, it is often referred to as sources of errors. Richards (1971) catalogued errors in two main groups: “interlingual” and “intralingual”. He initially identified a third source as “developmental errors” resembling to mistakes committed by children learning their mother tongue. However, he merged the latter two categories for convenience of presentation in the same paper. In the broadest sense, interlingual errors result from the mother tongue interference, while intralingual errors (also known as developmental errors) are caused by other factors which are comparable to those in L1 acquisition.

### 1.6.3.1. Interlingual Errors

As Dulay et al. (1982) pointed out, interlingual errors exhibit a similarity in structure to a phrase or sentence with equivalent meaning in the learner's native language (p. 171). For example, such an utterance as *He early wakes up* produced by a Turkish speaker reflects the word order typical in Turkish language.

Researchers commonly translate the grammatical structure of a learner's utterance into their native language to detect interlingual errors, searching for parallels (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 171). For example, if the learner produced such a sentence as *I tireded*, the researcher would translate the grammatical form *I got tired* into Turkish *Yorulдум* and then compare both sentences to ascertain if the learner's L1 is discernible in the L2 sentence. If such a similarity is not observed, the mistake is attributed to intralingual factors for further analysis before a definite decision.

The term “interlingual” is also named as “interference”, “negative transfer” or “crosslinguistic (influence)” in the SLA literature and they all are used analogously in this study.

### 1.6.3.2. Intralingual Errors

Richards (1971) said that although interference from L1 is clearly a major source of difficulty in L2 learning, many errors derive from the strategies employed by the learner in language acquisition, as well as from the reciprocal interference of elements within the target language. He asserted that intralingual errors in general reflect the general characteristics of rule learning, becoming manifest as faulty generalisation, failure to learn conditions under which rules apply, incomplete application of rules, and hypothesising about L2 from one's limited experience of it. These wrong uses are elaborated with examples below.

**Over-generalisation:** Richards (1971), citing Jakobovits (1969), defined this type of errors as “the use of previously available strategies in new situations” (p. 6). It happens when the learner invents an ill-formed phrase in reference to their experience of other structures in the target language. This trial and error may be because the learner strives to reduce their linguistic load. e.g. *He can sings.* or *We are hope* (p. 6).

**Ignorance of rule restrictions:** Closely associated with the generalisation of atypical linguistic structures is the failure to adhere to the limitations of established structures, specifically, the application of rules in contexts where their relevance does not extend. The following example could be representative. e.g. *The man who I saw him* (p. 9).

**Incomplete application of rules:** Systematic difficulty in the use of questions is a common occurrence of this type of errors. As the sample below implies, the answer often bears the influence of the question. *Teacher: What does he have to do? Student: He have to do write the address* (pp. 12-14).

**False concepts hypothesised:** This group identifies errors which are born by faulty comprehension of distinctions in the TL. These are sometimes due to poor sequencing of teaching materials. The form *is*, for example, may be taken for the indicative marker of the present tense, leading to the faulty composition *He is speaks French* (p. 14).

#### **1.6.4. Communicative Effect Taxonomy**

This classification concerns errors in terms of their impact on the reader or listener. It aims to differentiate between errors that appear to disrupt communication and those that do not (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 189).

**Global errors:** This section refers to mistakes that significantly disturb the overall organization of sentences and greatly impede effective communication. e.g. *We amused that movie very much. (That movie amused us very much.)* (Dulay et al., 1982, p. 191).

**Local errors:** These encompass mistakes that affect single elements in a sentence, not usually hindering communication significantly. e.g. *Why we like each other? (Why do we like each other?)* (Dulay et al., 1982, pp. 191-192).

#### **1.7. Error Analysis Studies**

If a popularity contest were held among research topics, Error Analysis would challenge the top ten. The literature offers a plethora of works dealing with errors of learners. Since it is not accomplishable to report them all here, the scope of previous

research was narrowed down to contain a few of those addressing mistakes at grammar and syntax levels in EFL/ESL learners' writings.

### **1.7.1. Studies in Turkey**

The most detailed examinations of syntactic errors made by Turkish learners of ELT are found in the works of Sebüktekin (1971) and Thompson (1987). Sebüktekin offers an extensive grammar manual of Turkish and conducts a comparative analysis between Turkish and English, aiming to assist English language educators in identifying problematic areas for their learners. Meanwhile, Thompson provides a concise overview of the syntactic errors observed among Turkish learners. He contends that Turkish students initially grasp fundamental English structures by leveraging their native language knowledge, but encounter difficulties when confronted with more intricate sentence constructions (Altunay, 1989, p. 24).

In certain aspects concerning word arrangement, Turkish students tend to make errors, as indicated by Thompson. These errors encompass various elements such as verbs, particularly "to be"; time, tense, and aspect; modal verbs, conditionals, the passive voice, participles and subordinate clauses, relative clauses, nouns, personal pronouns, articles, adjectives, quantifiers, adverbs, conjunctions, and prepositions (Altunay, 1989, pp. 25-28).

Departing from the foregoing, Altunay (1989) carried out a practical study to find out the common syntactic errors made by L1 Turkish university students learning English as L2. He collected data by giving a composition test and a translation task to four groups of students in four different universities, two groups at preparatory class and the other two at education faculty. As a result, the most important problem areas for both composition and translation groups were seen to relate to the sentence structure (e.g. wrong verb form, wrong tense, verb-verb construction), word choice and weak or vague expression. The frequency of errors varied in the tasks in that the composition test did not require the students' knowledge of LI but they needed to know both languages well for the other test. In general, both cases yielded similar problem areas.

Sürüç Şen and Şimşek (2020) analysed essays written by 17 preparatory school students at university to find out the most common mistakes made by intermediate level EFL students. As a result, a total of 14 grammar errors were identified, constituting the

most challenging aspect of language followed by lexical and mechanical aspects. The breakdown of the grammatical errors was as 20,97% prepositions, 17,48 % pluralisation, 14,68 % verb conjugation, 13,98 % article-related, 10,48 % subject-verb agreement, 9,09 % conjunctions, 6,99 % auxiliary verb, and 6,29 % word order.

Yalçın (2010) conducted a PhD study on ELT students to explore the syntactic error types in their English essays, to figure out whether the errors show any difference according to the grade level and the error type, and to describe the frequent errors emerging in the data. The corpus consisted of handwritten texts totalling 8794 words comprising argumentative essays written by 17 first-year students and 17 third-year students enrolled in the undergraduate program at the ELT Department of a Turkish state university. As a result, there were nine general types of errors in the texts. Among these, the most frequent were article, verb, noun, and pronoun use, making up 86% of all identified errors. Analysis using non-parametric tests revealed no notable distinction in error frequencies between the two levels of study years. However, it did highlight a significant distinction between errors related to article and verb usage compared to other types of errors.

Karahan (2011) conducted a two-stage error analysis study in a Turkish state university. In stage one, compositions were collected from 65 ELT students taking the proficiency exam at the end of the preparatory class. In stage two, 15 of 30 students who had previously completed the preparatory education were selected randomly for writing on the same topic before they finished the first semester of the first year in their undergraduate education. Their compositions were compared with t-unit analysis and One Way Anova test. As a result of the first stage, a range of grammatical errors were identified, namely prepositions, articles, plural morpheme “s”, subject-verb agreement, parts of speech, verb form, and verb tense. The second stage showed that the total number of sentences and error-free sentences increased while erroneous sentences decreased in the writings of the freshmen.

Duygun and Karabacak (2022) held a comparative study on writings of A1 level and A2 level students in a Turkish non-profit university. The data were collected from 32 students (16 from each level) attending the Foreign Languages School. The students were asked to write three narrative paragraphs (ranging in a 100-to-200 word each) producing a total of 96 pieces of writing. As a result, 478 errors were found in A1 and 280 errors in A2. In the former, 316 of the errors were related to grammar and 24 related to syntax

among others. The most common error types were seen in verb forms, missing items and prepositions. All of the syntactic errors were caused by mother tongue interference. In the other group (A2), there were 173 grammar errors and 10 syntactic errors. The most prevalent types of grammatical mistakes concerned verb forms, missing items and pluralisation. Of the syntactic errors, 60% were sourced from L1 interference and the rest of 40% was due to L2 rule learning. In summary, more than 90% of all mistakes were intralingual errors, the remaining being interlingual errors in both cases.

Şahan (2017) applied error analysis to written products of 106 ELT students at a state university. For this purpose, errors in 184 compositions written by students in the Advanced Reading and Writing course were identified through a scanning method. Errors were found in almost all grammar and spelling categories. Also, intra-linguistic errors overweighed the other source. In this category, a total of 632 errors were observed in 21 error types, while in the category of L1 transfer, a total of 318 errors were found under 6 error sub-categories.

Gürsel (1998) investigated and classified the errors in writings of the students from the Department of Foreign Languages. 76 papers were examined and it was seen that the most problematic area for Turkish learners of English was morphology. Syntax was found to be the second most problematic area, and it was followed by prepositions. When the errors were examined according to their sources, it was found that the intralingual errors were more than interlingual errors.

Tokdemir Demirel (2017) carried out an error analysis study to explore Turkish EFL students' major writing difficulties in a first-year academic writing course. As a result of analysing a corpus of 150 academic essays written by Turkish EFL students studying at the Department of English Language and Literature at a public university in Turkey, the most frequent errors were observed in the verb-related error categories. When considered individually, the most frequent errors were found in noun modification and were mostly interference related.

In another study, Çetin Köroğlu (2014) analysed Turkish EFL learners' errors with error analysis approach. It investigated grammatical errors in a corpus of 23 persuasive essays written by 23 Turkish EFL students at a state university. The participants were fourth-year student teachers of Arabic language teaching department. The grammatical errors were classified, identified and categorised. The participants made

intralingual errors besides L1 transfer in preposition use. Their intralingual errors included overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restriction and incomplete application of rules. It was concluded that the Turkish EFL students committed mostly interlingual errors in their persuasive essays.

Polat (2018) conducted a comprehensive study from a holistic standpoint, comparing the writing errors of A2-level undergraduate preparatory students from Turkey (n=5), Syria (n=5), and Azerbaijan (n=5) in terms of lexical, spelling, and grammatical aspects. It was aimed at discovering cultural differences in learners' errors. After qualitative data analysis on 60 pieces of writing using Corder's (1974) error analysis method, notable similarities were seen in error types between Turkish and Azerbaijani students, attributed to shared cultural and linguistic traits. Conversely, differences among the groups stemmed from negative transfers from their first language or cultural influences.

### **1.7.2. Studies Abroad**

This section also covers some of the notable studies carried out in other countries addressing grammatical and/or syntactic errors of learners.

To start with, a corpus study by MacDonald (2016) looked at errors in the written argumentative texts of 304 Spanish university students of EFL across all levels from A1 to C2. The corpus was compiled from two different corpora. As a result of analysis of the corpora by means of a digital tool, it was found out that grammar errors were the most common, particularly in noun phrases and determiners. The grammar errors decreased as competence level increased, with noun phrase errors being prominent across most levels but less so at the highest level (C2). Overall, grammar errors decreased from 50% at A2 level to 32% at C2 level, with variations in specific error types across different competence levels. In addition, noun phrase errors were found to be the most frequent among levels A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 (between 40% and 50% of all grammar errors). However, noun phrase errors were not so clearly salient (28% of grammar errors) at C2 but were similar in frequency to prepositional phrase errors (27% of grammar errors) and clause errors (25%).

Comparable studies are also available. In recent decades a series of studies on language learner errors (Chan, 2004; Dagneaux et al., 1998; Hayes, 2003; Izumi et al.,

2005) have highlighted that grammatical errors, particularly syntactic errors, constitute the most prevalent category among learners. Dagneaux et al. (1998) conducted a research to establish guidelines for an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) grammar and style checker for French-speaking learners. Their research data comprised two corpora: one containing advanced learner essays sourced from the ICLE database, and another containing essays written by intermediate students of comparable size. They categorised errors into seven main codes based on their analysis of the data: formal, grammatical, lexico-grammatical, lexical, register, word redundant/word missing/word order, and style. They found that the largest proportion of errors belong to grammar (32%), which was further subdivided into eight groups encompassing determiners, articles, nouns, pronouns, adjectives, adverbs, verbs and word class.

Chan (2004) examined how Chinese learners utilise English syntax in written communication. She identified more than 50 distinct types of errors originating from the English writing assignments given to Chinese learners. Chan then devised translation and grammaticality judgment tasks to explore the phenomenon of syntactic transfer. She posited that the errors were likely attributable to transfer due to their similarity to structures in the learners' native language (L1). Analysis of frequencies, percentages, and self-reported data from interviews revealed a significant influence of the learners' L1 on their output in the target language (L2).

Scott and Tucker (1974) conducted an analysis of errors made by 22 Arab students who were in their first semester of a low-intermediate intensive English course at university. The study aimed to characterise the interlanguage under examination and to pinpoint the origins, types, and frequencies of the students' errors. Their findings indicated that verbs, prepositions, articles, and relative clauses were the most frequently occurring errors. For instance, they observed that approximately 19% of the finite verbs used in the students' written work were incorrect. Additionally, errors in auxiliaries and copulas were also abundant.

As cited in Karahan (2011), Kim (1987) analysed 2455 errors found in English compositions of 12<sup>th</sup> grade Korean EFL students. The study highlighted that errors related to the use of “be” verbs and auxiliaries occurred the most (419), followed by errors in prepositions (287), and emphasised that most errors were intralingual rather than stemming from language transfer. In a subsequent study in 1988, Kim examined errors in English verbs concerning tense, mood and voice among 11<sup>th</sup> grade Korean EFL learners.

The analysis of 120 subjects translating Korean sentences into English revealed that mood errors were most frequent (903), followed by voice errors (885) and tense errors (720), totalling 2508 errors. Error sources were mainly attributed to overgeneralisation (65%), followed by first language transfer (22%), and simplification (13%). Additionally, in essay writings by 10<sup>th</sup> grade Korean EFL learners, Kim (1998) identified 2122 errors categorised into six main groups and subdivided into 22 linguistic categories. The study found that article errors were the most frequent (354), while errors in word order were minimal (8) and errors in passive voice were rare (2).

Another example showing a large number of syntactical errors was contributed by El-Sayed (1982) as cited in Karahan (2011). The participants in this study committed a total of 1140 errors, with 640 errors pertaining to verbs and verbals, 159 to pronouns, 143 to articles, and the remainder distributed among nouns, prepositions, and adjectives.

Chan (2004) examined the writing errors of 710 Hong Kong Chinese learners of English as a Second Language (ESL) across various proficiency levels, focusing on five specific error types: namely (a) lack of control of the copula (b) incorrect placement of adverbs (c) inability to use the “there be” structure for expressing the existential or presentative function (d) failure to use the relative clause and (e) confusion in verb transitivity. The findings provided supporting evidence for the transfer of syntactic structures from L1 Chinese to L2 English, particularly among learners at lower proficiency levels, when dealing with more complex target structures.

Lastly, Al-Shormani (2012) gathered empirical evidence regarding the origins of syntactic errors made by Yemeni Arabic-speaking university students learning English. 50 randomly selected learners from the third year of the Department of English participated in the research. To categorise these errors, a comprehensive taxonomy based on James (1998) and Al-Shormani (2012) was utilised. The sources of these errors were divided into four categories: L1-transfer, L2-influence, a combination of L1 and L2, and unrecognized factors. The analysis revealed that L1-transfer accounted for 27.90% of errors, L2-influence for 63.73%, a combination of L1 and L2 for 6.99%, and unrecognized factors for 1.38% of the syntactic errors observed in the study.

## CHAPTER 2

### METHODOLOGY

#### 2.1. Design of the Study

This study adopted a qualitative design to inquiry. It intends to collect, analyse and report data concerning written syntax errors made by pre-intermediate preparatory class EFL students at a public university. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative approach is appropriate when a problem or issue needs exploring, and it requires collecting data without manipulation. Also, Dörnyei (2007) highlights key methodological considerations regarding the main characteristics of qualitative research that can be applied to analysing L2 English learners' errors in a qualitative framework. Dörnyei emphasises the exploratory nature of qualitative research, noting its focus on uncovering novel insights or opportunities that may emerge during the investigative process (p. 37).

