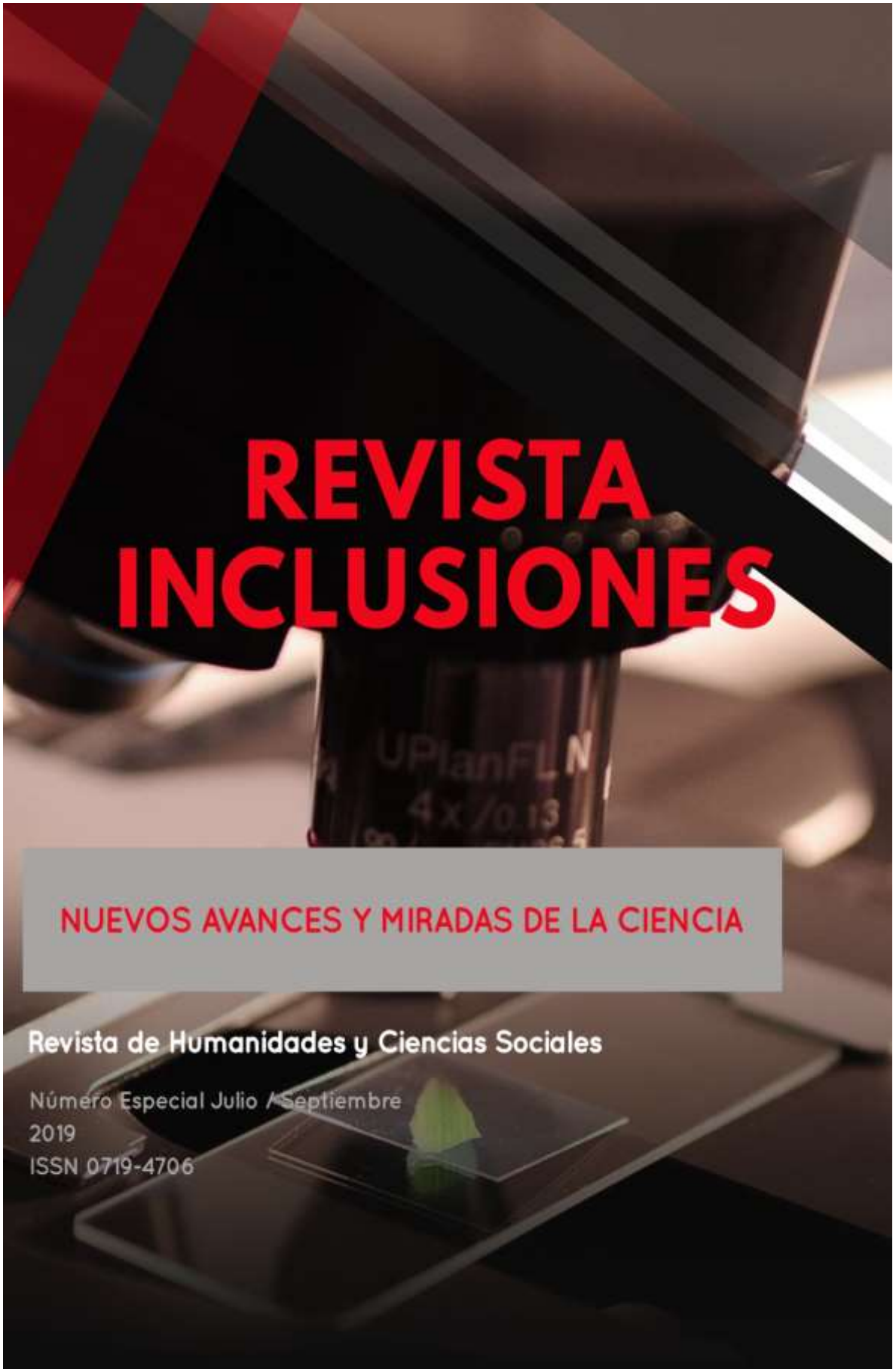

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ANALYSİS AND CLASSİFİCATİON OF FREQUENT WRİTİNG ERRORS OF TURKİSH CYPRİOT UNİVERSİTY STUDENTS

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Abstract

This paper aims at analyzing and classifying frequent writing errors of Turkish Cypriot university students. Fifty-five English as a foriegn language (EFL) learners ranging from pre-intermediate to advanced proficiency levels, majoring in English Language and Literature at a private university in Northern Cyprus participated in this study. They were asked to write an essay about their summer holiday within the range of 100 to 300 words. After the identification of errors in students' writing, they were analyzed and categorized based on a model proposed by Kashavarz (2015). Inter-rater reliability was carried out for the analysis of errors. The linguistic analyses of the data showed that morphological errors were the most frequent produced in the participants' essays, followed by syntactic errors. The errors were also analyzed in the light of their contributory sources. The results showed that 208 (44.2%) of errors were interlingual, and 263 (55.8%) were developmental and intralingual. The findings have implications for syllabus designers and EFL teachers.

