

# Evaluation of Errors in Written Texts Created by Foreigners Learning Turkish Online

## OPEN ACCESS

Volume: 10

Special Issue: 1

Month: August

Year: 2022

E-ISSN: 2582-1334

Received: 08.05.2022

Accepted: 24.07.2022

Published: 18.08.2022

### Citation:

Bayram, Bora. "Evaluation of Errors in Written Texts Created by Foreigners Learning Turkish Online." *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 10, no. S1, 2022, pp. 141–49.

### DOI:

<https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v10iS1-Aug.5188>



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### Abstract

*The Covid 19 pandemic, which started to be seen in Turkey in March 2020, required some changes to the education process in our country and all over the world, and during this period, the courses were carried out online. Therefore, education activities for foreigners residing in different parts of the world in Turkish education were carried out following the new situation. However, this situation has brought various problems. This study aims to detect the errors in the written texts created online by the students studying in the form of distance education at Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University TÖMER in the spring semester of the 2020-2021 academic year. For this purpose, 26 students were given topics such as fellowship, friendship, family, travel, technology, daily life, memories, cities, and countries. Then, they were asked to write a text about any of the topics of their own choice. The texts written by the students were evaluated by content analysis from qualitative data analysis. A total of 517 errors were detected as a result of the review, and the errors were categorically collected under three headings: Narrative disorders, spelling errors and punctuation errors. Nearly half of the errors detected are due to narrative disorders (49.51%). In second place are spelling errors (32.30%) and punctuation errors (18.18%) in last place. When looking at the errors evaluated at the level of narrative disorders, it was observed that impairments caused 71% of the 256 errors detected in the grammar level and 29% were caused by disorders in the level of meaning. Accordingly, it has been concluded that the students did not have sufficient feedback from the teacher on the language level disorders in the written texts created by the students during the online Turkish teaching process and that the students did not succeed at the desired level in applying the grammar rules. In this context, it is recommended that the lecturers show the necessary sensitivity to the application process of writing skills in online Turkish teaching to foreigners.*

**Keywords:** Teaching Turkish as a Foreign Language, Writing Skills, Error Analysis.

### Introduction

As a social organism, human being is in a constant contact with other human beings from the start of the life. There is a communication with foreign nations and communities for many reasons such as social, political, cultural, economic, military and commercial. This has raised issues such as learning a new language or teaching your own language to a foreigner. Today, it is pretty common for people to receive training in order to acquire a new language. This training has become one of the necessities of not falling behind in the modern world and adapting to changing conditions. According to Arat (2021), individuals are aware that it is necessary to speak a good foreign language for advances in communication technology, increased international relations, commercial and economic cooperation, and greater use of educational opportunities.

Recently, interest in learning Turkish has been increasing. In this direction, there is also an increase in the number of studies in this field with the centers that provide language teaching services. This increase brings with it inquiries about the nature of foreign language teaching.

Learning a foreign language is not just about transferring information about the target language to the student. However, this process also includes dynamics that will help make learning possible, illuminate teaching and shape the process (Gülmez, 1986). As a matter of fact, the language learning process includes many variables.

Writing is an important skill area of the language learning process shaped by different variables. According to Demirel (2003), writing skill stands out as the last and the most challenging skill in terms of gaining and improvement for the students. It is possible to say that the primary skill areas of this situation are related to the integrity of each other and the ability to write is in parallel with the development of other skills such as speaking, reading and listening. In addition, the ability to write is also noted as a product-expected skill in terms of requiring students to demonstrate what they have learned in a concrete way (Arat, 2021). As a matter of fact, the primary purpose of giving the student the ability to write is to ensure that people can express their feelings and thoughts in their written expressions by adhering to the rules of the language when using Turkish (Tiryaki, 2013). This is the case in Turkish teaching both as a mother tongue and as a foreign language. However, the problems encountered in teaching Turkish as a foreign language are unique. It is possible to count many reasons for the errors we observe in the process of teaching foreign languages. These reasons are some of the differences in the essential characteristics due to the different language structures, words, and sentences in the mother tongue or because the target language and mother tongue belong to other language families (Adalar Subaşı, 2010). According to Richards (1974), students make errors in the language learning process that arise from their native language or target language. Those originating from the mother tongue are called interlingual errors, and errors not related to the linguistic background are called developmental or intralinguistic errors. Intralinguistic errors are divided into four as an excessive generalization, inability to restrict rules, incomplete implementation of rules and inaccuracies in concept development.