In this study, to analyse learners' syntactic errors together with their sources, the data needed to be approached by considering the context where students wrote paragraph-length texts and language learner mistakes can be unpredictable in learner datasets. On the other hand, Dörnyei (2007) asserts that especially sample size and the notion of generalisability are the two main weaknesses of qualitative research. However, Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005) contend that qualitative data, similar to quantitative data, can undergo comparison, facilitated by methods such as percentage comparison. Hence, in addition to its exploratory character, qualitative studies can serve as a foundation for broader quantitative investigations. In the literature on syntactic and grammatical errors of L2 English learners, a substantial number of studies have applied qualitative research steps manually or by the aid of some error-tagging software. As Dörnyei (2007) points out, while the previous studies are useful for suggesting broad statements about the error patterns, there still may be a need to explore types of syntactic mistakes and reasons behind those uses in the selected context. Taking these into account, data set of 112 exam papers were analysed qualitatively to spot and interpret syntax-level mistakes committed by Turkish EFL learners below intermediate level.

Among qualitative research types, case study best suits the main motive behind the current thesis. As stated by Mackey and Gass (2021), case studies generally aim to

provide a holistic description of language acquisition or usage within a particular group and context. Furthermore, they often offer intricate depictions of specific learners (or occasionally classes) within their learning environment (pp. 308-309). This study complies with the characteristics of case study. It also uses data that come from a naturally occurring situation which is not experimentally manipulated, as specified in Mackey and Gass (2021, p. 472).

Looking from a wider angle, this study can be classified as descriptive qualitative as it employs descriptive data analysis approach.

## **2.2. Setting**

For the study setting, a Turkish state university was selected in the capital city of Turkey. This was a deliberate choice because the researcher works as a full-time English language instructor at the Preparatory School of this university. Also, the researcher is particularly attracted to the idea of depicting the picture of syntax use tendencies of pre-intermediate level L1 Turkish learners in that school, which, as far as she is aware, has not been addressed in previous scientific papers.

The higher education institution hosting this thesis is one of the esteemed national universities high-achieving students are admitted based on the university entrance examination scores. The medium of instruction is English in almost all departments and faculties. Therefore, the students have to take a proficiency exam upon acceptance to university. Those who can take 70 points out of 100 proceed to their major of study, but the others are supposed to attend a one-year preparatory program, which covers all four skills. In the preparatory school, all exams during the year as well as the proficiency exam given as the exit test are prepared based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Council of Europe, 2020). The students at this school are placed in classes corresponding to their proficiency level ranging from Pre-A1 to B1 to excel in English until they reach the exit level B1+ according to the same criteria. Throughout the program, they have to take several examinations assessing receptive and productive skills.

## **2.3. Participants**

When conducting studies, researchers can employ either probability or non-probability sampling methods (Creswell, 2015). Like random sampling methods, non-

random sampling methods are also common to second language research. Non-random sampling includes systematic, convenience and purposive sampling. Convenience sampling refers to selecting individuals who are readily available for the study (Mackey & Gass, 2021, p. 228). As Dörnyei (2007) suggests, the most common study group appointment model encountered in second language studies is the ‘convenience’ sampling also known as ‘opportunity’ sample. Here, the primary consideration in selecting participants is the ease and convenience for the researcher. Individuals from the target population are chosen for the study based on practical factors like their proximity, availability, accessibility, or willingness to participate. A typical example could be groups like students at the researcher's institution, who are readily available, as in the present study (p. 98).

In this thesis, the participants were selected from the researcher's immediate surrounding by using convenience sampling among non-random sampling methods to reach out to valuable data to answer the research questions.

In the research setting in question, the students are distributed to classrooms randomly once their global level is determined through the English placement exam. On average, there are 20 students in each class and they are educated by the same instructor for one semester before they all are shuffled at the beginning of the following semester. As mentioned in the previous section, the students in any of the given CEFR level share the traits common to that band even though they study in different classes and learn with different teachers. Similarly, the instructors go through in-service training on a regular basis in order to best meet the criteria of teaching and assessing in the particular proficiency level they teach every academic year. There is also uniformness in terms of the teaching and testing materials including the textbooks and additional resources for respective pedagogical stages.

As for the sample size, this study comprised 28 participants of both male and female genders aged 18-20 and enrolled in various departments at the university. The study was carried out during the fall semester of the academic year 2023-2024. There were above 300 students in 15 classrooms at the pre-A1 level based on the CEFR at the beginning of the semester. As detailed in the following part, the study data were started to be collected when the students achieved the A2 level after schooling for nearly two months. The researcher had 21 students registered in her class but she made contact with

students in another class section at the same proficiency level in case there were not enough volunteers available.

With respect to the sample size, the guidelines in the literature were observed. Creswell (2015) says that the number of participants varies from one qualitative study to another. It is typical to examine a limited number of individuals or cases since the researcher's capacity to provide a comprehensive understanding diminishes with the addition of newcomers. There are cases studying one single individual or site, but the sample size might increase up to 30 or 40 in other scenarios. It must be noted that as the number of cases increases, it becomes challenging to provide detailed reports for each, potentially leading to shallow insights. Furthermore, the process of gathering and analysing qualitative data is time-intensive, and including more cases only extends this duration (p. 208).

Besides, the literature provides examples of case studies dealing with EFL learners' errors involving a relatively smaller number of participants (Atmaca, 2016; Polat, 2018; Sürücü Şen & Şimşek, 2020; Yahya & Hashim, 2014;).

As the third basis for the sample size, the volume of the corpus could be considered. In this study, a collection of 112 paragraphs written by the participants were analysed. This number of written specimens seems to be reasonable in comparison to similar studies in the literature (Al-Shormani, 2012; Erkaya, 2012; Khatter, 2019;).

## **2.4. Data Collection Instruments**

According to Creswell (2015), documents are a valuable information source in qualitative research. These encompass both public and private records gathered by researchers about a study's site or participants. Examples include newspapers, meeting minutes, personal journals, and letters. Utilising such sources aids researchers in comprehending key phenomena within qualitative studies. Documents offer rich textual data for qualitative analysis, as they reflect the language and expressions of participants, who typically invest thoughtful consideration in them. Moreover, documents are readily available for analysis, eliminating the need for transcription required in observational or interview data (pp. 221-222).

In this thesis, documents were used as the only data collection instrument. The choice was made without much hesitation since this research aimed to identify learners'

written errors. The documents were obtained from the students' regular written exams scheduled for the relevant semester. In the school of implementation, pre-intermediate level students have to sit for five open-ended writing examinations in a semester. The exam calendar is prepared and announced by the testing unit at the beginning of the half-year. During the creation of the exam questions, utmost care is taken for some issues. The questions are drafted and revised by a team of professionals in that unit while maintaining confidentiality. Also, the questions are written in strict compliance with the CEFR descriptors and the teaching approach adopted in the school. The students are tested by means of writing a formal type paragraph in response to an open-ended question on a different topic each time. During the 2023-2024 fall semester, the task types and scopes were announced as following: Exam 1- Writing on daily routines, Exam 2-Writing a narrative paragraph, Exam 3- Writing a descriptive paragraph (a place), Exam 4- Writing a descriptive paragraph (a person), Exam 5- Writing a formal e-mail.

The study data were collected from the students in the first four exams. It was thought that the paragraphs produced in Exam 5 contained a lot of set phrases and formal expressions that had to be memorised by students. They did not seem to provide reliable input and information about the students' syntactic errors; therefore, the papers in the last exam were not requested for the research purpose.

## **2.5. Data Collection Procedure**

In this study, data collection was carried out between 20 November 2023 and 5 January 2024, lasting for nearly two months. The students were studying English at pre-intermediate level within this period. They took four writing exams assessing their language development at intervals of two weeks on average. The topic and the content of the exams changed parallel to the syllabus.

A few weeks before each exam, the students were taught a new type of writing genre at paragraph length and were provided models. Then they practised writing the target paragraph type several times and received feedback from their instructors. Each genre was introduced with its target lexical and grammatical structures. Basically, the learning outcomes of the scheduled writing tests were as following. The learners were expected to be able to use the present simple to describe a person's habits and routine (Exam 1), use the past simple to narrate a past event on a familiar topic (Exam 2), use prepositions of place and "there" + "be" to describe a place (Exam 3), and use the most

basic structures to describe a person in a limited way (Exam 4). The grammatical objectives were accompanied by certain phrases and collocations relevant to the topic of each writing test.

On exam days, the exam questions were copied and delivered to the instructors by the testing unit on the same day. They were applied during class hours and proctored by the responsible classroom instructors. Except in the first exam, which asked the respondents to describe the daily routine of an imagined person whose everyday activities were shown on the exam paper, the students chose from two alternatives requiring the same type of writing task. For example, in Exam 2, the students were instructed to write a well-developed narrative paragraph on “*the last time you went to a concert or festival*” or “*your first day at university*”. Each session lasted for 45 minutes. The word limit differed depending on the students’ level. The minimum word count was set at 80 words in Exam 1 and 2, while it was increased to 100 words in Exam 3 and 4. Upon the obtaining of the ethical permission (Appendix-A), the students were then informed about the research project by the researcher asking if they would allow access to their exam papers for this purpose. Their approval was sought through an informed consent form (Appendix-B). They were assured that their names would be kept anonymous during the error analysis and reporting process if they took part. In two classrooms, 31 students in two classrooms agreed to participate in the study. However, three of them were removed on the ground of not attending all of the four tests. The reason is that one of the objectives of this research is to count and compare the syntactic mistakes made by the same group of participants as they progressed from one task to another throughout the A2 level. Therefore, 28 students’ written productions from four exams were copied and a total of 112 exam papers were filed for data analysis.

## **2.6. Data Analysis**

Due to the nature of the operations in this research, namely error analysis, descriptive statistics were used for analysing the data. There is a harmony between this research type and data analysis method as implied in McMillan and Schumacher (2013) saying, “Qualitative results are descriptive and often contain quotations from participants. Results from qualitative studies are also presented with tables and graphs, and findings are typically discussed when presented, integrating the relevant literature as appropriate” (p. 497).

In this study, analysis of data was conducted by following Corder's stages of error analysis as cited by Ellis (1997):

- 1- Collection of a sample of learner language
- 2- Identification of errors
- 3- Description of errors
- 4- Explanation of errors (p. 48)

Generically speaking, this study adopted document analysis technique for breaking down the dataset into meaningful components. In greater detail, the data analysis process progressed as follows. The researcher formed a small team of two assessors, one native English teacher, and an expert in second language acquisition. The researcher and one colleague with a similar background performed error analysis on the exam papers independently. They made lists of errors independently by recognising the faults, providing an account for the faults, and pinpointing the cause of the inaccuracies one by one. In cases where they could not be sure as to the accuracy or acceptability of some English utterances in the samples, they referred to the native-speaker, who works at the same school as the researcher. The assessors had frequent meetings to compare their analysis results. Their results were predominantly in agreement and they reached consensus on points of dispute when needed. In instances of doubt or confusion about the source of errors, the assessors consulted the expert, who is a professor of linguistics at Ufuk University. After all uncertainties were settled collaboratively, the errors were counted and divided into linguistic categories and grouped based on the source of errors. The results were displayed in pie charts by using the Excel and finalised for tabulation and further discussion.

## **2.7. Trustworthiness**

Qualitative research is generally approached with apprehension by positivists on account of questionable reliability and validity. Nonetheless, several measures exist to be taken by qualitative researchers as detailed by Shenton (2004). Shenton puts them in a nutshell under the title of four criteria as credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (p. 64).

Credibility can be regarded as the qualitative equivalent of internal validity, and it seeks the alignment of findings with reality (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). To strengthen this pillar, several techniques were used in the study. First, the researcher made efforts to collect data from as many informants as possible. Students in different class sections bound to the same academic level were contacted for potential cooperation in terms of data collection. Also, the duration of data collection was kept as long as two months so that a more realistic picture of the real situation could be captured. Secondly, the researcher chose to conduct the study in her own professional setting since familiarity with the educational context would benefit significantly in implementing the study and interpreting the naturalistic data. Another measure taken by the researcher was investigator triangulation. As mentioned earlier, the study data were analysed by another English language instructor besides the researcher, and cross-checks were done on the independent findings. As the last technique in this regard, the participants were informed that they were free to refuse to participate or withdraw at any stage without fear of facing unfair treatment by the teacher.

Transferability is about relevance of a qualitative study for new situations (Shenton, 2004, p. 7). To increase replicability of the present study, most actions suggested in Shenton (2004) were taken (p. 8). This research provided a comprehensive description of the sample size, methodologies, instruments, study group, and results in order to give a clue to future researchers if they want to repeat the study.

Dependability is really close to credibility (Shenton, 2004, p. 71). To ensure this aspect of trustworthiness, a transparent documentation of the entire project was provided in the thesis.

Confirmability relates to the qualitative researcher's focus on objectivity (Shenton, 2004, p. 72). To support confirmability, the decisions about methodology and data analyses were justified when they were applicable in the current study.

## CHAPTER 3

### FINDINGS

#### 3.1. Overview of the Findings

This chapter is devoted to a detailed presentation of the study findings obtained through document analysis on the students' exam papers. The results of the analysis are given descriptively in accordance with quantification stage in error analysis. The aim of the study is to provide a landscape of syntactic errors made by Turkish adult learners of EFL. The study findings are shown in order of the research questions. Also, direct quotations are extracted from the study data as necessary. Beforehand, some specificities are noted as they are special circumstances surrounding the analysis of the errors.

The following points need to be considered in reading and interpreting the findings reached in the study.

During the examination of the papers, mistakes in the grammatical subjects above the students' level were ignored. Some of these structures are the use of linking words *so*, *because of*, *such as*, and *for example* in formal writing; infinitive of purpose; and verb patterns except for gerunds following certain verbs about likes and dislikes. Erroneous uses were analysed or discarded by taking into account the syllabus. In other words, a syntactic error was recognised only if it occurred although the related L2 aspect was covered in class explicitly or implicitly.

Students' mistakes arising from wrong selection of tenses, words and parts of speech were ignored as they are largely bound to semantics and lexicology. Likewise, misspelling was overlooked as it is out of the scope of this research.

Throughout the data, the syntax errors were seen to fall under three major classes as noun phrases, verb phrases and word order. Nonetheless, the findings are presented at a lower level. At analysis level, non-standard uses were counted and described as errors of determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns.

The first linguistic category of errors was determiners. Redundant, wrong or non-use of articles, possessives, demonstratives and quantifiers were referred to as errors of determiners. Also, pluralisation mistakes were listed under determiners as they were

mostly about countable and uncountable nouns. Only one exception was made for quantifier mistakes while scanning Exam 1 because that grammatical subject had not been taught by then.

Secondly, verbs emerged as a category of errors. It contains any mistake in subject-verb agreement, third person singular –s, auxiliary verbs, copula, and wrong selection of structures used in similar contexts. For instance, *to be* and *have/has got* were mixed up while describing a person's basics.

Word order was restricted to the absence or wrong ordering of the main parts of phrases, clauses or sentences since they cause distortion in standard English language. The lacking of the subject, verb, direct object or adverb in some cases was labelled as a word order error. Sentential examples include *You can beach volleyball* and *He takes food...and put in the park*. Both of these sentences were placed under word order mistakes because the main verb or the object is omitted, respectively. Other missing elements were indexed in errors of the corresponding grammatical category including determiners, prepositions, verbs or pronouns. As an example, the lacking of *at* in the following sample was taken for an error of preposition: *We sit the dining table*.

Another sub-group of syntax in this study, conjunctions, referred to both coordinators and subordinators joining together elements of sentences. In general, any inaccurate use in linkers was labelled as an error of conjunction in the data analysis and reporting.

Lastly, in sorting of the errors based on their source, utterances that were ambiguous or seemingly indicated no definite source of error were classified under a contingent group called *Other*. Sentential examples: *He leaves to work* and *He chats his friends*. The latter resembles neither an interlingual nor intralingual error considering the syntactic norms of Turkish and English. The former was treated in the same way due to two equally possible meanings in the given context, namely *He goes to work* or *He leaves for work*.