Keywords

Writing errors – University students – Turkish Cypriot learners – English as a Foreign language Linguistic analysis

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Introduction

'They keep commiting the same errors' is in general put forth by language educators. Even though there has been a shift from traditional to innovative English as a foreign language (EFL) writing approaches and methods, students in the Turkish Cypriot context are still commiting the same type of errors in their writings. For this reason, it is important to detect the errors committed by EFL learners in this specific context to be able to deal with the difficulties these learners face in their writings. Correcting such errors will abolish the fossilization of these errors[1].

Errors in the speech or writing of second language learners are inevitable. They are seen as part of the learning process[2]. They are indications for teachers "how far towards the goal the learner has progressed, and, consequently, what remains for him to learn"[3]. Errors are also of benefit to the learners since "it is possible that making errors may actually help learners to learn when they self-correct the errors they make"[4]. In addition, errors are indispensable to second language researchers as they are "evidence of how language is learned or acquired, and what strategies or procedures the learner employing in his discovery of the language"[5]. Therefore, it is justifiable to analyze and classify learners' errors. As pointed out by Ellis[6], the classification of errors helps teachers to diagnose learners' language problems at any stage of their development. Furthermore, in support of studies like the current one, Corder points out that "by describing and classifying the learners' in linguistic terms, we build up a picture of the features of the target language which are causing him/her learning problems"[7]. Taking these into account, the significance that error analysis (EA) has and the contribution it makes to the EFL classroom in order to identify and reduce learner errors and improve teacher methodology is unquestionable. EA is the scientific categorization, investigation and perception of errors. In other words, it is explicit focus on committed learner errors in the target language. In order to carry out an E. A. Corder[8] highlights five phases a) Collecting a sample of learner language, b) Identifying errors, c) Describing errors, d) Explaining errors,and f) Evaluating errors.

Accordingly, this paper aims at describing and classifiying errors produced by Turkish Cypriot EFL learners in their free writing. The significance of this study is that, to the best of my knowledge, no previous study has dealt with Turkish Cypriot students' writing errors. In this specific context, even though Turkish Cypriot EFL learners have been studying English (it is a compulsory subject at primary and secondary schools) before starting their Bachelor's program, it is observed that they still produce written errors when writing assignments, projects, compostions and essays. Pinpointing the problamatic areas will provide some pedagogical guidelines for educators in this specific context.

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[1] H. Aziz and F. Abdolghader, "Investigation of International Students Quality on Educational Services", Journal of Humanities Insights. Vol: 2 num 3 (2018):118-23.
[2] S. P. Corder, "The significance of learner's errors", International Review of Applied Linguistics in language teaching, Vol: 5 num 4 (1967): 161–172; R. Ellis, The Study of Second Language Acquisition (UK: Oxford University Press, 2003) y S. Krashen, Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition (New York, NY: Pergamon Press, 1987).
[3] S. P. Corder, "The significance of learner's errors... 167.
[4] R. Ellis, The Study of Second Language Acquisition...
[5] S. P. Corder, "The significance of learner's errors...
[6] R. Ellis, Second Language Acquisition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).
[7] S. P. Corder, Error Analysis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1974), 257.
[8] S. P. Corder, Error Analysis...

The classification of errors employed in this study is based on Keshavarz's[9] comprehensive taxonomy. Two major categories of this taxonomy namely morphological and syntactic have been adopted in the present study. A description of each category will be provided in the results and discussion section of this paper. Following the linguistic classification of errors, in order to find out the reasons behind the production of errors commited by Turkish Cypriot learners of English, the sources of errors according to Keshavarz's[10] taxonomy were determined.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following research questions guided this study:

1.- What are the most and least frequent committed errors by Turkish Cypriot English as a foreign language learners?
2.- What were the main influences of the errors committed?

Literature Review

Following the outburst of the second world war, a cure for language teaching issues were highlighted with the recognition of constrastive analysis (CA) which predicts and prevents learners from commiting errors and assists them to solve their difficulties when learning a language. CA compares and contrasts languages and its major weakness is that it claims that mother-tongue interference is the main cause of errors. Learner errors were seen as a sin and should be eradocated. Opposing this view and to overcome the weakness of CA, a new alternative approach that investigated learner errors arose. Error analysis (EA) focused on the similarities of two languages. Errors were no longer seen as a sin but rather as indications for the process of learning. Committing errors enables second/foreign language educators to overcome the difficulties learners are facing in the language learning process[11]. CA concentrates on the similarities and differences of the first and second languages. However, EA descibes the learners' interlanguage objectively without highlighting the first language for comparison[12].

There are four sources of errors learners commit namely; interlingual, context of learning and communication strategies Keshavarz[13] identifies five major catagories of errors namely orthographic, phonological, lexical, morphological, and syntactic exist. To be able to present a detailed description of these errors, they are later classified into sub-catagories[14]. For example, the major category of syntactic errors will have as a sub-category wrong use of tenses. Darus conducted an error analysis and his investigation revealed that the most common errors committed by his participants were singular/plural forms, verb tense, word choice, subject-verb agreement, and word order. In addition to this, "errors that interefere with the comprehensibility" of the writing produced are referred to as global errors and the minor errors namely, grammar, punctuation and spelling produced in writing that do not "impede understanding" are referred to as local errors[15].