Error analysis is to observe and analyze the errors made by the students within a particular system.

Although this analysis and grouping is complex, it sheds light on the problems students have in the language learning process and the points that need to be emphasized more in terms of showing teachers and those preparing materials for learning a foreign language (Bölükbaş, 2011). In addition, error analysis also helps the teacher review the teaching techniques and materials applied and reorganize the teaching program by evaluating the teaching process (Önder & UzduYıldız, 2017). It is possible to benefit from the information about the language use skills of the students and their error analysis in detecting and correcting the missing information of the students and correcting the errors that arise (Gülmez, 1986).

According to Lado (1957), people tend to carry the meanings and forms found in their own languages and cultures to foreign languages and cultures. This can happen both when they try to speak the target language and in the process of understanding it. In such a case, contrastive analysis between the mother tongue and the target language will help prevent students from getting it wrong. While the contrastive analysis is carried out in advance, the error analysis is carried out later with the help of data obtained from foreign language learners or exams (Şahin, 2019). Both methods have strengths and weaknesses. The contrastive analysis has been criticized as inadequate and incomplete due to the fact that the source of the errors is linked to the mother tongue mixture (Kahraman, 2019). In error analysis, it is impossible to explain the error by transferring similar structures in the student's mother tongue to the target language, as in the contrastive analysis. In addition, transfer errors, social-linguistic and psycho-linguistic errors are explained taking into account (Kahraman, 2019).

One of the classifications for the errors made by students in the language learning process is the classification created by Keshavarz. According to Keshavarz, these errors are examined in two groups: grammatical errors and usage-level errors. Grammatical errors are grouped under four subheadings: spelling, phonological, lexical-semantic, and morphological-syntactic. Usage-level errors are divided into addition, subtraction-inclusion, substitution and ordering (Keshavarz, 2011).

The Covid 19 pandemic, which started to be seen in Turkey in March 2020, has required some

changes to the education process in our country as well as all over the world. During this period, face-to-face education was replaced by distance education and courses were carried out online. Education activities for foreigners residing in different parts of the world in Turkish education were carried out in accordance with the new situation. It has become inevitable to encounter many problems caused by the online practicing of face-to-face, interactive teaching activities such as language teaching. As a matter of fact, the written texts created by students who learn Turkish as a foreign language are also affected by different variables of the virtual environment. Therefore, it is significant to identify and evaluate the errors in the written products created by the students, to prevent future problems and to increase the quality of teaching Turkish to foreigners.

This study aims to identify the errors contained in the texts created by foreigners with different mother tongues who learn Turkish online at level B2 during the Covid 19 pandemic.

### Method

In the research, descriptive survey model, one of the qualitative research methods, was used. It is descriptive research since it is a case study aiming to measure the written expression skills of the students studying in the form of distance education at Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University TÖMER in the spring term of the 2020-2021 academic year. This type of research is generally known as survey research, which deals with events and situations in detail (Erkuş, 2005).

### Study Group

The study group consists of 26 students studying at B2 level at Alanya Alaaddin Keykubat University TÖMER in the 2020-2021 academic year. Information about the students who make up the study group is given in the table below.

**Table 1 Information About the Countries of Origin of the Students Participating in the Study**

Country	f	%
Russia	5	19.23
Iran	3	11.54

Kazakhstan	3	11.54
Iraq	2	7.69
Azerbaijan	2	7.69
Syria	1	3.85
Congo	1	3.85
Egypt	1	3.85
Palestine	1	3.85
Libya	1	3.85
Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	3.85
Lebanon	1	3.85
Yemen	1	3.85
France	1	3.85
The USA	1	3.85
China	1	3.85
<b>Total</b>	26	100

When table 1 is examined, it is seen that a total of twenty six students from 16 countries participated in the study, including five students from Russia, three from Iran, three from Kazakhstan, two from Iraq, two from Azerbaijan and one each from Syria, Congo, Egypt, Palestine, Libya, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Lebanon, Yemen, France, the USA, China.