### **3.2. Error Types and Frequencies**

This part presents the findings obtained in response to the first research question. Research question 1 is stated below.

**Research Question 1) What type of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) do pre-intermediate prep class tertiary level students commit in paragraph writing? What are the frequencies of their errors respectively?**

The answer to the research question above was derived from four exams. In parallel with this organisation, the findings are given separately for each of the four exams.

Although this question basically relates to linguistic categories and numbers of syntactic errors, sources of errors are also displayed in tables for a snapshot picture at a glance.

### 3.2.1. Findings regarding Exam 1

Exam 1 contained one open-ended question. The question was *Look at the chart and write about Brian's daily routine (minimum 80 words)*. It was supported with visual prompts on the exam paper. As a result of the analysis, a total of 236 syntactic errors were found in the papers. They emerged in six syntactic categories with different frequencies. Of the errors, 73 were in determiners, 62 verbs, 54 prepositions, 25 word order, 21 conjunctions, and 1 was in pronouns. In all categories, the relevant parts of the sentences are affected by the wrong use or lacking of some compulsory linguistic item or unnecessary addition of such an item. The numbers and distribution of the errors are shown in Table 1.

**Table 1.**  
**Types and frequencies of syntactic errors in Exam 1**

| Type               | f   | % in total | Source       | f   | % in sources |
|--------------------|-----|------------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Determiner</b>  | 73  | 31         | Interlingual | 36  | 49,3         |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 36  | 49,3         |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 1   | 1,36         |
| <b>Verb</b>        | 62  | 26         | Intralingual | 62  | 100          |
| <b>Preposition</b> | 54  | 23         | Interlingual | 5   | 9,25         |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 40  | 74,07        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 9   | 16,66        |
| <b>Word order</b>  | 25  | 11         | Interlingual | 17  | 68           |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 7   | 28           |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 1   | 4            |
| <b>Conjunction</b> | 21  | 9          | Interlingual | 21  | 100          |
| <b>Pronoun</b>     | 1   | 0          | Intralingual | 1   | 100          |
| <b>Total</b>       | 236 |            | Interlingual | 79  | 33,47        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 146 | 61,86        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 11  | 4,66         |

As seen in Table 1 above, the syntactic errors in Exam 1 are comprised of six types as determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns. The largest part was contributed by determiners (f=73; 31%). These mistakes were particularly concerning articles, pluralisation, possessives and demonstratives, but article mistakes were more frequent than the others.

Article errors were seen in performing of the functions of indefinite articles *a/an* and definite article *the*. The students could not place *a/an* before singular countable nouns or *the* before definite countable/uncountable nouns correctly in most cases. To exemplify, they omitted an indefinite article as in *He takes shower* or *It is very relaxing activity for Peter*, or they did not put a definite article as in *He plays piano*. Sometimes, they used an article before an indefinite or definite noun despite being unnecessary, like in *He has a special hobbies* and *He goes to the work*.

Possessives also inflicted mistakes on sentences. All of them were caused by unneeded or inadequate use of possessive adjectives. They were used with collocations or other words that usually go together leading to syntactic errors. Examples include *He goes to his home* and *He washes face and he changes clothes*.

Under determiners, pluralisation rules caused mistakes, too. They were mostly because of not annexing the plural suffix *-s* to countable nouns after quantifiers and to nouns following numbers or plural nouns for general meaning. One example for each follows: *He eats meat or vegetable*; *...he eats...seven olive...*; *He loves book*.

As for demonstratives, there were very few mistakes and they happened when *this* was chosen instead of *these* before plural countable nouns. The examples are as following. *He hates this activities*; *...he loves this meals*.

As can be seen in the table above, verbs yielded the second highest number of errors (f=62; 26%). They were predominantly related with the third person singular *-s*, and it was followed by other verb uses including verb-verb constructions, coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs, and verb conjugation in affirmative and negative statements in the present simple tense. Examples of mistakes in this category are as following, respectively.

*... his job start at 10:00.*

*He loves eat chicken.*

*He is listens to music...*

*His jobs is difficult.*

According to Table 1, the third most recurrent syntactic errors were found in prepositions (f=54; 23%). They were caused by addition of an unnecessary preposition, omission of a necessary one, or misselection of prepositions. The examples below are given to represent flawed use of prepositions.

*He always goes with by bus.*

*He chats his friends.*

*In breakfast he usually...*

In the table above, the next group of syntax errors was identified in the word order of the English sentences written by the students (f= 25; 11%). The majority of the word order errors were resulted from omitting the subject or verb or object in the sentence, and some were due to the wrong ordering of the elements in a phrase, clause or sentence. Examples are given below, respectively.

*Before leaves at home, ...*

*Because he tired.*

*...he gets up at weekends.*

*...but he has sometimes fish and salad.*

In Table 1, conjunctions revealed a relatively lower frequency (f=21; 9%). There were substantially sentence fragments with subordinating conjunction *because* and sequence markers *before* and *after*. Also, the latter was often used without the pronoun *that/this* while referring to the previous or subsequent action. Some of the erroneous utterances are given below.

*Because he really likes dinner.* (no superordinate clause)

*(...he brushes teeth.) After he has breakfast at 8:30 a.m.* (to give the intended meaning *After that, he has breakfast at 8:30 a.m.*)

The last and the smallest category of syntactic errors was pronouns (f= 1; 0%). There was only 1 mistake in this sub-group, and it happened because of confusion of a possessive adjective with an object pronoun as following: *That is tired for his.*

### 3.2.2. Findings regarding Exam 2

In this exam, the students were expected to write a well-developed narrative paragraph in minimum 80 words. They had to choose one of the two following topics:

*Write about the last time you went to a concert/festival.*

*Write about your first day at university.*

The analysis of the papers yielded 319 errors in total. The errors were seen in the same syntax items as in Exam 1. However, the frequencies of the errors were different. There were 157 mistakes with determiners, 79 with prepositions, 42 verbs, 26 word order, 10 conjunctions, and 5 with pronouns. The distribution of the errors is shown in Table 2.

**Table 2.**  
**Types and frequencies of syntactic errors in Exam 2**

| Type               | f   | % in total | Source       | f   | % in sources |
|--------------------|-----|------------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Determiner</b>  | 157 | 49         | Interlingual | 111 | 70,70        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 46  | 29,29        |
| <b>Verb</b>        | 42  | 13         | Intralingual | 42  | 100          |
| <b>Preposition</b> | 79  | 25         | Interlingual | 21  | 26,58        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 33  | 41,77        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 25  | 31,64        |
| <b>Word order</b>  | 26  | 8          | Interlingual | 16  | 61,53        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 8   | 30,76        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 2   | 7,69         |
| <b>Conjunction</b> | 10  | 3          | Interlingual | 9   | 90           |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 1   | 10           |
| <b>Pronoun</b>     | 5   | 2          | Intralingual | 5   | 100          |
| <b>Total</b>       | 319 |            | Interlingual | 157 | 49,21        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 135 | 42,31        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 27  | 8,46         |

As Table 2 demonstrates, the errors in this exam are scattered across six syntax items, which are determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns. The most prominent type was determiners (f=157; 49%). Determiner errors were particularly concerning articles, pluralisation, possessives, demonstratives and quantifiers, but article mistakes were by far the most common.

Article errors were related with the functions of indefinite articles *a/an* and definite article *the*. The students could not place *a/an* before singular countable nouns or *the* before definite countable/uncountable nouns correctly in most cases. To exemplify, they omitted an indefinite article as in *Aziz can use car* and *Finally we arrived on concert hall* and did not also include a definite article before ordinal numbers like in *First part was okay but second problem*. In some instances, they used an article needlessly before an indefinite or definite noun such as *I had a breakfast* and *We hang out in the Gölbaşı*.

Under determiners, possessives posed an area of problem, too. All of the possessive-related mistakes were caused by abundant or missing use of possessive adjectives. They were used wrongly before certain nouns (e.g. *Then, I came my home*) or words that usually go together (e.g. *I cleaned face*), double possessive marker was used (e.g. *Göksel sang a my favourite's her song*).

Also, pluralisation mistakes were existent. They were mostly because of not annexing the plural suffix -s to countable nouns after quantifiers (e.g. *There were many student...*) and nouns following numbers (e.g. *I went to a concert two month ago*), and rarely choosing the plural form instead of the singular for uncountable nouns (e.g. *My hairs...*).

Demonstratives and quantifiers showed very few mistakes. The demonstrative errors happened as *this* was chosen instead of *these* before plural countable nouns. e.g. *I never forget this times*. The quantifier errors happened as a result of combination of two quantifying phrases. The example is as following: *We took a lots of photos*.

The second most frequent type of syntax errors was found in uses of prepositions (f=79; 25%). These errors were caused by using the wrong preposition (e.g. *Then we left for getting ready to concert*) or omitting a necessary preposition (e.g. *It started 9:00 pm*) or adding a redundant one (e.g. *I went to concert with my close friends on last April*).

The third most frequent type of syntactic errors was found in verbs (f=42; 13%). They were predominantly related with verb conjugation, coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs, and verb-verb constructions. Examples of mistakes in this category can be seen below.

*...I leaved there.*

*...they didn't accepted pizza.*

*I did very happy.*

*This was made me angry.*

*...I love buy gifts someone.*

In Exam 2, the next group of syntax errors was identified in the word order of English sentences (f= 26; 8%). The majority of the word order errors resulted from omitting the subject, verb or object in the sentence, and some were due to the wrong ordering of the elements in a phrase, clause or sentence. Examples are given below, respectively:

*Before came to Ankara, I...*

*After last lesson I back to my dormitory alone.*

*We took a photo and shared on social media.*

*What I will wear?*

In Table 2 above, conjunctions display a relatively lower frequency (f=10; 3%). Mistakes were detected in the use of the subordinating conjunctions; however, there were almost no errors in the use of sequence markers. There were sentence fragments with *because*, the conjunction *when* was used wrongly to function as a preposition, and the preposition *for* was used to replace the subordinator *because*. Some of the erroneous utterances are shown below.

*Because concert area wasn't close.*

*I was shocked for I lived that.*

*When lunch time the class was very silent.*

The last and the smallest category of syntactic errors was pronouns (f= 5; 2%). There were only 5 errors, and they occurred because of confusing possessive adjectives with pronouns (e.g. *I wanted it and its happened*) or confusing different types of pronouns with each other (e.g. *...me and my class friends were nervous*).

### 3.2.3. Findings regarding Exam 3

In this exam, the students were expected to produce a well-developed descriptive paragraph in minimum 100 words. They chose one of the two following topics:

*Describe your favourite city. Write about places to visit, activities you can do there, etc.*

*Describe your living room. Write about the furniture, decorations, and why you like it.*

A total of 284 errors were found in this exam. The errors were seen in the same six syntactic types. However, the frequencies of the errors were different. In this exam, 151 mistakes were found in determiners, 49 in prepositions, 35 word order, 29 verbs, 12 conjunctions, and 8 in pronouns. The distribution of the errors is shown in Table 3.

**Table 3.**  
**Types and frequencies of syntactic errors in Exam 3**

| Type               | f   | % in total | Source       | f   | % in sources |
|--------------------|-----|------------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Determiner</b>  | 151 | 53         | Interlingual | 103 | 68,21        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 47  | 31,12        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 1   | 0,66         |
| <b>Verb</b>        | 29  | 10         | Intralingual | 29  | 100          |
| <b>Preposition</b> | 49  | 17         | Interlingual | 2   | 4,08         |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 26  | 53,06        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 21  | 42,85        |
| <b>Word order</b>  | 35  | 13         | Interlingual | 27  | 77,14        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 7   | 20           |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 1   | 2,85         |
| <b>Conjunction</b> | 12  | 4          | Interlingual | 11  | 92           |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 1   | 8            |
| <b>Pronoun</b>     | 8   | 3          | Intralingual | 8   | 100          |
| <b>Total</b>       | 284 |            | Interlingual | 143 | 50           |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 117 | 41           |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 24  | 9            |

As seen in Table 3 above, the errors in this exam are scattered across six syntax items, which are determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns. The most prominent type was determiners (f=151; 53%). Determiner errors particularly rose in articles, pluralisation, possessives and quantifiers, but article mistakes were the most common, as in the previous exams.

Article errors concerned the functions of indefinite articles *a/an* and definite article *the*. The students could not place *a/an* before singular countable nouns or they failed to place *the* before definite countable/uncountable nouns correctly in most cases. To exemplify, they omitted an indefinite article as in *You can buy souvenir in the Alanya Kalesi* and *It is comfortable carpet*. Similarly, they did not include a definite article before specific nouns like in *Sofa is grey and long...*, before *noun + of + noun* construction as in *There is a door of living room*, and before superlative adjectives like in *But Silifke, Tömük and Erdemli are best places...* In some instances, they used an article before a definite noun together with a possessive adjective such as in ... *middle of the my room* and *I watch movie on the my bed every night*.

Under determiners, pluralisation posed an area of problem, too. Almost all of the singular-plural noun mistakes were caused by not annexing the plural suffix *-s* to countable nouns after quantifiers (e.g. *I do a lot of thing in the living room*) and nouns following numbers (e.g. *There are two old but good book...*) In a few sentences, the plural form was used instead of the singular for uncountable nouns (e.g. ...*with its furnitures and decorations*) or for singular countable nouns (e.g. *It is good things for students*).

Possessive case mistakes were existent, not many albeit. Possessive – ‘s was not attached to plural nouns (e.g. *The armchairs color are dark red...*) or possessive adjectives were omitted after groups of words that often happen together (e.g. *I live family*).

Likewise, there were few mistakes with quantifiers caused by missing a part of the quantifier or adding an extra suffix to the quantifier. The examples are following. *Antalya has got lot of tourist so very crowded but...; There are a lots of museums...*

The second most frequent type of syntax errors was found in uses of prepositions (f=49; 17%). These errors occurred due to omitting a preposition (e.g. *We sit it and watch TV...; ...they should stay their habitat*), using the wrong preposition (e.g. *I like playing*

*with computer; I have got black carpet and it is in the floor)* or adding an unneeded preposition (e.g. *...if you look to the right...*).

The third frequent type of syntactic errors was found in the word order of sentences ( $f= 35$ ; 13%). The majority of the word order errors were seen as a result of omission of the subject, verb or object in the sentence, and some were due to the wrong ordering of the elements in a phrase, clause or sentence. Different from the previous exams, there were mistakes arising from the use of existential clauses with *there is/there are*. Examples are given below, respectively.

*I don't like this armchair because too small.*

*This place next to the sea.*

*...these make so happy.*

*My dad can read a book and a lot of spend time.*

*At the end of the hallway, my bedroom and living room.*

*On the right side of the living room a big sofa.*

In Exam 3, the next group of syntax errors was identified in verbs ( $f=29$ ; 10%). They were related with verb conjugation, coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs, confusion of *to be* forms with *have/has got*, verb-verb constructions, and the third person singular –s in a limited number. But there was a different type of verb errors in this exam. In some papers, double verb was used in sentences containing the existential clause with *there is/there are*. Examples are below, respectively.

*My living room have got white floor.*

*It is looks very nice.*

*The sofa has grey and it is big.*

*The door open the hall way.*

*There are two old but good book is on the desk and some keys is next to the books.*

In the table above, conjunctions show a relatively lower frequency (f=12; 4%). Mistakes were detected in the use of the subordinating and coordinating conjunctions. There were sentence fragments and run-on sentences. Some of the erroneous utterances can be seen below.

*Because there is a huge lamp in the middle of the room.*

*If you like spending time with nature.*

*I would like to drink water you can use it...*

*I read a book also I watch TV to this sofa.*

The last and the smallest category of syntactic errors was pronouns (f= 8; 3%). There were 8 errors, and they occurred because of confusing possessive adjectives with pronouns (e.g. *It has got two small plants on its*) or confusing different types of pronouns within themselves (e.g. *Our living room is mine comfort zone*).