[9] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage (Iran: Rahnama Press, 2015).
[10] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[11] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[12] S. P. Corder, Error Analysis...
[13] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[14] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[15] D. Ferris, Treatment of error in second language student writing (Ann Arbor, MI: The U of Michigan P., 2002).

Another study conducted by Khodabandeh[16] showed that the most local errors were caused by misuse and omission of prepositions, articles, auxiliaries, lack of subject-verb agreement, and faulty lexical choice. Some studies have focused on written errors in general, i.e. they have dealt with more than one error type simultaneously, such as Owu-Ewie and Williams[17] who dealt with grammatical and lexical errors. Another general study by Cetereisi and Bostanci[18] revealed that EFL Turkish learners mainly commit linguistic errors when producing written texts.

Studies which have also employed Keshavarz's taxonomy of errors have shown that EFL learners produce more errors in the syntactic catagory[19]. However, Hariri's[20] study revealed that the most frequent errors committed by participants in his research were morphological as they were related to the use of prepositions. Less frequent errors were related to errors in the use of relative clauses, relative pronouns, and wrong use of verbs. Another study carried out by Eftekhar and Nouraey[21] indicated that the most frequent errors were committed were grammatical errors compared to the semantic and pragmatic errors committed.

Dispite, identifying and classifying errors it is important to find out the reasons behind these errors. Are they caused because of mother tongue interference or due to learning problems?. Kahavarz[22] put forth two causes of second language errors, namely, interlingual and intralingual and developmental errors. "Interlingual errors result from the transfer of phonological, morphological, grammatical, lexical, and sociocultural elements of the learner's mother tonuge to the learning of the target language"[23]. On the other hand, "intralingual and developmental errors are caused by the mutual interference of items in the target language"[24]. Intralingual and developmental errors are divided into the subcatagories of overgeneralization which is the process where the learner commits errors due to his/her limited knowledge and lack of exposure of the target language. In other words, applying grammatical rules to places where they basically to not apply. Another subcatagory of intralingual and developmental errors is ignorance of rule restrictions. This is commiting errors due to having no knowledge of certain rules. False anology is using elements of the target language where they are inappropriate. So, the learner has learnt some things in the target language and uses those in inapproapriate sentences[25]. The subcatagory of hyperextension is basically extending rules to areas where they are not applicable and hypercorrection "takes place when the speaker of non-standard variety

[16] F. Khodabandeh, "Analysis of students' errors: the case of headlines", The Asian ESP Online Journal Vol: 3 num 1 (2007): 6-21.
[17] C. Owu-Ewie & M. R. Williams, "Grammatical and lexical errors in students' English composition writing: The case of three senior high schools (SHS) in the central region of Ghana", Sino-USEnglishTeaching, Vol: 14 num 8 (2017): 463-482. doi:10.17265/1539-8072/2017.08.001
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[24] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage... 115.
[25] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...

attempts to use the standard variety"[26]. The last subcatagory put forth by Kashavarz[27] is faulty catagorization. Faulty catagorization is classifying target language items incorrectly.

A study by Sari[28] revealed that the causes of written errors were due to intralingual errors mainly in the subcatagories of overgeneralization, false concept hypothesis and incomplete application of rules.

Methodology

Research Design

Considering the research questions presented earlier, it was determined that a descriptive quantitative design would effectively answer the research questions as the main purpose was to analyze the errors by describing, identifying and categorizing them. Descriptive quantitaive designs involve numeric data analysis. Descriptive studies are primarily concerned with finding out 'what is' and quantitative research methods deal with numbers and/or anything that is measurable. The results thereby were deduced depending on frequencies and percentages.

Participants and Sampling

Convenience sampling, where the specific type of data collected from the class members were conveniently available to participate in the study, was employed. Convenience sampling is known as "a type of nonprobability sampling, where the members of the target population that meet certain practical criteria, such as easy accessibility, geographical proximity, availability at a given time, or the willingness to participate"[29]. In total, 55 EFL learners studying in the department of English Language and Literature in a private university in North Cyprus took part in this study. All the participants were of Turkish Cypriot origin and were all above 18 years of age. 25 of these participants were male and 30 were female. The prarticipants in this study were all sophomores in which case they were homogenious to some extent. Lack of homogeneity will have adverse effect on the results.

Data Collection Procedure

The quantitative data were obtained from the essays participants wrote based on their past summer holiday. All participants were provided with an A4 piece of paper to write their essays in 60 minutes within the range of 100 to 300 words. By enabling the participants to write freely it was assummed that they would be able to best express their potential by increasing writing fluency and prevent them from cheating. The participants were assured that this task would not affect their overall grades. After having collected the essays, an error analysis was carried out.

[26] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage... 118.
[27] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[28] E. M. P. Sari, "Interlingual errors and intralingual errors found in narrative text written by EFL students in Lampung", Journal Penelitian Humaniora, Vol: 17 num 2 (2016): 87-95.
[29] I. Etikan; S. A. Musa & R. S. Alkass'm, "Comparison of convenience sampling and purposive sampling", American Journal of Theoretical and Applied Statistics, Vol: 5 num 1 (2016): 2.

Inter-Rater Reliability

To check the reliability of the error analysis, the collected papers were given to another lecturer in the same institution (i.e., English Language Teaching Department) to analyze. The judge was requested to mark the participants' errors with a blue pen. This enabled the researchers to identify the similarities and differences in error identification in each essay. Table 1 displays the results of the inter-rater reliability.

		Lecturer 1 errors	**Lecturer 2 errors**
Lecturer 1 errors	Pearson Correlation	1	.961**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	55	55
Lecturer 2 errors	Pearson Correlation	.961**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	55	55

Table 1
Error Identification in Each Essay
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to see if the two raters' identification of errors were similar. The results of this analysis suggested a statistically significant and strong relationship between the two sets of results (*r*= .961, *n*=55, *p*= .000), indicating that the errors assigned by the second lecturer could be considered reliable. It could be concluded that the identifications of the first lecturer for the errors produced were reliable.

Data Analysis

The data obtained extracted from the essays were quantitatively analyzed. First, the errors were identified, then analyzed and categorized according to Kashavaraz's[30] detailed model. It appeared beneficial to employ this taxonomy as it is comprehensive and easy to follow. Moreover, it has been employed in previous studies and hasproven to be satisfactory. The most frequent errors were, then, presented in figures and a table (see Figures 1, 2, 3, 4 & Table 2) and statistically analyzed providing frequencies and percentages of the paricipants' committed errors.

Findings and Discussion

Error Catagories

The analysis of the data showed that the most prevalent error types produced in the participants's essays were morphological and syntactic errors (see Table 2). Themorphological errors (N=272, %=57.75) outnumbered the syntactic ones (N=199, %=42.25). In total, 471 errors were committed in the essays of the participants. This finding is in line with the findings of Hariri[31] who also put forth that morphological errors are committed the most among EFL learners.

[30] M. Kashavarz, Contrastive analysis, error analysis, and interlanguage...
[31] M. Hariri, "Taxonomy of morpho-syntactic errors and error analysis...

Error Catagories	N	%
Morphological Errors	272	57.75
Syntactic Errors	199	42.25
Total	471	100

Table 2
Frequency of Error Catagories

Figure 1 below illustrates the frequency of occurrence of different types of morphological errors. As can be seen, the most frequent morphological errors are errors in *the use of Articles* (N=125, %=46) and the least ones are *Wrong use of Influectual Morphemes* (N=4, %=1.5).