#### **3.2.4. Findings regarding Exam 4**

In Exam 4, as in the previous one, the students were asked to write a descriptive paragraph in minimum 100 words. The theme of this task differed in that description of a person replaced description of a place in the current exam. The students had to choose one of the two following topics:

*Describe your primary school teacher. Write about his/her appearance, personality, and why you like him/her.*

*Choose a family member and describe his/her appearance, personality, hobbies, and what makes him/her special.*

The smallest number of errors (f=213) was recorded in this exam. The errors were found in the same syntax categories as in all of the previous exams. However, the frequencies of the errors were different. There were 83 mistakes with determiners, 78 verbs, 24 with prepositions, 21 word order, 6 conjunctions, and 1 with pronouns. The distribution of the errors is shown in Table 4.

**Table 4.**  
**Types and frequencies of syntactic errors in Exam 4**

| Type               | f   | % in total | Source       | f   | % in sources |
|--------------------|-----|------------|--------------|-----|--------------|
| <b>Determiner</b>  | 83  | 39         | Interlingual | 32  | 38,55        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 49  | 59,03        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 2   | 2,40         |
| <b>Verb</b>        | 78  | 37         | Intralingual | 78  | 100          |
| <b>Preposition</b> | 24  | 11         | Interlingual | 6   | 25,00        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 9   | 37,50        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 9   | 37,50        |
| <b>Word order</b>  | 21  | 10         | Interlingual | 16  | 76,19        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 5   | 23,80        |
| <b>Conjunction</b> | 6   | 3          | Interlingual | 6   | 100          |
| <b>Pronoun</b>     | 1   | 0          | Intralingual | 1   | 100          |
| <b>Total</b>       | 213 |            | Interlingual | 60  | 28,16        |
|                    |     |            | Intralingual | 142 | 66,66        |
|                    |     |            | Other        | 11  | 5            |

As can be seen in Table 4 above, syntactic errors occurred in six types as determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns in Exam 4. The largest part was contributed by determiners (f=83; 39%). These mistakes were particularly concerning articles, pluralisation, possessives and quantifiers, but article mistakes were most frequent.

Article errors were in the functions of indefinite articles *a/an* and definite article *the*. The students could not place *a/an* before singular countable nouns or they could not do so when they needed to place *the* before definite countable/uncountable nouns. To exemplify, they omitted the indefinite article before a singular countable noun. Examples: *He has got beard and moustache*; *...she is very social person*. In addition, they did not use the definite article before names of musical instruments and common places. The examples are as following:

*My mother can play violin.*

*I think, my dad is best father in world.*

Sometimes, they used an unnecessary article before an uncountable noun such as in *We always have a time together* and *...a black jacket and a brown jeans*.

Also, pluralisation was used wrongly in some writings. The mistakes were mostly because of not annexing the plural suffix -s to plural nouns for general meaning (e.g. *She don't tell lie to anyone*) or other plural countable nouns (e.g. *One of my family member is my mother*). Other mistakes were due to using the plural form instead of the singular in fixed expressions. An example is as following: *In her free times, she likes...*

Possessives and quantifiers caused few mistakes. Possessive -'s or possessive adjectives were not placed after some nouns (e.g. *My cousin name is Şura*) and groups of words that are usually used together (e.g. *...she spends time with family*). In some cases, a possessive adjective was added despite not being needed before certain places. E.g. *When she goes her gym...*

The second major category of syntax was verbs (f=78; 37%). Those errors were predominantly related with the third person singular -s and verb conjugation in the present simple and past tenses. They were followed by verb-verb constructions and coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs. Common examples include the following:

*...when she see any animal...*

*...but she always wearing black shoes.*

*...I haved a amazing primary school teacher.*

*She doesn't like wear trousers.*

*...he is shout at me...*

The third most frequent syntactic errors were found in prepositions (f=24; 11%). They were caused by adding an unnecessary preposition, omitting a preposition or choosing the wrong one. The examples below are given to represent flawed use of English in terms of prepositions.

*Whenever I need to help...*

*...working on PC at ...my sister goes out with alone...*

The next group of syntax errors was identified in the word order of the English sentences (f= 21; 10%). The majority of the word order errors resulted from omitting the

subject or verb in the sentence, and some were due to the wrong ordering of the elements in a phrase, clause or sentence. Examples are given below, respectively.

*When he saw spider, running fast away and doesn't look at behind.*

*He tall and slim.*

*He doesn't like look me.*

*But from different me, he is angry.*

Fifth, conjunctions were used with a few mistakes (f=6; 3%). In general, there were seen sentence fragments with subordinating conjunction *because*. Exemplary sentence is as following: *Because he can't make origami.*

Lastly, there was only 1 pronoun error (f= 1; 0%). It resulted from confusing two different types of pronouns.

To sum up, the error analysis on the exam papers yielded the following frequencies: Exam 1= **236**; Exam 2= **319**; Exam 3= **284**; Exam 4= **213**. The numbers and types of errors are shown together in Table 5 below.

**Table 5.**  
**Types and frequencies of syntactic errors in exams**

|                              | Types and frequencies of errors |            |            |            |           |           |
|------------------------------|---------------------------------|------------|------------|------------|-----------|-----------|
|                              | Det                             | Verb       | Prep       | WO         | Conj      | Pron      |
| <b>Exam 1</b><br><b>236</b>  | 73                              | 62         | 54         | 25         | 21        | 1         |
| <b>Exam 2</b><br><b>319</b>  | 157                             | 42         | 79         | 26         | 10        | 5         |
| <b>Exam 3</b><br><b>284</b>  | 151                             | 29         | 49         | 35         | 12        | 8         |
| <b>Exam 4</b><br><b>213</b>  | 83                              | 78         | 24         | 21         | 6         | 1         |
| <b>Total</b><br><b>1.052</b> | <b>464</b>                      | <b>211</b> | <b>206</b> | <b>107</b> | <b>49</b> | <b>15</b> |

### 3.3. Sources of Errors

This part attempts to answer the second research question. The findings are reported separately for each exam.

**Research Question 2) What might be the sources of students' errors (interlingual or intralingual transfer)?**

As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, it was initially planned to divide the syntactic errors into two as *interlingual* and *intralingual*. However, there were some unidentified uses, so an additional category of *Other* was opened. As a result, the presentation of findings is done based on three sources.

**3.3.1. Findings regarding Exam 1**

In the first exam, 236 errors were found, and 79 (33%) of them were caused by interlingual transfer (L1), while 146 (62%) were caused by intralingual transfer (L2). A small number of 11 (5%) fell in the other category. The distribution of error sources across linguistic types is shown in Figure 1.

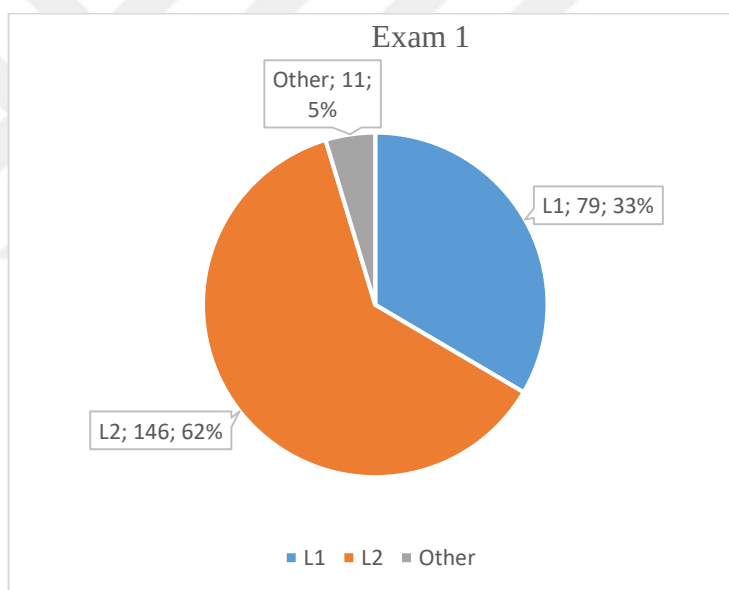


**Figure 1.** Sources of errors in Exam 1

**3.3.1.1. Interlingual**

In this exam, 79 interlingual errors were shared among four linguistic categories. There were no such errors with verbs and pronouns. The distribution is shown in Figure 2 below.

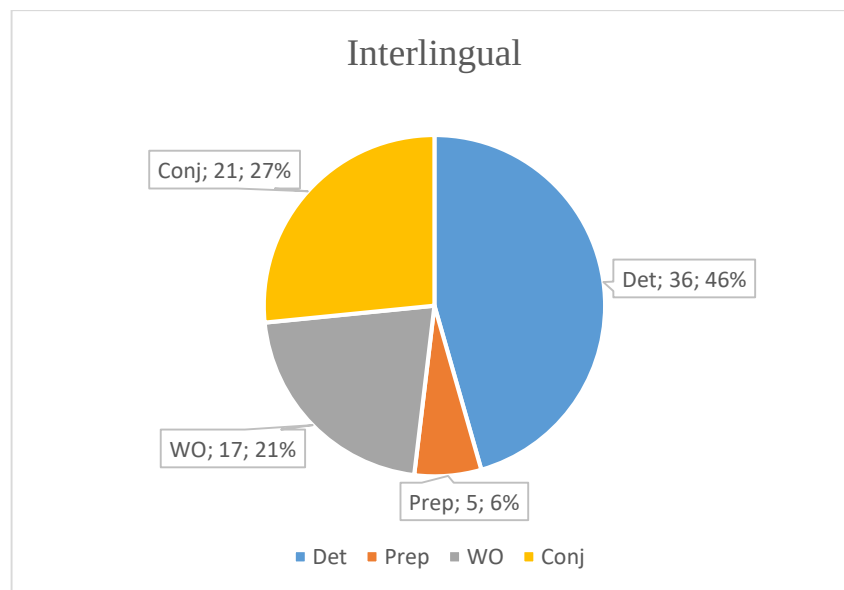


**Figure 2.** Interlingual errors in Exam 1

As can be seen in Figure 2 above, the majority of the interlingual errors were provided by determiners (f= 36; 46%). It was followed by conjunctions (f=21; 27%), word order (f=17; 21%) and prepositions (f=5; 6%).

Among determiners, often there were interlingual errors in articles. They usually appeared as a missing indefinite article before singular countable nouns or a missing definite article before specific nouns and musical instruments. The examples below represent Turkish language as it does not have articles.

*He usually eats egg, ...*

*So he doesn't have television in the home.*

*He arrives office at 10...*

*... he plays piano.*

The second biggest address of interlingual transfer was conjunction errors. They were mostly seen when the students tried to present a reason for a statement by using the subordinator *because*. As can be understood from the examples below, this conjunction was often used to introduce an independent clause as in Turkish.

*(... he doesn't drink tea.) Because he hate it.*

*Because he really likes dinner.*

Also, sequence markers were used under the same influence in paragraphs telling a daily routine. Examples:

*(He works with computer because his documentary has in computer.) After he eats lunch at about 14:00 o'clock.*

*Before, He takes a shower.*

The third most common source of interlingual errors was word order. The students attempted to construct sentences without using a subject, *to be* copula or object since Turkish language allows it. Examples are given below.

*Then he has lunch at 2 p.m. after starts work.*

*Because he tired.*

*...he takes food for animals and put in the park.*

Lastly, very few errors were detected in prepositions resembling Turkish language. The examples were as following: *...he listens music; He always goes with by bus.*

### 3.3.1.2. Intralingual

In Exam 1, intralingual errors accounted for the largest number of syntactic mistakes (f=146; 62%). Their distribution across the linguistic categories is demonstrated in Figure 3 below.

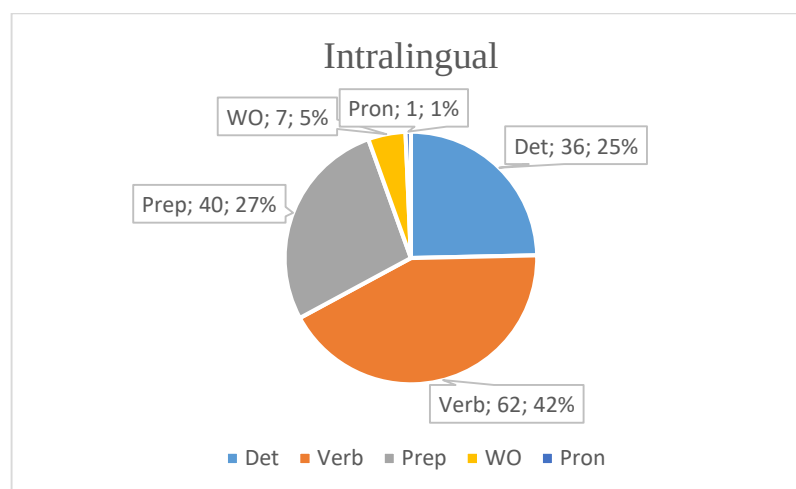


**Figure 3.** Intralingual errors in Exam 1

As can be seen in the figure above, almost half of the intralingual errors came from verbs (f= 62; 42%). It was followed by prepositions (f=40; 27%), determiners (f=36; 25%), word order (f=7; 5%) and pronouns (f=1; 1%). There were no intralingual errors with conjunctions.

Firstly, all of the verb errors were caused by intralingual transfer. They were predominantly related with the third person singular –s, coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs, and verb-verb constructions. Examples of mistakes in this category are as following, respectively.

*He often make dinner...*

*He is listens to music...*

*...he loves go to the cinema in free time.*

Secondly, intralingual errors were seen in prepositions. They were predominantly because of redundant uses as in these examples: *He arrives at home...; ... he goes to home...*

The next area of intralingual errors was determiners. Such mistakes usually occurred in articles and possessives. In articles, there was a missing indefinite article before singular countable nouns or a redundant article before certain expressions. The examples below show that these mistakes are associated with the target language.

*...he likes sleeping after tired day.*

*...he is a tired.*

*He goes to the bed...*

As for possessive case, the students sometimes failed to use a possessive adjective with words that usually go together. Examples include *..., he brushes teeth; ...he takes off clothes...*

Another related area was word order with a small number of intralingual errors. The position of the linguistic items was wrong in some cases. Sentential examples: *He has usually soup...; He works start at ten...*

As regards pronouns, the only error was caused by English as can be seen in the following example: *That is tired for his*.

### 3.3.1.3. Other

In the first exam, 11 errors were not classified as interlingual or intralingual ( $f=11$ ; 5%). They were mostly related with missing prepositions. Examples are following: *...he doesn't go work; He chats his friends...*

### 3.3.2. Findings regarding Exam 2

In the second exam, 319 errors were found, and 157 (49%) of them were caused by interlingual transfer (L1), while 135 (42%) were caused by intralingual transfer (L2). A number of 27 (9%) fell in the other category. The distribution of error sources across linguistic types is shown in Figure 4.

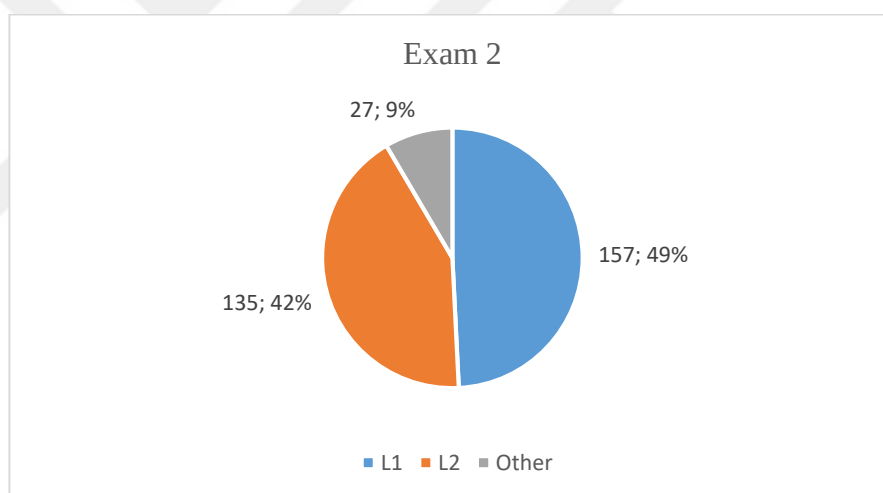


**Figure 4.** Sources of errors in Exam 2

#### 3.3.2.1. Interlingual

In this exam, 157 interlingual errors were shared among four linguistic categories. There were no such errors with verbs or pronouns. The distribution is shown in Figure 5 below.

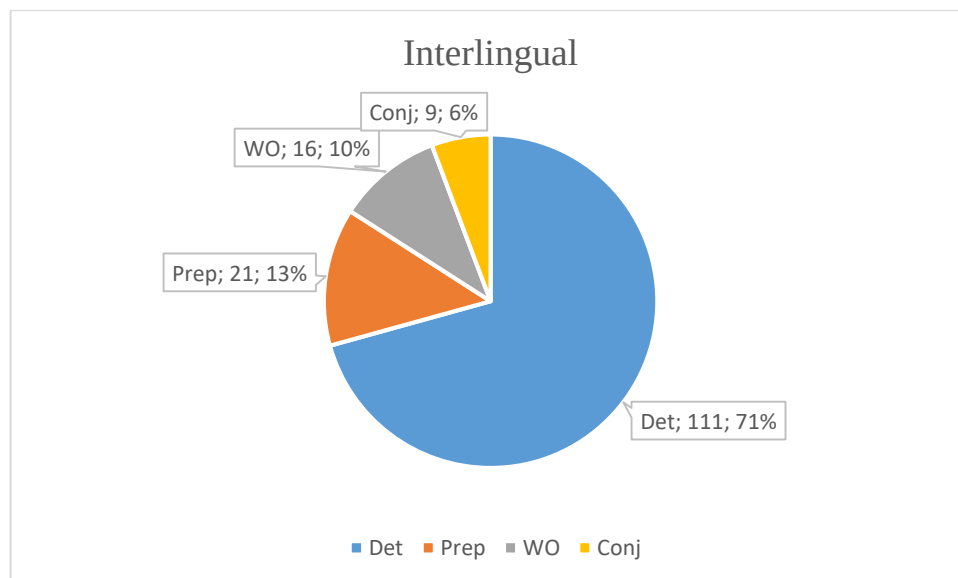


**Figure 5.** Interlingual errors in Exam 2

As can be seen in the figure above, the majority of the interlingual errors were provided by determiners (f= 111; 71%), followed by prepositions (f=21; 13%), word order (f=16; 10%) and conjunctions (f=9; 6%).

Among determiners, interlingual errors usually occurred in articles. They usually appeared as a missing indefinite article before singular countable nouns or a missing definite article before specific nouns or ordinal numbers. Examples can be seen below.

*I read book...*

*My mother made cake for me.*

*...concert area was very crowded.*

*First part was okay but second problem.*

Also, singular and plural nouns showed some interlingual errors. They were mostly because of not annexing the plural suffix -s to countable nouns after quantifiers and to nouns following numbers or plural nouns for general meaning. One example for each follows: *He eats meat or vegetable*; *...he eats...seven olive...*; and *He loves book*.

The second biggest source of interlingual errors was prepositions. They were caused by a missing or extra preposition due to the influence of Turkish. Examples are below.

*We talked this topic.*

*I listened best musics.*

*We arrived to school...*

Thirdly, interlingual errors were seen in word order. Again, there were some constructions lacking the subject, verb or object. Examples: *Before came to Ankara, I...*; *Our lunch break at ten past eleven*; *We took a photo and shared on social media.*

Lastly, conjunctions revealed some interlingual errors. As in Exam 1, they were substantially inflicted in the use of subordinate conjunctions. Examples: *Because it had a service for concert*; *I was shocked for I lived that.*

### 3.3.2.2. Intralingual

In Exam 2, the number of intralingual errors was almost equal to interlingual ones (f=135; 42%). Their distribution across the linguistic categories is demonstrated in Figure 6 below.

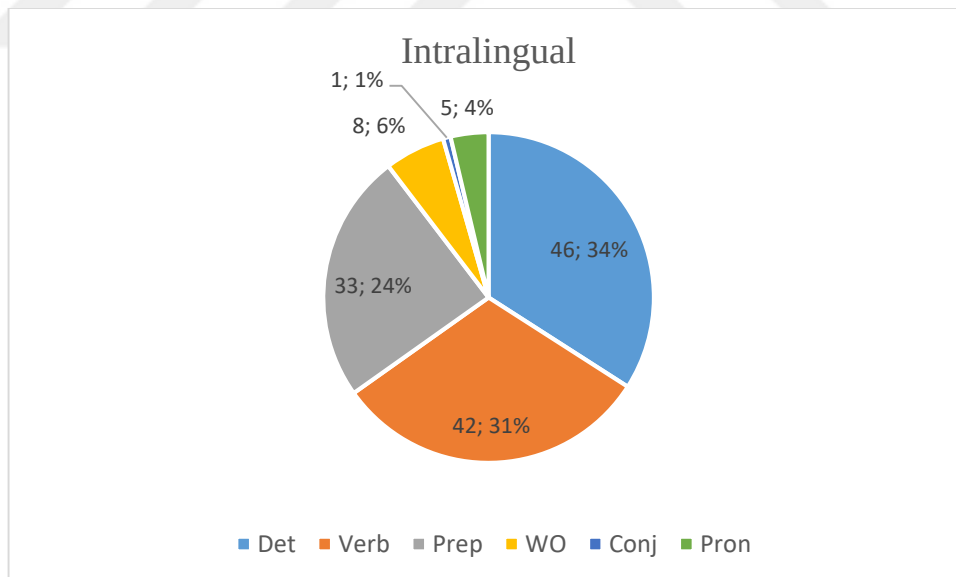


**Figure 6.** Intralingual errors in Exam 2

Figure 6 shows that the majority of the intralingual errors rose with determiners (f=46; 34%), verbs (f=42; 31%) and prepositions (f=33; 24%). The remaining was comprised of word order, conjunction and pronoun errors.

To begin with, most of the intralingual errors were made in determiners. The mistakes were similar to the previous exam. Usually, an indefinite article was omitted before singular countable nouns or an extra article was added before names of places. Examples: *That was amazing day; I had a breakfast; We hang out in the Gölbaşı.*

Secondly, verb errors were all classified as intralingual errors. They were predominantly related with the wrong verb form including verb conjugation in regular and irregular verbs, *to be* forms, use of the past marker *did* instead of *was/were*, and double past marker. Examples of mistakes in this category are as following, respectively.

*I don't liked...*

*...I leaved there.*

*I were in Ankara.*

*I did very happy.*

*...they didn't accepted pizza.*

The third remarkable source of intralingual errors was prepositions. There was often misselection of prepositions as in these examples: *At the evening...; ...my lessons started in 2 October.*

Word order mistakes were caused by ordering of the elements constituting phrases, clauses or sentences. Sentential examples: *How did happen this and how I was late first day now I will tell you; 1st on October, 2023 I went...; What I will wear?*

The only conjunction error was due to the wrong use of *when* to function as a preposition rather than a conjunction. E.g. *When lunch time the class was very silent.*

Pronouns showed intralingual errors as they were confused with possessive adjectives or a different type of English pronoun. Examples: *I wanted it and its happened; ...me and my class friends were nervous.*

### 3.3.2.3. Other

In the first exam, 27 errors were not classified as interlingual or intralingual (f=27; 9%). They were mostly related with missing prepositions. Examples are following: *She spoke us; I looked my exam screen...; Nobody didn't talk eachother.*

### 3.3.3. Findings regarding Exam 3

In the second exam, 284 errors were found, and 143 (50%) of them were caused by interlingual transfer (L1), while 117 (41%) were caused by intralingual transfer (L2). A number of 24 (9%) fell in the other category. The distribution of error sources across linguistic types is shown in Figure 7.

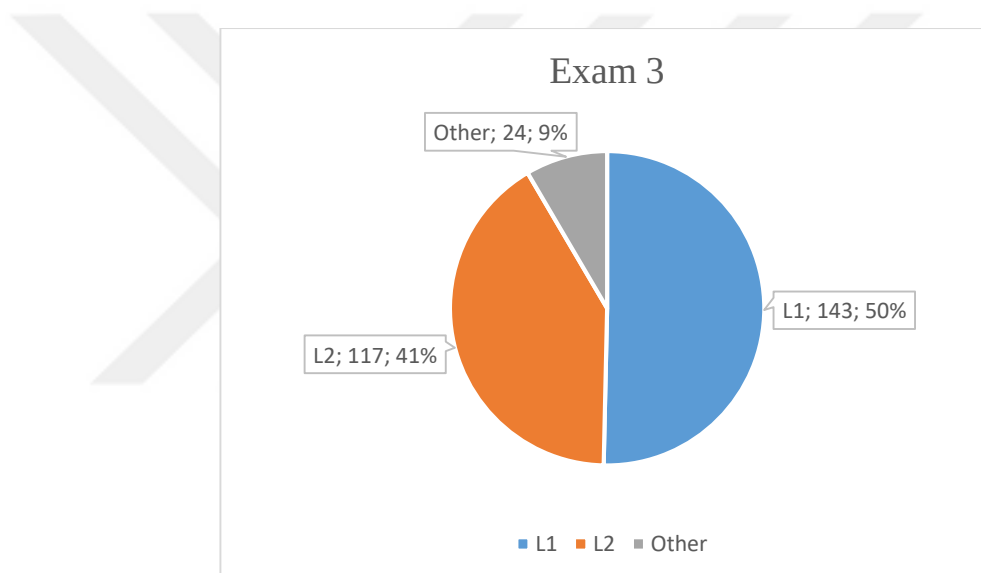


**Figure 7.** Sources of errors in Exam 3

#### 3.3.3.1. Interlingual

In this exam, 143 interlingual errors were shared among four linguistic categories. The distribution is shown in Figure 8 below.

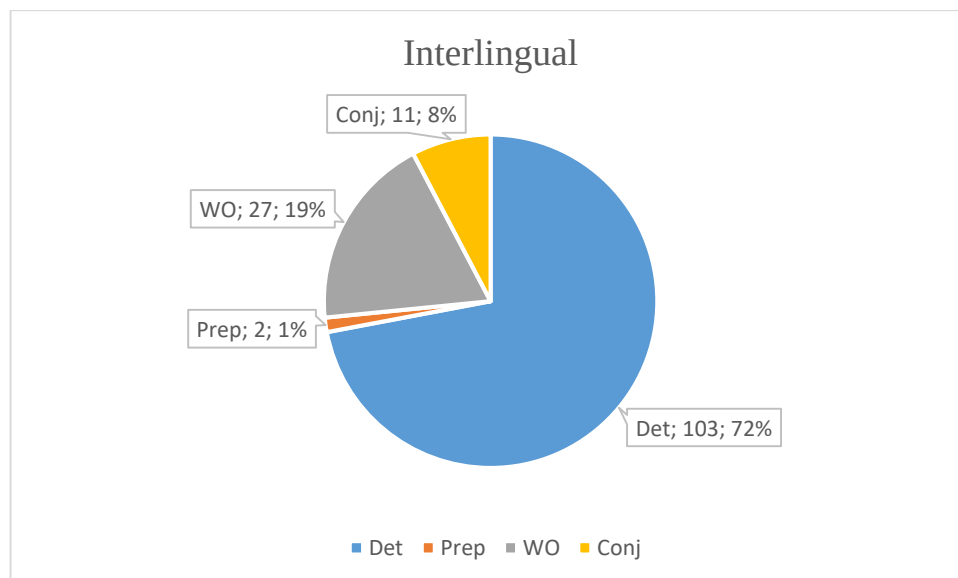


**Figure 8.** Interlingual errors in Exam 3

As can be seen above, interlingual errors were in determiners (f= 103; 72%), word order (f=27; 19%), conjunctions (f=11; 8%) and prepositions (f=2; 1%). Verbs and pronouns did not reveal any such mistakes.

In this exam, the most common linguistic category of interlingual errors was determiners. The vast majority of such errors were related with articles. Indefinite articles before singular countable nouns were missing. Examples: *It has got white door; Last year we went library with my sister for bring book*. Similarly, definite article was not used before specific nouns or *noun + of + noun* construction. Examples: *When you go living room...; There is a door of living room*.

Also, singular and plural nouns showed some interlingual errors. They were mostly because of not annexing the plural suffix -s to countable nouns after quantifiers and to nouns following numbers or plural nouns for general meaning. One example for each follows: *Why are there a lot of place? ...; the room has got two sofa, two armchair...; I don't like zoo because...*

Secondly, interlingual errors were found in word order. There were some constructions lacking the subject, verb or object. Typical examples illustrating them are, for instance, *I don't like this armchair because too small; Television and table very close too; ...these make so happy*.

Thirdly, conjunctions revealed some interlingual errors. As in Exam 1 and 2, they were substantially inflicted in the use of subordinate conjunctions. Examples: *Because it is very high and dangerous; If you like spending time with nature.*

Preposition errors were too few. The influence of Turkish can be seen in the following examples: *...if you look to the right, ...; I like playing with computer.*

### 3.3.3.2. Intralingual

In Exam 3, there were a large number of intralingual errors (f=117; 41%). Their distribution across the linguistic categories is demonstrated in Figure 9.

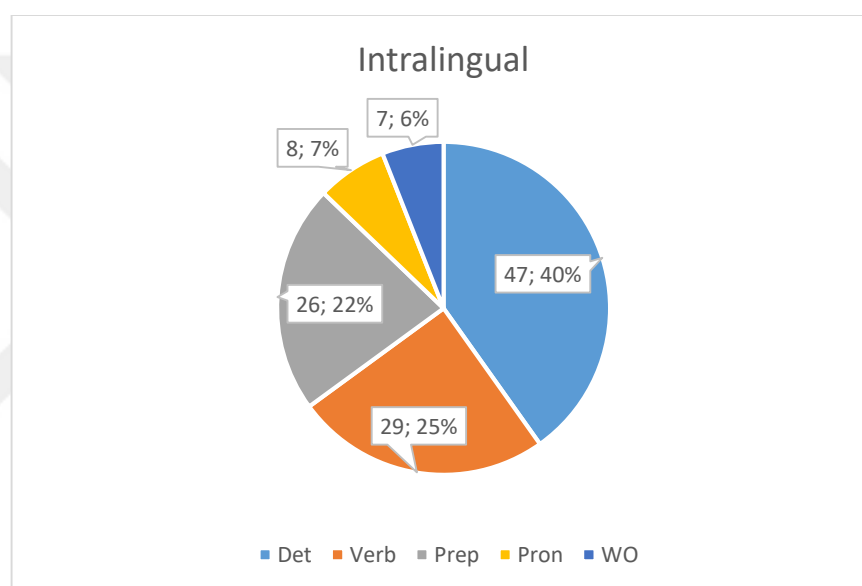


**Figure 9.** Intralingual errors in Exam 3

As the figure above shows, the majority of the intralingual errors happened with determiners (f=47; 40%), verbs (f=29; 25%) and prepositions (f=26; 22%). The remaining was comprised of pronouns (f=8;7%) and word order (f=7; 6%).

To begin with, determiners showed a lot of intralingual errors. Almost all of them happened because of omission of an indefinite article before singular countable nouns or superlative adjectives and addition of a definite article before possessive adjectives and indefinite nouns. Examples of the mistakes are below, respectively.

*Anıtkabir is important value for Ankara.*

*I think Bursa is best city in Turkey.*

*The living room to the left of the my bedroom.*

*If you turn on the right, you can see the shelves.*

As seen in Figure 8 above, verb errors were completely intralingual errors. They were predominantly related with the wrong verb form including verb conjugation, coexistence of *to be* forms and main verbs, confusion of *to be* forms with *have/has got*, and double verb in existential clauses with *there is/there are*. Examples are below, respectively.