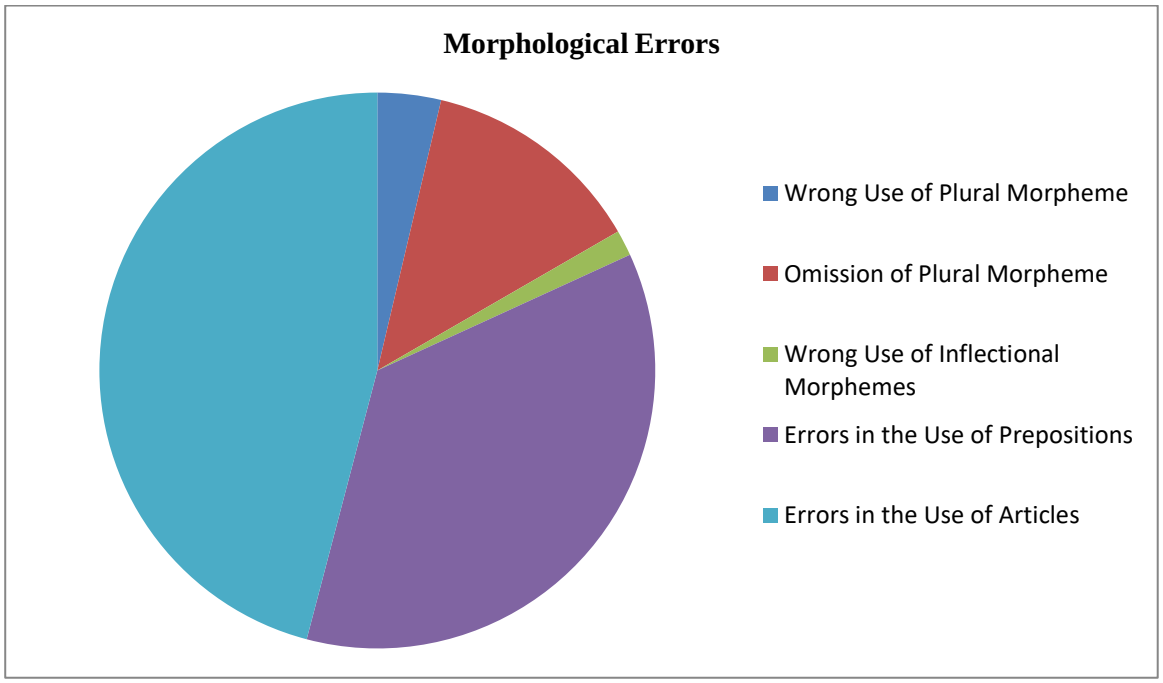

Figure 1
Catagory of Morphological Errors

Figure 2 displays the errors produced regarding the syntactic catagory. As could be seen errors with regard to *wrong use of tenses* are the most committed errors. More specifically, the participants produced the most errors in the catagory of *Wrong use of Tenses* (N= 75, %=38) especially in the sub-catagory of *Simple Present instead of Simple Past* (N=49, %=24.62). The least produced errors regarding the sub-catagory of wrong use of tenses were seen in the sub-catagories of *Past Perfect instead of Simple Past* and *Past Perfect Continuous instead of Simple Past*, both having only one error (%=0.51). The least committed errors were produced in the sub-catagory of *Omission of Capula* (N=1, %=0.51). These findings contradict to the findings of Zarei and Mansoori[32] who indicated that the least produced errors are in the sub-catagory of tenses.

[32] R. G. Zarei & S. Mansorri, "Analysis and catagorization of the most prevalent errors of intermediate and elementary Iranian EFL learners in writing in Iran", Language in India, num 11 (2011): 51-60.