*You can visited...*

*It is feel peaceful.*

*Finally, the living room has amazing.*

*On the right side of the living room a big sofa.*

Figure 8 indicates prepositions as the third source of intralingual errors. There was often absence or misselection of prepositions as in these examples: *The door is the right of the cupboard; I have got black carpet and it is in the floor.*

Pronouns caused intralingual errors when they were confused with possessive adjectives and different types of pronouns. Sentential examples: *Them color is green; There are a lot of mine work tools.*

Word error mistakes were seen when one of the essential elements of the sentence was omitted. One example is following: *...Antalya very hot weather...*

### **3.3.3.3. Other**

In this exam, 24 errors were not classified as interlingual or intralingual (f=24; 9%). They were mostly related with missing prepositions. Examples are following: *When you go Bosphorus, you will see a lot of fisherman; Last year we went library with my sister...*

### **3.3.4. Findings regarding Exam 4**

In the last exam, 213 errors were found, and 60 (28%) of them were caused by interlingual transfer (L1), while 142 (67%) were caused by intralingual transfer (L2). A

number of 11 (5%) fell in the other category. The distribution of error sources across linguistic types is shown in Figure 10.

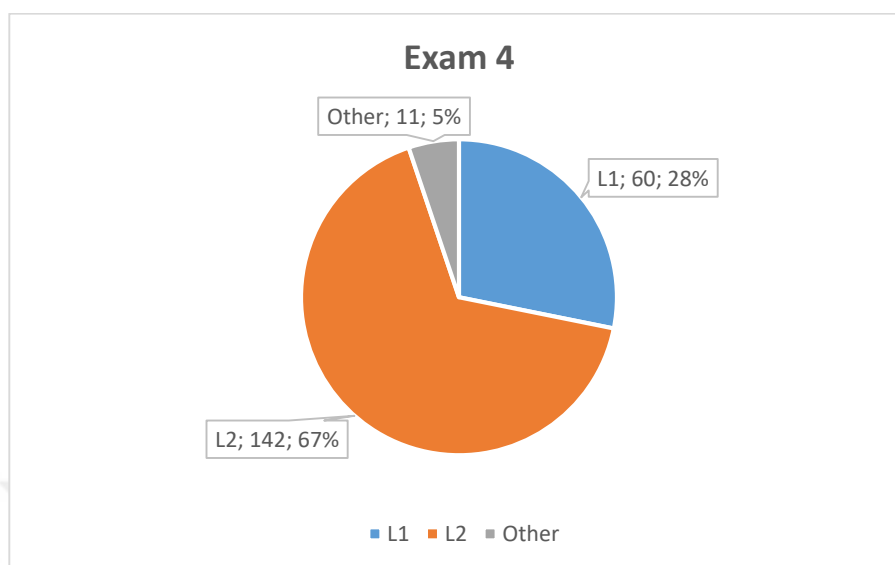


**Figure 10.** Sources of errors in Exam 4

#### 3.3.4.1. Interlingual

In this exam, 60 interlingual errors were shared among four linguistic categories. The distribution is shown in Figure 11.

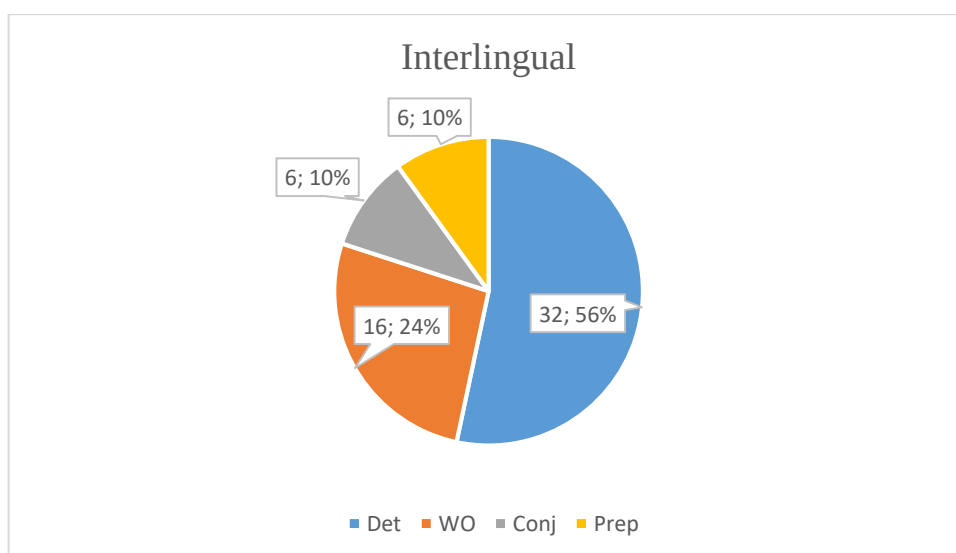


**Figure 11.** Interlingual errors in Exam 4

As seen above, interlingual errors were in determiners (f= 32; 56%), word order (f=16; 24%), conjunctions (f=6; 10%) and prepositions (f=6; 10%). Verbs and pronouns showed no interlingual mistakes.

In this exam, the most common linguistic category of interlingual errors was determiners. Almost all was related with articles. Indefinite articles before singular countable nouns and jobs were not used. Examples: *I think my mother is angel to our family*; *...he never wears jumper or T-shirt*; *She is house worker*. Similarly, definite article was not used before names of musical instruments and common places. The examples are as following:

*...she plays guitar...*

*...she never went to city center.*

As Figure 11 above shows, word order was affected by interlingual errors, too. There were some constructions lacking the subject or verb and other mistakes were due to the misplacement of the elements in a sentence. The examples are below, respectively.

*When he saw spider, running fast away and doesn't look at behind.*

*He tall and slim.*

*He very likes watching cartoon films.*

Thirdly, conjunctions and prepositions revealed some interlingual errors. As in the previous exams, conjunction errors were caused by using subordinators according to the conventions of Turkish. Examples: *Because he hates do sport*; *Because he can't make origami*. Also, preposition mistakes were made under the influence of L1. Examples: *..., she always listens her friends...*; *...we usually go everywhere with our car*; *Whenever I need to help...*

#### **3.3.4.2. Intralingual**

In Exam 4, there were a large number of intralingual errors (f=142; 67%). Their distribution across the linguistic categories is demonstrated in Figure 12.

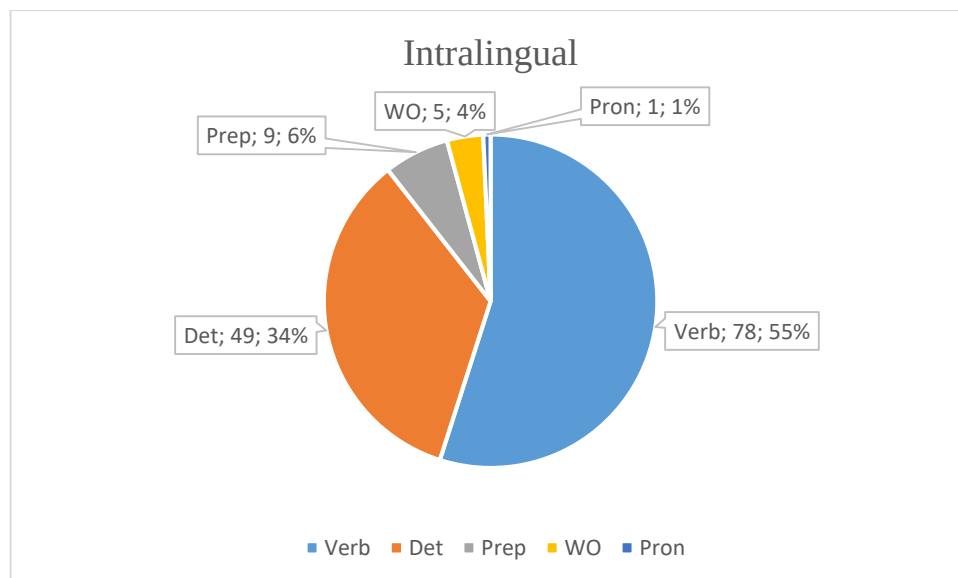


**Figure 12.** Intralingual errors in Exam 4

As the figure above shows, more than half of the intralingual errors happened with verbs (f=78; 55%). They were followed by determiners (f=49; 34%) and prepositions (f=9; 6%). Only a small amount was provided by prepositions (f=9; 6%), word order (f=5; 4%) and pronouns (f=1; 1%).

As in Exam 1, verbs caused the highest number of intralingual errors. Most of them were related with the third person singular –s and verb conjugation in the present simple and past tenses. Common examples include the following:

*...when she see any animal...*

*...but she always wearing black shoes.*

*...I haved a amazing primary school teacher.*

As seen in Figure 12 above, determiners constituted the second most frequent intralingual errors. They were mostly related with articles, followed by pluralisation. As in all exams, indefinite articles were omitted before indefinite singular countable noun or added before uncountable nouns and plural nouns. In some cases, definite article was deleted before superlative adjectives. Respective examples can be seen below.

*After that, she has got oval face...*

*We always have a time together.*

*... a black jacket and a brown jeans.*

*...he is best teacher...*

Prepositions showed a few intralingual errors as in the following examples:  
*...working on PC at everyday; ... he apologize for me...*

Word order and pronouns revealed a few intralingual errors. The examples follow: *He doesn't like look me; But from different me, he is angry.*

### **3.3.4.3. Other**

In this exam, 11 errors were not classified as interlingual or intralingual (f=11; 5%). They were mostly related with prepositions. Examples are following: *She looked me with her bright brown eyes; ...my sister goes out with alone...*

In summary, the error analysis on the exam papers yielded a total of 1.052 errors in a corpus of above 10.000 words. 51,33% of these errors were caused by L2 and 41,73% were caused by L1. A small amount (6,94%) was unrecognised. The distribution of errors among sources is shown below. Also, see Table 6.

Interlingual (= **79 (Exam 1); 157 (Exam 2); 143 (Exam 3); 60 (Exam 4).**

Intralingual = **146 (Exam 1); 135 (Exam 2); 117 (Exam 3); 142 (Exam 4).**

Other = **11 (Exam 1); 27 (Exam 2); 24 (Exam 3); 11 (Exam 4).**

**Table 6.**  
**Sources and frequencies of syntactic errors in exams**

|                                  | Sources and frequencies of errors |                   |             |
|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------------------|-------------|
|                                  | Interlingual (L1)                 | Intralingual (L2) | Other       |
| <b>Exam 1</b><br><b>236</b>      | 79                                | 146               | 11          |
| <b>Exam 2</b><br><b>319</b>      | 157                               | 135               | 27          |
| <b>Exam 3</b><br><b>284</b>      | 143                               | 117               | 24          |
| <b>Exam 4</b><br><b>213</b>      | 60                                | 142               | 11          |
| <b>Total</b><br><b>Frequency</b> | <b>439</b>                        | <b>540</b>        | <b>73</b>   |
| <b>Total percentage</b>          | <b>41,73</b>                      | <b>51,33</b>      | <b>6,93</b> |
| <b>Grand total</b>               | <b>1.052</b>                      |                   |             |

When the sources of errors are examined across exams, it is seen that interlingual (L1) errors started at a low level but they increased and then decreased. In contrast, intralingual (L2) started at a high level, decreased and increased back. The third source of errors followed a path similar to interlingual errors. The curves of three sources of errors can be seen in Figure 13 below.

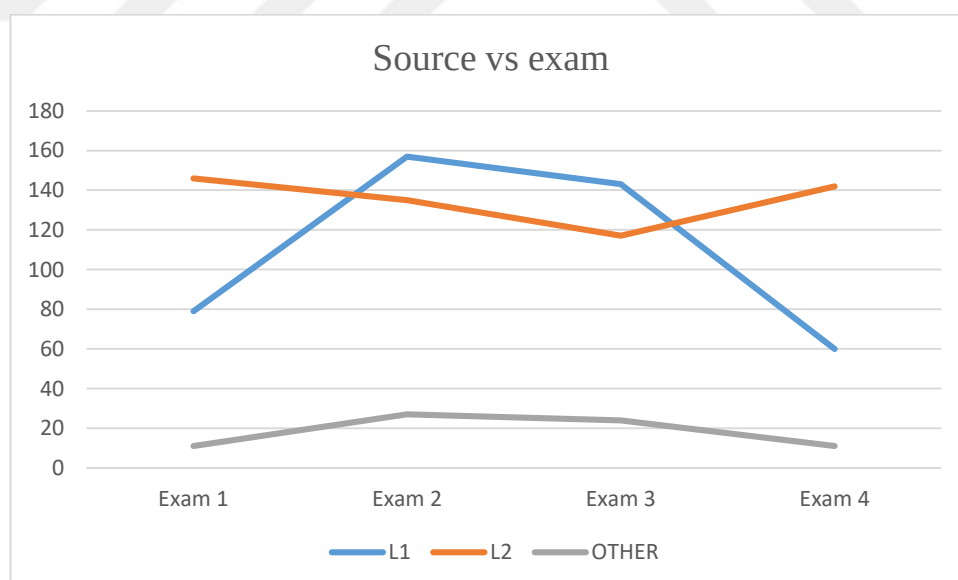


**Figure 13.** Sources of syntactic errors over time

As understood from the figure above, interlingual (L1) errors were less than intralingual (L2) errors in the beginning. Then the two main sources of errors replaced each other in Exam 2 and Exam 3. However, L2 errors surpassed L1 errors again in the last exam. To add further detail, the highest number of interlingual errors were made

during Exam 2, when the students wrote a narrative paragraph about a past event, and Exam 3, when they wrote a descriptive paragraph about a place they know.

On the contrary, more intralingual (L2) errors were committed during Exam 1, when the students wrote a paragraph about the daily routine of a specific person, and Exam 4, when they wrote a descriptive paragraph about a person they know.

As regards the nature of errors here, it is clear that the interlingual errors were characteristic of Turkish language. They were principally raised by articles, which is a grammatical phenomenon peculiar to L2 in present case. The students often made mistakes when they were expected to insert an indefinite article before singular countable nouns and a definite article before specific nouns, unlike in their mother tongue. Similarly, plural nouns were not used after zero article. Though such mistakes were counted under pluralisation mistakes in the analysis, they can be regarded to be a result of the article system in English.

Turkish language also manifested itself in prepositions, word order and conjunctions. Even though interlingual errors in these categories were not as frequent, the trace of Turkish language could easily be seen. As for prepositions in English, a corresponding category exists in Turkish. The students sometimes referred to their native language when they needed to use a proper preposition or omit one in English writings. Word order was another area where L1 transfer was crystal clear. Turkish has a more flexible sentence structure compared to English in that the former allows for omitting a subject and copula in sentences. Also, while Turkish is a “subject-object-verb” language, English requires the sequence “subject-verb-object”. Due to these, the students made interlingual mistakes while composing sentences. For conjunctions, interlingual errors happened because of the discrepancies between the conventions of linking ideas and sentences in both languages.

When it comes to intralingual (L2) errors, they were most visible in verbs, determiners and prepositions. The students made mistakes through overgeneralisation, ignorance of rule restriction and false hypothesis within English language. Verb errors were mostly caused by misformation of the verb, specifically third person singular –s. Moreover, a copula was used in addition to the main verb, and a verb following the main verb was not formed accurately according to the rules of English.

Intralingual errors in determiners were most common with articles. Often indefinite articles were not placed before singular countable nouns which followed an adjective (e.g. ...*she is very social person*), which is a common structure in English. Also, mistakes arising from the definite article *the*, such as using *the* before proper names and possessive adjectives were widespread among determiner-related intralingual errors.

Prepositional errors were due to the use of a redundant or improper preposition in cases which were associated with meaning and structure requirements of L2.

Lastly, unidentified errors were mostly linked to prepositions. In Turkish, it is necessary to use a word or suffix from the corresponding category of prepositions in all relevant cases. Different from Turkish, English language reserves cases where no preposition is needed or the correct preposition cannot be guessed from other cases within the language. Most of those errors contained a missing or wrong preposition without reference to Turkish. Hence, that type of errors are similar to intralingual errors in character because they occurred when the students could not avail themselves of the prepositional rules of L2.

### **3.4. Trend of Error Types**

This small part answers the third research question of the study.

**Research Question 3) Do the types of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) vary throughout one semester?**

According to the analysis of the papers, the types of syntactic errors remained the same throughout the semester. In other words, the students committed errors in six linguistic categories in all of the four exams, which are determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions, and pronouns. However, as highlighted in the following section, the numbers of errors in each category changed from exam to exam. There were a few things which did not change under any circumstances. Determiner errors were heavily in articles. They were mostly caused by not placing *a/an* or *the* before noun phrases. Likewise, verbs were usually formed incorrectly in the present simple and past simple including a missing third person singular *-s*, using *to be* and a main verb in the verb phrase, and gerunds following certain verbs. The other stable thing was that conjunction and pronoun mistakes were seen to be in the smallest number in all exams.

The conjunction mistakes were mostly related with wrong use of the subordinator *because* and sequence markers *after* and *before* in a way inherent in the students' mother tongue.

### 3.5. Trend of Error Frequencies

This part presents results concerning the last research question.

**Research Question 4) Do the frequencies of syntactic errors vary throughout one semester?**

As can be seen in the previous sections on types and frequencies of errors, the number of total errors showed changes across exams. The variance is displayed in Figure 14.

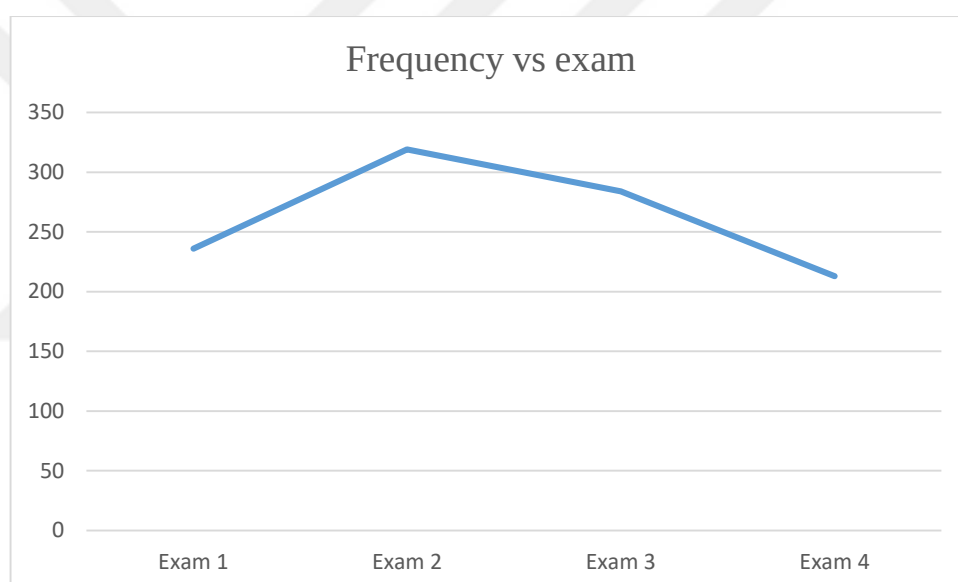


**Figure 14.** Frequencies of syntactic errors over time

The figure above indicates that the number of syntactic errors was in the range of 213 and 319. The totals were found as 236, 319, 284, and 213 in the order of the writing exams.

A detailed analysis shows the differing frequencies by types of syntactic errors, and it is depicted in Figure 15 below.

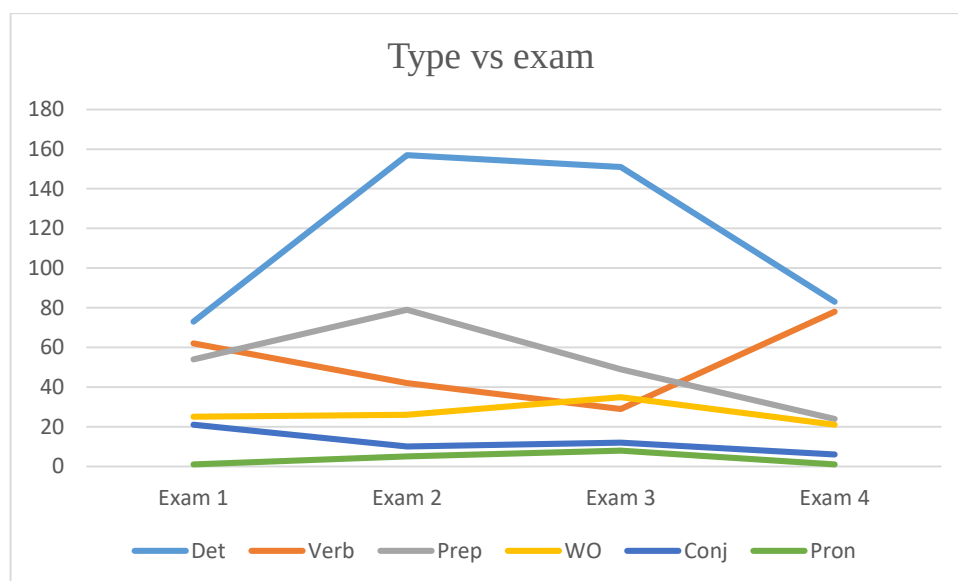


**Figure 15.** Frequencies of error types over time

As the figure above displays, all types of the syntactic errors differed in frequency between the first and the last writing exam. Besides frequency, their placement in the list changed, too. Yet three linguistic categories held onto the same order in the list regardless of the fluctuations. One of them is determiners. This group became the leading category of errors in all exams. The other categories are conjunctions and pronouns. These two types of errors remained in the bottom of the frequency list until the end of the semester. The rest of the error types were verbs, prepositions and word order, and they were in the middle of the list and showed a dynamic movement in relation to each other. Verbs started in second place but went down to third and fourth places in the following exams and went up back to second place in the last exam. The closest item was prepositions and this category started in third place and rose to second place in the following exams and then fell down to third place in the end. As for word order, this type of mistakes kept being the fourth most frequent category except in Exam 3 when it showed an increase going slightly above verb errors. To put concisely, the places of error types looked similar in both Exam 1 and Exam 4. However, there were alterations in the places of verbs, prepositions and word order during Exam 2 and Exam 3. While the number of verb errors was quite high in Exam 1, they were replaced by preposition errors in Exam 2 and Exam 3. What is more, verb errors fell below the frequency of word order errors in Exam 3.

## CHAPTER 4

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In this chapter, the researcher discusses the study findings with the aim of establishing the contributing factors and puts forward implications as applicable. The discussion focuses on the most committed errors by making reference to the literature. The discussion is presented by following the research questions. Then, limitations of the study and recommendations are stated. Finally, conclusion of the thesis is provided based on the foregoing parts.

#### 4.1. Overview of the Discussion

This study was carried out to expose the main syntactic errors committed by tertiary level Turkish learners of L2 English. It was also aimed to trace back to the root of the errors as Turkish (L1) or English (L2). It was designed as a case study exploring the relevant linguistic features in the written interlanguage of prep school students in a Turkish state university. For this purpose, a group of 28 students were reached through convenience sampling, and data were collected during four official writing exams administered by the institution. As a result of analysing the paragraphs through error analysis procedure, errors were found in six categories of syntax, and the most recurrent category was determiners. Of determiners, articles posed the biggest source of problem. Apart from determiners, the use of verbs and prepositions was often erroneous. Verb errors were seen in the formation of verbs requiring the third person singular –s, verb conjugation in the present and past simple affirmatives and negatives, and also verb-verb constructions. Preposition errors happened in all ways including the lack, redundancy and substitution of such items. The other three linguistic categories, namely word order, conjunctions and pronouns, were not prevalent with far lower frequency.

The source of errors was three types: interlingual, intralingual and undefined (*Other*). Interlingual and intralingual errors showed a changing frequency in the exams. While mother language transfer was more evident in the second and third exams, target language influence was dominant in the first and fourth exams. The other type of error had a small frequency, with a few dozens of errors mostly occurring in prepositions. The interlingual errors substantially affected articles in relation to all functions of indefinite and definite articles. The mother tongue effect was discernible in the sentence structure,

conjunctions and prepositions, too. Clear traces of the participants' native language rules and conventions were observed in sentence creation, coordination, subordination and organisation of prepositional phrases. However, such errors were much less frequent. Intralingual errors largely affected verb forms as well as determiners and prepositions. All of the verb errors were caused by L2, and as mentioned above, there were a lot of wrong verb forms containing the copula, main verb and gerunds. In this error source, determiners were influenced by the target language when it was needed to use an indefinite article before singular countable nouns and zero article before proper nouns. Prepositional errors were due to using a redundant or inaccurate preposition in students' attempts to make meaning in English.

The types of the syntactic errors did not vary throughout the semester, whereas the frequencies changed. The highest number of errors was found in Exam 2, and the lowest frequency was in Exam 4.

#### Error Types and Frequencies

Research question 1 was “*What type of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) do pre-intermediate prep class tertiary level students commit in paragraph writing? What are the frequencies of their errors respectively?*” It was found that errors happened in six components of syntax, which are determiners, verbs, prepositions, word order, conjunctions and pronouns. Of all, determiners, particularly articles, stood out as the most problematic area. The students could not provide *a/an* before singular countable nouns and *the* before definite nouns as needed.

Similar results were reported by other researchers. Abdulrahim (2020) carried out a corpus study on Turkish EFL learners' use of determiners and he found out that missing determiner *a* and *the* were the most persistent determiner errors followed by unnecessary determiners *a* and *the* across all proficiency levels.

Saltaş (2009), in a study on students of English Language and Literature department in a Turkish state university, came up with similar linguistic categories of mistakes. In spite of a different rate of errors, articles were still an area of problem in that study. The students generally omitted *a/an* or *the* in their English compositions.

Yalçın (2010) scanned a corpus of 8.794 words comprising argumentative essays written by first-year and third-year students in ELT department BA program. She determined widespread errors of article.

Karahan (2011) analysed written errors of prep-schoolers in their essays produced at the proficiency exam. Articles became the second most common error type after prepositions in that study.

*Considered together with the results above, our findings give support to the linguistic evaluation offered by Master (2002). He said,*

*The English article system is a notoriously complex aspect of English grammar that may cause the most advanced non-native speaker of English as a second or other language ... to make errors even when all other elements of the language have been mastered. (p. 1)*

The students in this study might have committed so many article errors accordingly.

Another considerable area of errors was verbs in this study. Wrong formation was the most frequent, and mistakes in the use of third person singular –s were higher than other sub-types of verb errors in some exams. The findings regarding the frequency of verb errors support the previous findings to a certain extent.

Sürüç Şen and Şimşek (2020) analysed 17 essays written by intermediate level university prep school students, and they came up with similar grammatical categories of errors. They applied a different grouping. After combining the sub-categories of errors so as to make them match with the analysis results in this thesis, they were compared to our findings and it was seen that top three categories of errors were the same as in our study findings. All errors related to verbs (32,15%) constituted the most frequent type, slightly above determiners (31,38%) leaving preposition errors (20,97%) in third place.

Bostancı (2019) applied error analysis to essays of 55 Turkish Cypriot university English-majoring students with various linguistic proficiency ranging from pre-intermediate to advanced levels. She found a quite high percentage of morphological (plural morpheme, inflectional morphemes, prepositions, articles) and syntactic errors

(basically verbs, tenses, word order, conjunctions). When the scope of the syntactic errors is examined, it can be understood that verb errors were common in Bostancı (2019), too.

Further support can be received from the Spanish EFL context. MacDonald (2016) analysed university students' argumentative essays adding up to 110.000 words. A total number of 15.850 errors were tagged and almost half of all errors were in the grammar of English. Within the category of grammar, verb-phrase errors were the third most frequent grammar mistakes.

Our findings are not in agreement with Eriş (2013). While the verb errors were the second, third or fourth most frequent type depending on the exam in the present study, Eriş reached a different finding in his experimental study. He compared the effectiveness of two language teaching methods in reducing error frequency and improving writing skills of students majoring in nursing at a Turkish state university. It was found that verb tenses and auxiliaries became the two leading error categories. The disagreement with the findings of Eriş (2013) might be due to the proficiency level of students. Since the participants in this study were at pre-intermediate level, they were expected to produce a small piece of writing, which was paragraphs of about 100 words on subjects that were rehearsed before. To achieve the task, they did not have to supply a great variety of verbs or tenses. Due to these reasons, the total verb errors may have been relatively smaller.

Looking from another angle, the total number of verb errors in the current study may be regarded high. The most probable explanation seems to be the error categorisation adopted here. Unlike the others, several different types of errors were collected under one heading in this study. This factor might have raised the total number of verb errors.

The verb errors showed a similar pattern in Exam 1 and Exam 4, and this seems to need accounting for. The students committed a large number of errors with the copula *be*, present simple conjugation of verbs and verb patterns in the first and the last exam. As mentioned earlier, this case study was implemented on students who were studying at A2 level based on the CEFR criteria. The students had not fulfilled the A1 level requirements completely yet when they took the first exam. It can thus be understandable to record those errors during that stage. However, at the time of the last exam, they were supposedly at A2 level. According to the CEFR scale, the participants were expected to have acquired those aspects of English by the time of Exam 4. The actual number and characteristics of the verb errors seem not to represent the schedule. The explanation of

this gap might be lying in classroom practices. The school under the examination shows utmost care to set and follow a standard CEFR-adjusted curriculum from material design to testing. In this plan, linguistic input is provided in line with the framework above. For example, the present simple is introduced in three parts rather than teaching all of the affirmative, negative and interrogative statements at once. The instructors might have not observed this gradation, and it may have led to inadequate learning and faulty use of verb conjugation. Departing from this, there could be modest implications for the literature and the specific educational setting. Practicality might fall behind schedule in fulfilling the CEFR descriptors, and this might be considered by EFL professionals. In the school of implementation, exam scores obtained from both perceptive and productive skills are analysed at regular intervals. The feedback is interpreted to make right decisions in the overall learning and teaching process. It involves all actors in this process ranging from the curriculum designers to instructors in that school. It seems beneficial to carry on the system. Particularly, the instructors could be reminded to employ teaching methodologies aligned with the CEFR rationale. Just as importantly, the curriculum and testing departments may need to reflect on the course syllabus by monitoring the grammatical error rates in the productive skill tests besides the overall exam scores.

Prepositions were one of the most common types of error in this study, and this finding concords with other research studies with some divergence in the hierarchy of errors. Scott and Tucker (1974) conducted an analysis of errors made by 22 Arab students who were in their first semester of a low-intermediate intensive English course at university. They found prepositions as the second most common error type after verbs.

Karahan (2011) analysed compositions of 65 ELT students taking the proficiency exam at the prep school of a state university. Prepositional errors took place in the form of wrong, redundant and inadequate use, and overall preposition errors were the highest (23,43%) among all other syntactic categories.

Atmaca (2016) also reported prepositions as the most frequent type of errors. However, prepositions symbolised the second or third most problematic category in the current study.

The percentage of prepositional mistakes may have been smaller than in the three studies above due to the data analysis and labelling process adopted in each study.

Without considering the conformity with similar studies, the frequency of prepositions was high in our study. It can be explained by Baysal's (2009) argument to an extent. She points out that prepositions give students a hard time learning and they are difficult to use in any language. The high ranking of this kind of errors here might be due to the challenging nature of this linguistic category.

The other groups of syntax such as word order, conjunctions and pronouns were ranked low. It is compliant with Karahan (2011), Yalçın (2010), Sürüç Şen and Şimşek (2020).

### Sources of Errors

Research question 2 was “*What might be the sources of their errors (interlingual or intralingual transfer)?*” It was found out that out of 1.052 total errors, 540 (51,33%) were intralingual and 439 (41,73%) were interlingual errors. A small amount of all errors (6,94%) was unrecognised.

A few points can be highlighted in the findings about the sources of errors. To begin with, the frequency of the interlingual and intralingual errors changed throughout the semester. While L2 errors started out at a higher place than L1 errors, these two error sources were swapped in Exam 2 and Exam 3. Then L2 errors increased again while L1 errors decreased at the end of the study. The change from Exam 1 to Exam 2 was sharp in terms of the respective numbers of L1 and L2 errors. Looking from the perspective of writing topics, there can be seen a difference between the nature of the writing tasks. In Exam 1, the students wrote about the daily routine of a person shown on the exam paper together with main details, which was quite controlled as a writing task. Before the exam, the students practised certain collocations and phrases used for expressing one's daily routine in the target language. During the exam, they may have failed to recall the chunks in full or correctly so they might have committed a high number of faulty uses of “verb + noun” collocations in English. This might explain the weight of the intralingual mistakes in the first exam. Conversely, in Exam 2, the students were given a relatively less controlled writing topic with a set of guiding instructions. They wrote a narrative paragraph about their past experiences at a concert or their first day at university. Both of the topics entail a lot of details about their personal past experiences that cannot be predicted or limited during the exam preparation. As they had only limited grammatical knowledge of L2 back then, the students may have resorted to their native language in

order to be able to complete the task. The reason for the abrupt rise in the crosslinguistic errors at that point could be the shift of writing task as mentioned above.