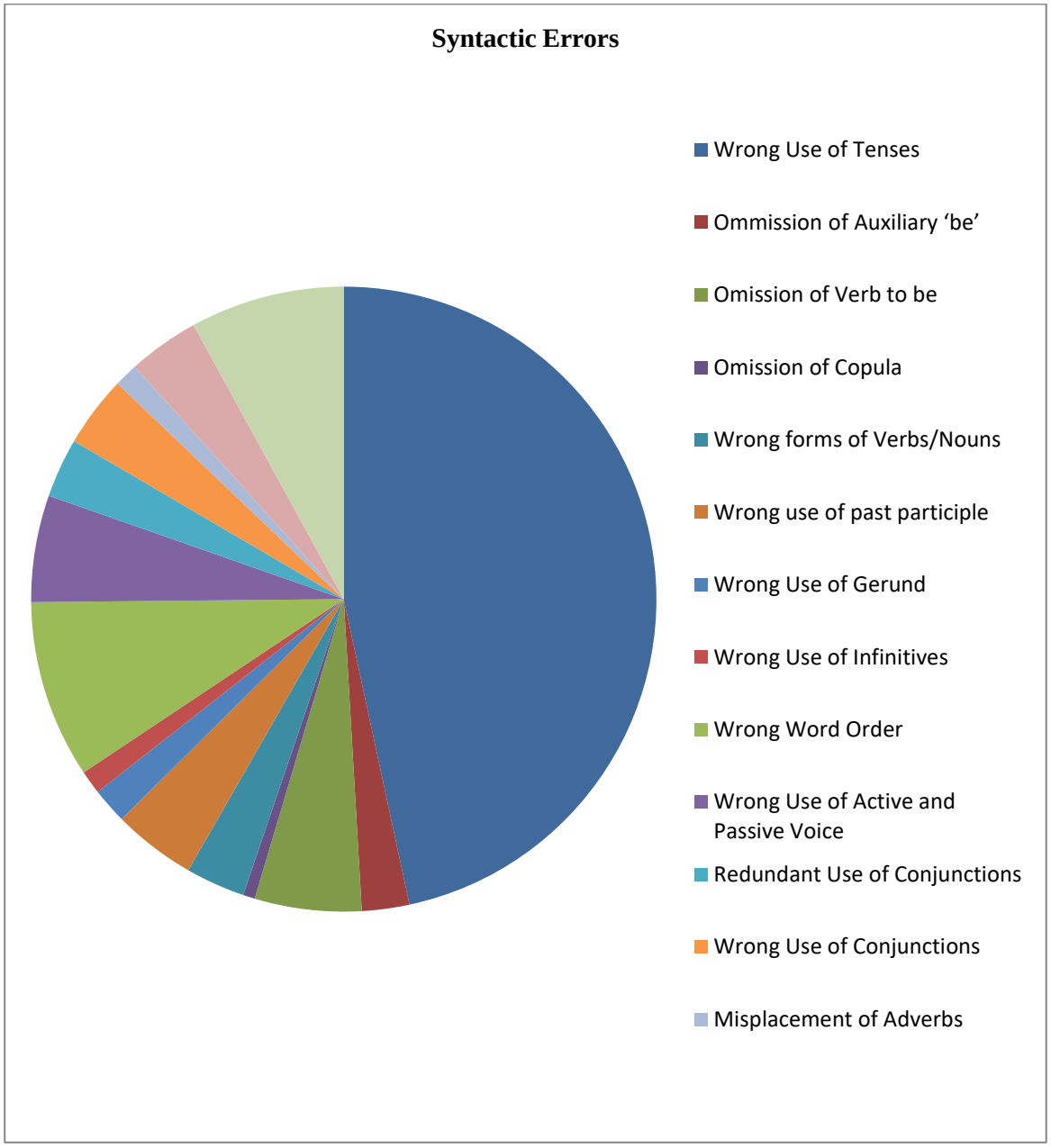

Figure 2
Catagory of Syntactic Errors
Sources of Errors

To be able to address the second research question, all the errors the participants produced were analyzedagain with regard to their contributory sources. It was revealed that out of the 471 errors produced 208 (%=44.2) were interlingual and 263 (%=55.8) were developmental and intralingual errors. The finding reveals that the errors produced were mainly influenced by developmental and intralingual errors (see Figure 3). This finding also reveals that a number of factors contribute to the production of second language learners' errors. This goes against the claim made by the proponents of constrastive analysis hypothesis who take mother tongue (MT) interference as the main cause of errors.

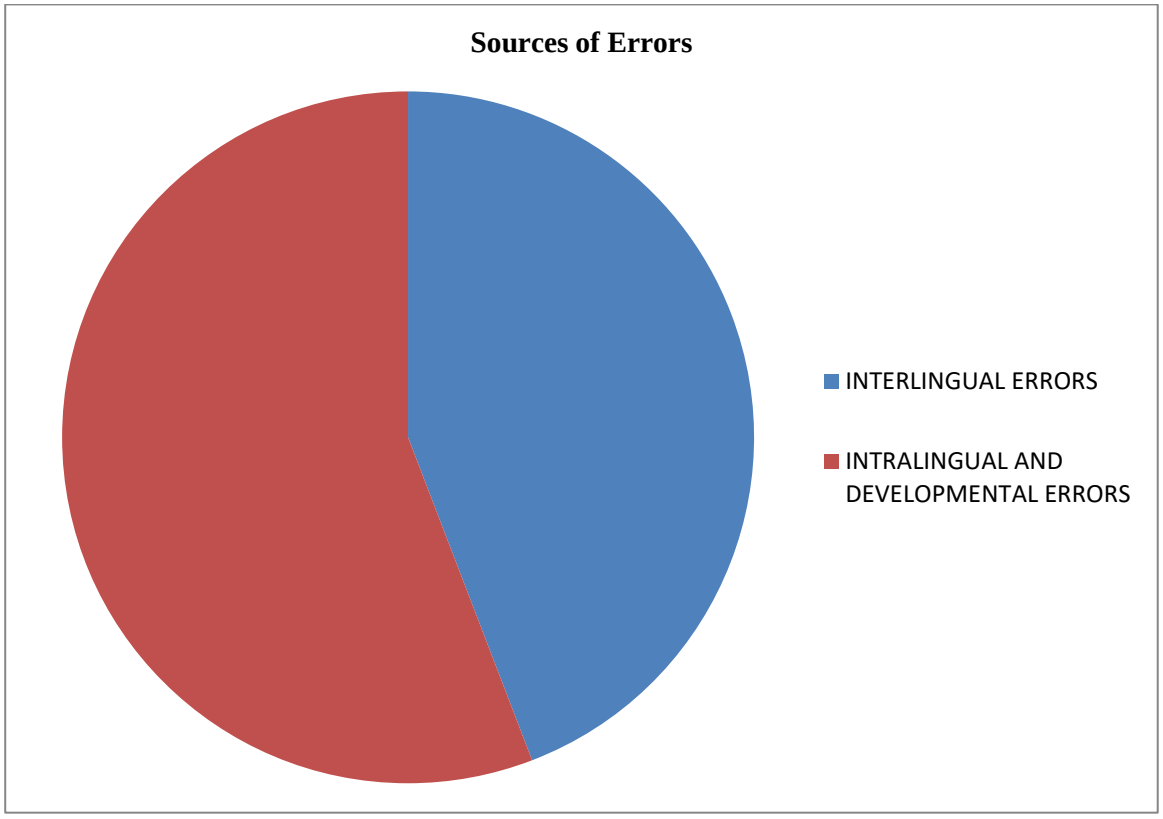

Figure 3
Sources of Errors

Interlingual Errors. As Figure 4 illustrates, interlingual errors were due to the*Morphological* (N= 213) and *Grammatical Elements*of Turkish (N=95).

The following are examples of transfer of morphological elements:

I didn't go to London for five **year.**

I stayed there for three **month.**

In these sentences the learners' native language had influenced their target language performance. In Turkish, the words year and month do not agree with number, i.e., number is used with these words.

The following are examples of transfer of grammatical elements:

My cousins **are living** there too.

I **was waking up** at 3 or 4 pm to open my bar.

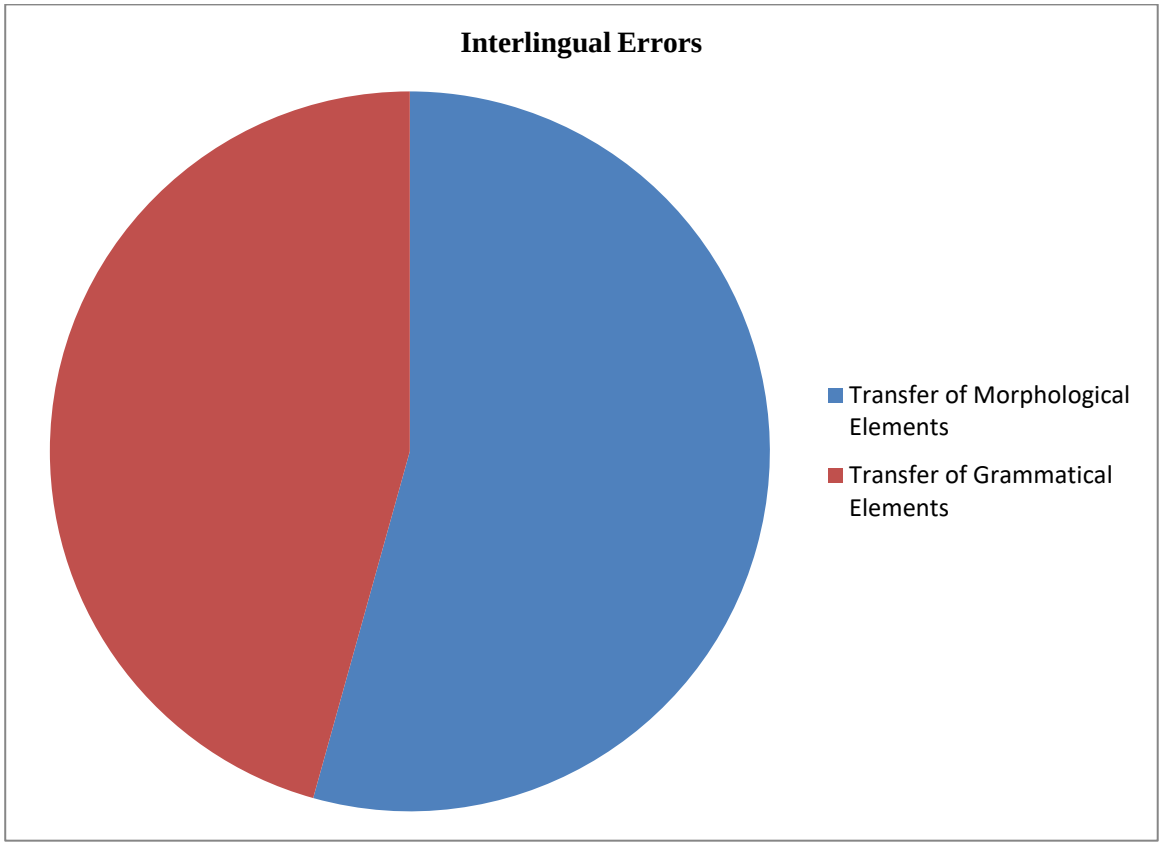

Figure 4
Interlingual Errors

The first two errors are due to the fact that in Turkish present and past progressive are used instead of Simple Present and Past tenses, respectively. It can also be argued that the third error above is influenced by the structure of Turkish since in this language the past tense is used for all past actions regardless of the structure or sequence of tenses involved. Whereas in English if one action is done before another in the past, Present Perfect is used for the first and Simple Past for the second.

Intralingual and Developmental Errors. As Figure 5 illustrates, intralingual and developmental errorsare divided into several subcategories. However, overgeneralization (N=56) and simplification (N=127) enjoy the highest frequecies, and hypercorrection (N=1) and hyperextension (N=2) the lowest.