The other exams showed steadily lower levels of L1 errors. Exam 3 and Exam 4 were more structured than the previous one. In the same way as in Exam 1, before those exams, the learners practised a set of phrases and units of words for describing a place and a person, which must have controlled their mistakes. This in turn might have reduced the number of interlingual errors in Exam 3 and Exam 4. In those exams, most of the errors were caused by interference of the lexical and grammatical norms of English as L2.

In the separation of the error sources, it was noticed that determiners made up the largest part of interlingual errors. In particular, uses of articles led to such mistakes since indefinite and definite articles were often deleted in contexts they were needed.

Similarly, Alhaysony (2012) found out the Saudi learners committed a considerable number of article errors. They often omitted the indefinite article *a* and overused the definite article *the* as a consequence the native language transfer. In other words, the students made omission errors since Arabic does not possess indefinite articles. In the same vein, they added the definite article *the* redundantly in most cases because it exists in their mother language.

Atmaca (2016) also studied 32, elementary level adult learners in a Turkish state university, and she documented 16,29% of overall errors in articles. She suggested that the students had a tendency to apply the rules of their first language since they were not advanced learners of English.

Turkish language does not have a definite article, but it has an indefinite article: *bir*. Nevertheless, *bir* does not necessarily precede a noun phrase in Turkish while the opposite is true of *a/an* in English unless the head noun is uncountable. Also, specificity is not rendered by an article in Turkish, unlike *the* in English. Therefore, Turkish learners seem to neglect the function words *a/an* and *the* due to their habits in the mother tongue. This linguistic difference between the two languages could be the reason for the high frequency of interlingual article errors in our study.

Chelli (2014) reached a similar result in the Algerian context. She analysed preposition and article errors of first-year students of English and found 221 article errors.

It was revealed that 161 (72,85%) of the article errors were caused by negative transfer from the participants' native language Arabic.

Under the intralingual transfer in our study, there were two remarkable syntactic categories. Verbs and determiners comprised around 39% and nearly 33% of the intralingual errors, respectively. Such high levels can be considered to be normal since the students were at the beginning stages of language learning. Al-Shormani (2012) reported a comparable finding regarding verb errors. In his analysis of written syntactic errors made by 50, native Arabic university students, he found 3.429 errors. Of all errors, 63,79% was caused by L2 transfer and more than one third was contributed by verb phrase constructions and subject-verb agreement uses. Citing Dulay et al. (1982), he ascribes these rates to the lack of sufficient knowledge of English since "...learners, in this stage, are still trying to build systematically a knowledge base about the L2 linguistic system." This situation and the supporting argument might be valid for our case on account of the proficiency level of the participants.

Duygun and Karabacak (2022) reported a high frequency of verb errors within a corpus of around 10.000 words comprised of 96 narrative paragraphs written by prep school students. They found out that grammatical errors were the most recurrent type of errors among A1 level and A2 level participants, and they were mostly verb errors. The authors argued that more errors were made because of "target language transfer, limited knowledge of English language grammar and carelessness." This conclusion might also explain our results given that the students in both studies were at early stages of EFL, they were not good at forming verbs and L2 was a stronger source of transfer for those errors.

The other major feeder of the intralingual errors was determiners (33%), heavily articles. Most of the errors in this sub-group appeared like *He goes to the work; After the dinner he goes out; ...but she does not likes singing a Turkish rap; ...he is best teacher; It has got green view*. As is seen, the students provided articles when they were not needed as a result of generalizing a rule in L2. Also, they were not aware of the obligatory use of an article before "adjective + "noun" and superlative adjectives. They are unlikely to be analogy of L1 because translating them into Turkish would not give the intended meaning. Such mistakes could be explained with the lower proficiency of the learners in this study. They might need more input before starting to produce the relevant forms correctly.

In parallel, Al-Shormani (2012) determined a close percentage of L2-induced article errors (25,67%). Chelli (2014) reported an approximate percentage (27,15%) of intralingual articles errors, too.

Looking from a broader perspective, the total numbers of L1 and L2 errors in our study offer both supporting and contradicting results for the literature. As an example, Kırkgöz (2010) differs from the findings due to the distribution of errors by sources. In contrast to the present study, she identified more interlingual errors (221) than intralingual errors (179) in grammar.

On the other hand, there were compliant results. For example, Al-Shormani (2012) categorised 27,90% of errors as L1-induced and 63,73% as intralingual syntactic errors in students' argumentative essays.

The rate of interlingual errors was high in the study, not as high as intralingual errors though. It might be due to the proficiency level of the learners as suggested by Brown (2007). He posits that the early stages of language learning are characterised by prevalence of interlingual errors. The level of crosslinguistic influence at the pre-intermediate level can be explained with Brown's argument.

The intralingual transfer was even more visible. According to Dulay et al. (1982), contrary to popular belief, the vast majority of errors in L2 learners' language output are of the developmental kind. Adult interlingual errors also happen in very modest numbers, even though adults tend to show more mother-tongue influence in their errors than children do—as long as ambiguous errors are taken into consideration and language data are not elicited through timed translation tasks. The distribution of L1 and L2 errors in this study seems to fit into Dulay et al. (1982)'s proposition.

As an implication, the higher share of intralingual errors in the current study may not be interpreted as an alarming situation. Besides interlingual errors, intralingual errors are evidence of the students' learning attempts. It would not go too far to say that the L2 errors here are signalling the participants' language development shadowing the cognitive propensity in child language acquisition. It can be taken to mean that the foreign language teaching process in the school is functioning at least for the study participants concerned.

### Trend of Error Types

Research question 3 was “*Do the types of syntactic errors (linguistic categories) vary throughout one semester?*” It was found out the types of syntactic errors remained the same with varying frequencies throughout the study period.

It seems worth noting that determiners became the top category of syntax errors in all exams. MacDonald (2016) discovered that grammar errors were pervasive in the Spanish higher education sample. 27% of all grammar errors were in determiners and it remained so across all levels from A1 to B2. Considering the pre-intermediate level of the study group, the current study seems to support MacDonald (2016)’s results. In addition to that, the researcher above reported noun-phrase errors as the most frequent type, followed by prepositional-phrase errors and verb-phrase error, which is also supported by our findings.

Master (2002) points out that the English article system is a challenge for non-native learners. This may bear inferences for our participants as they had recently embarked on L2 learning during the study.

### Trend of Error Frequencies

Research question 4 was “*Do the frequencies of syntactic errors vary throughout one semester?*” It was found out the overall number of syntactic errors was above 200 in all exams. However, the score was above 300 in one writing session. There was noticeable increase from 236 to 319 in Exam 2. The first explanation for this can be the gap in the alignment of learner level and task timing. As mentioned earlier, the students were still at the beginning of pre-intermediate level when they were given the task of writing a narrative paragraph about their past experiences. It might have not been handled well enough by the students. Contrarily, they were able to submit papers with decreased rates of errors in the other exams as they demanded written outputs around more structured contents like daily routine and place and person description. It can hence be suggested that the narrative writing genre was not timely for the early stages of pre-intermediate level.

Moreover, Altunay (1989, pp. 37-38) refers to Ellis (1985) pointing at the difference between formulaic output and creative speech or writing. Exam 1, Exam 3 and 4 in our case can be associated with the first type of language learning process as students

navigated by memorising or imitating certain patterns. By contrast, the task requirement in Exam 2 tended to require creative output with less formulaic expressions. The number of errors might have increased because of the language use process employed in narrative writing.

One implication can be drawn accordingly. The quality and difficulty of testing materials could be fine-tuned according to the skill development benchmarks in the CEFR framework.

#### **4.2. Limitations of the Study**

This study is bound to a few limitations. First of all, it was conducted with a small group of learners that could be reached conveniently. The results cannot be generalised for all learners at this level in this school. In the same way, the study setting was restricted to the foreign language college of a state university; thus, the results cannot be assumed to represent all preparatory schools in Turkey. Another limitation is that a specific level of language (syntax) was picked for analysing the errors and arriving at conclusions. Therefore, it is possible that a holistic approach to all types of errors in the writings would give more hints at the learners' cognitive processes. Lastly, data collection was done by means of written documents only. Diversifying the data collection tools could have strengthened the results.

#### **4.3. Recommendations for Future**

This research study supports the claim that error analysis gives important insights on the teaching and learning process. Some recommendations are offered for future research in light of the findings and limitations of the study. In the first place, longitudinal studies can be done to examine the language development of pre-intermediate level Turkish adult learners. The volume of research on beginners' language psychology would expand as a result. Also, it is recommended to replicate this study in other colleges of foreign languages including the state and private universities. Third, the number of participants could be increased for more generalizable results. Lastly and the most importantly, there is a need for a sequential study towards the end of the academic year to compare the students' performance against the CEFR standards. The students are allowed to leave the school only after they reach level B1+. A future study at higher levels might show whether the learners are likely to achieve the exit level by the end of the

academic year. As a consequence, a bigger picture might be obtained regarding the linguistic goals and achievements.

#### **4.4. Conclusion**

As explained in the background of this research, learner errors bear importance for three things. They are signposts pointing to the learner's progress and areas of need. Secondly, they inform about the efficacy of a learner's language acquisition tactics. Also, mistakes as a necessary part of the learning process help students become fluent in the language (Corder, 1967). The present research is thought to serve these purposes to a considerable extent.

The contribution of this study is currently limited since studies with an identical design were not available in the literature. There were similar studies but none of them investigated the syntactic or grammatical errors over a period of time across the language proficiency level given. Therefore, less direct references and connections could be made with the previous research.

On the other hand, the study extends valuable contribution to the existing literature as it concerns itself with language pedagogy based on the CEFR principles. As known, the CEFR is grounded in real language learning data obtained by means of large-scale research. Thus, it is highly valued by the education planners in the foreign language school under examination. Different from other language instruction settings, the CEFR descriptors are strictly followed as the governing principles in any educational decision, whether it be about teaching or testing. The current research gives feedback on the practical side of the self-consistent CEFR system. This feedback may be useful to all parties involved such as the planners, testing specialists, instructors and students in this school and equivalent institutions. It is hoped to raise consciousness among educators and students about possible gaps in achievement of pedagogical goals.

Moreover, the results of this study may draw attention of the teacher training professionals to plan in-service assistance for the instructors to come into line with the educational logic adopted in the institution. In the same way, it may call for the instructors' attention to arrange remedial teaching as needed. These suggestions are applicable to other schools that are trying to adapt to the CEFR as well as the immediate one.

Lastly, the study findings can inform both the specific context and overall literature about things that are being done right and wrong in EFL teaching. Also, it can contribute a drop in the ocean in terms of implying the cognitive pattern of Turkish adult EFL learners.



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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX-A. Ethics Committee Approval



T.C.  
UFUK ÜNİVERSİTESİ  
Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma Etik Kurulu Başkanlığı

Sayı : E-81182178-605.99-41142  
Konu : Etik Kurul Onayı (Hülya GÜRBÜZ)

08.01.2024

#### DAĞITIM YERLERİNE

İlgi : Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğü'nün 11.10.2023 tarihli ve E-96064710-5014.10-38835 sayılı yazısı.

Üniversitemiz Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Yüksek Lisans Programı öğrencisi **Hülya GÜRBÜZ**'ün, **Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Berra ABBASOĞLU**'nun tez danışmanlığında devam ettirdiği "**Üniversite Hazırlık Sınıfında Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizce Öğrenen Orta Altı Seviye Öğrencilerin Yazılarının Sözdizimsel-Syntactic-Hata analizi (Syntax-based error analysis on writings of university prep school preintermediate level students)**" konu başlıklı tez çalışması, Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma Etik Kurulumuzun 17.11.2023 tarih ve 2023/06 sayılı toplantısında Yükseköğretim Kurumları Bilimsel Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Yönergesi ve Ufuk Üniversitesi Sosyal ve Beşeri Bilimler Bilimsel Araştırma Etik Kurulu Yönergesi çerçevesinde değerlendirilmiş olup, etik açıdan uygun olduğuna karar verilmiştir.

Bilgilerinizi ve gereğini saygılarımla arz/rica ederim.

Prof. Dr. Mustafa KILIÇ  
Kurul Başkanı

#### DAĞITIM:

Gereği:  
Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Müdürlüğüne

Bilgi:  
Rektörlük Makamına

## APPENDIX-B. Informed Consent Form

### BİLGİLENDİRİLMİŞ ONAM FORMU

(Gönüllü Katılım Formu)

Sayın Katılımcı,

Bu çalışma Ufuk Üniversitesi İngiliz Dili Eğitimi Bölümü'nde yürütülen bir araştırmadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı; İngilizceyi yabancı dil olarak öğrenen üniversite hazırlık sınıfı A2 seviye öğrencilerinin (CEFR) yazılarındaki sözdizimsel özelliklere ışık tutmaktır. Bu araştırma, dil öğrenimi ve öğretimi için önemli çıkarımlara sahiptir. Çalışmanın sonucunda kurumda çalışan İngilizce öğretmenleri uyguladıkları dilbilgisi ve sözdizimi öğretiminin ne derece isabetli olduğuna dair geribildirim alacaktır. Aynı zamanda, Türkiye'de öğrenen dilinin daha iyi anlaşılmasına katkıda bulunulabilecektir.

Sizden hiçbir kimlik belirleyici bilgi istenmeyecektir. Cevaplarınız, sınav kağıdı üzerindeki ad ve soyad gibi bilgilere bakılmadan ve hiç kimseyle paylaşılmadan araştırmacı tarafından amacına uygun olarak kullanılacak ve gizli tutulacaktır. Bu çalışmaya katılım tamamen gönüllülük esasına dayalıdır. Eğer katılmayı kabul ederseniz güz dönemi süresince katıldığınız beş (5) adet yazılı sınavda yazdığınız paragrafların bu amaçla incelenmesine izin vermeniz istenecektir.

Bu çalışmaya katılmayı kabul edebilir, reddedebilirsiniz, ayrıca çalışmanın herhangi bir yerinde onayınızı çekme hakkına da sahipsiniz.

Çalışma ile ilgili herhangi bir bilgi almak isterseniz aşağıdaki elektronik iletişim adresinden ulaşabilirsiniz.

Araştırma Koordinatörü: Dr. Öğr. Üyesi Berra ABBASOĞLU

Araştırmacı: Hülya GÜRBÜZ

**Katılımınız ve ayırdığınız vakit için şimdiden teşekkür ederiz.**



#### **Katılımcı Beyanı:**

Araştırma ile ilgili yukarıdaki bilgiler bana aktarıldı. Bana yapılan tüm açıklamaları ayrıntılarıyla anlamış bulunmaktayım. Verdiğim bilgilerin bilimsel amaçlı yayınlarda kullanılmasını kabul ediyorum. Bu araştırmada 'katılımcı' olarak yer alma kararını aldım.

İsim Soyisim:

İmza:

**NOT:** Sayın katılımcı, işbu onam formunun bilgilendirme kısmı tarafınızda kalacak olup, isim-soy isim ve imzanızın olduğu alan çalışmaya gönüllü olarak katıldığınızı belgelendirmek amacıyla araştırmacıda kalacaktır. Araştırmacı sayılan amaç dışında hiçbir şekilde isim ve imzanızı başka bir işlemde kullanmayacaktır.

## CURRICULUM VITAE

### Personal Information

Name & Surname : Hülya Gürbüz

### Education

2024 : Ufuk University, M.A in English Language Teaching

2005 : Hacettepe University, B.A in Translation and Interpreting

### Work Experience

2005 – 2008 : Translator, Agrin Consultancy Co. Ltd.

2009 – 2014 : English Language Instructor, Kilis 7 Aralık University

2014 - : English Language Instructor, Ankara University

### Qualifications

Languages : English

Date : 11.06.2024