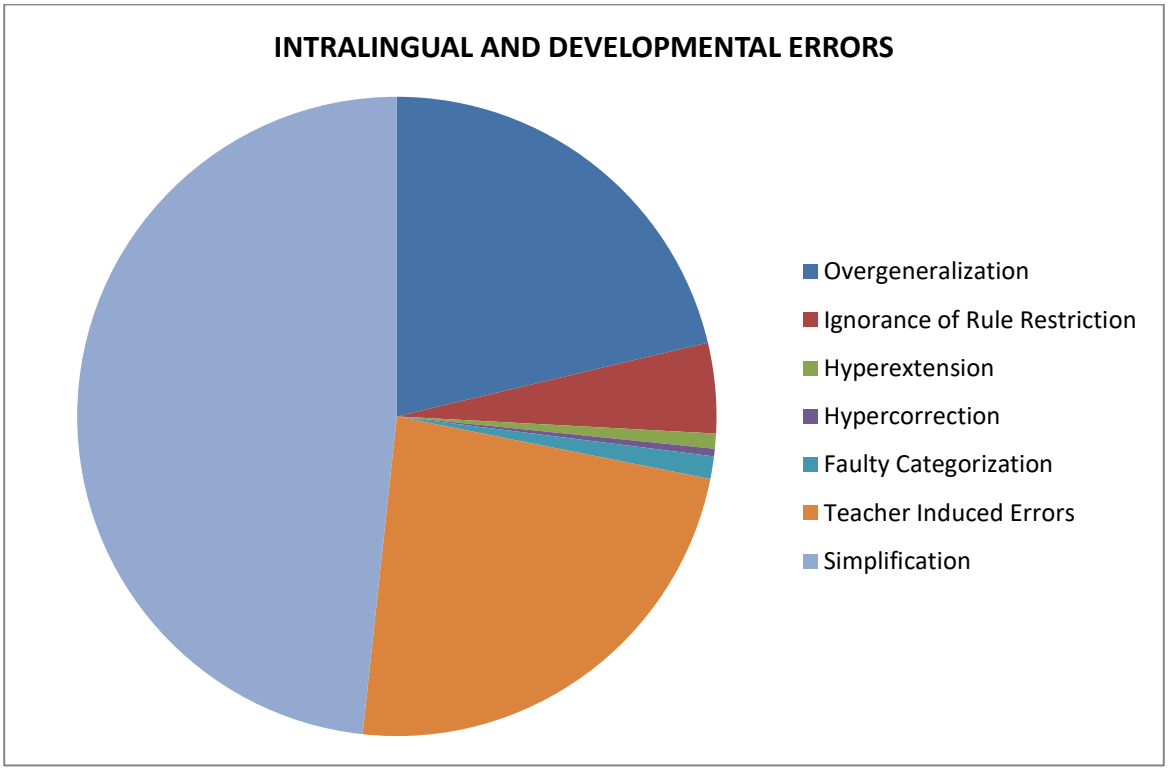

Figure 5
Intralingual and Developmental Errors

Regarding Intralingual and develpmental errors 56 of the errors were influenced by *Overgeneralization*. An example of this is as follows:

we **ride** a bike with my friend together last year.

The student learn't that a bike is used with the verb ride therefore s/he did not change this eventhough it is a past sentence.

Twelve errors were influenced by *Ignorance of Rule Restriction*. Examples of these are as follows:

The **films** finished we went to a night club.

I met many **peoples** at the concert.

After doing so many **shoppings** and visiting many places we returned back to Cyprus.

In these sentences it is evident that the learners were unaware of the rule of the TL.

Only two errors were influenced by *Hyperextension*. Examples of these are as follows:

Sometimes I was *boring* sitting every day.

Sometimes *it was becoming bored* because in my country we spent summer in moderate heat.

The learners that had produced these sentences had gone beyond what s/he knew of the TL.

Only one error was caused by Hypercorrection. This was seen in the sentence.

Generally in my free time my father and **mego** to the beach.

In this sentence over correction for the production of this sentence is seen. Here the sentence should have been *my father and I.*

Three errors were influenced by *Faulty Categorization*. To illustrate.

I wanted **to began** a new life with him.

I didn't work anywhere last summer because I wanted to have fun with my friends before **come** to Cyprus.

In these sentences incorrect classification of TL items are seen. The learners have used the infinitive correctly but have used the past tense after to.

Sixty-two of the errors were influenced by *Teacher-induced* errors. Examples of these are as follows:

I am also often **visiting** my classmate who works at the library.

I **didn't go** to London for five years.

I got sick and I **stay** at hospital for five days and till now I am trying to recover.

The learner has learn't the present continuous grammar rule but has confusion with the present simple rule. In addition, the learner has confused the present perfect tense grammar rule with the past simple.

As aforementioned most of the errors were influenced by *Simplification* (N-=127). To illustrate:

The weather good.

My family very happy.

She ill so I very sad.

I think everything perfect.

The film finished we went to a night club.

In these sentences the learners tried to get the meaning across by simplifying the sentences.

Conclusions and Recommendations

It could be concluded from the findings that the errors related to the writings produced by the participants were mainly committed in two main catagories, namely, morphological and syntactic. The study revealed that the morphological errors outperformed the syntactic errors. The morphological errors the EFL participants mostly committederrors in *the use of Articles* and the least committed errors in the *Wrong use of Influectual Morphemes.* On the other hand regarding the syntactic errors, the EFL participants committed the most errors in the catagory of *Wrong use of Tenses*in general and in the sub-catagory of *Simple Present instead of Simple Past* in particular. The least produced errors regarding the sub-catagory of wrong use of tenses were seen in the sub-catagories of *Past Perfect instead of Simple Past* and *Past Perfect Continuous instead of Simple Past*. The least committed syntactic errors were produced in the sub-catagory of *Omission of Capula*.

The main source of these errors were in contrast to the contrastive analysis' theorists who claim that the interference of the mother tongue (interlingual errors) causes learners' errorneous sentences, in fact it was seen that in such a context the main cause of learners' errors were attributed tointralingual and developmental errors.

These findings have implications for syllabus designers and EFL educators. and in the In addition, the findings of this study has shed light on the errors committed by EFL learners when writing. For this reason, this study could be helpful to EFL learners with regard to the awareness of errors when producing written work. Working on these errors as educators in writing classes will eliminate most of the global errors produced by the learners. Abolishing such errors will also reflect to the other courses, in the sense that, the learners will produce better writings when given essays, assignments, projects and compostions.

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