### Data Collection Tool

In order to obtain the research data, the students who participated in the study were given different topics, and the students were asked to write texts about anyone they would choose from. The subjects given to students are fellowship, friendship, family, travel, technology, daily life, memories, cities, and countries.

### Data Analysis

Research data were evaluated by content analysis from qualitative data analysis. It is a scientific approach that enables the systematic and objective analysis of verbal and written materials (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001). While analyzing the data obtained, the texts received within the framework of the subjects given to the students were collected. The texts were examined one by one and the errors in the texts were identified and recorded. Subsequently, the clustering of the detected errors in terms of similarities was taken into account, and the substances were collected

around subcategories. If subcategories create new subcategories within themselves, relative frequency tables of errors are prepared by taking the necessary care.

**Findings and Comments**

In this part of the research, evaluations of the data obtained from the study group are included. These assessments are digitized with frequency (f) and percentage (%) values to make them more straightforward and expressed in tables. In order to support the data of the research, direct excerpts from the texts written by the students were included without interference.

A total of 517 errors were detected due to the examination of the texts printed on a total of 26 students studying at B2 level. The detected errors

are categorically collected under three headings: Narrative disorders, spelling errors and punctuation errors. Almost half of the errors detected are due to narrative disorders (49.51%). In second place are spelling errors (32.30%) and punctuation errors (18.18%) in last place.

**Table 2 Errors Detected in the Texts Created by the Students**

Errors	f	%
Narrative	256	49.51
Spelling errors	167	32.30
Punctuation errors	94	18.18
The Overall Total	517	100

**Table 3 Errors Caused by Narrative Disorders**

Errors		f	%		
Narrative disorders	Disorders at the level of meaning	Misuse of the word	50	19.53	
		Use of the word in the wrong place	8	3.12	
		Unnecessary word usage	17	6.64	
	Disorders at the level of grammar	Noun phrase error	Noun phrase error	11	4.29
			Subject-verb agreement	12	4.68
		Lack of elements	Lack of subjects	3	1.17
			Lack of verb	11	4.29
			Lack of prepositional clause	8	3.12
			Lack of objects	3	3.17
		Prefix/Suffix related disorders	Incorrect use of the possessive suffix	29	11.32
			Incorrect use of the verb suffix	11	4.29
			Incorrect use of the prepositional suffix	38	14.84
			Incorrect use of the modal suffix	10	3.90
	Lack of prefix/suffix		25	9.76	
	Unnecessary suffix usage	17	6.64		
	Other	3	1.17		
<b>Total</b>		256	100		

A total of 256 errors were detected when the texts created by the B2 level foreign students who participated in the study were evaluated in terms of narrative disorders. 29% of these errors are due to semantic errors, and 71% to grammatical errors. It is seen that the disorders at the level of meaning are mostly caused by not using the word in accordance with its meaning (f=50). When we look at the semantic disorders detected at the grammar level, it

is seen that four sub-categories emerged as phrase errors (f=11), subject-verb agreement (f=12), lack of element (f=25), and prefix/suffix-related errors (f=133). When we looked at the errors related to prefix/suffix, which are the subcategory in which the most errors were detected from this group, it was determined that items such as misuse of the prepositional suffix (f=38), misuse of the possessive suffix (f=29) and lack of prefix/suffix(f=25) stood out.

In general, when looking at the narrative disorders, it was observed that the most common error among all items was the misuse of the word (19.53%), misuse of prepositional suffix (14.84%) and possessive suffix (11.32%). Below are direct excerpts from the texts examined as examples of errors that can be evaluated in this category.

- Kazancım öğrendiğimde mutluluktan ağlıyordum. (S.12-Russia/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Hayatımdaki en önemli ve büyük başarı Moskova vokal yarışmasında ilk sırayı kazandım. (S.12-Russia/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Sonra ben bir yolundan geliyorum. (S.11-Kazakhstan/Prefix/suffixerror)
- ... bahçemizde bir kaç ağaçlar var. (S.10-China/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Sosyal medya(yı) derslerim için kullanıyorum. (S.9-Iran/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Bazen müzik dinlerken yemek pişiriyorum ve annem(le) beraber yürüyürüm. (S.9-Iran/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Mesela Kongo'da kendi elektrimiz üreten bir büyük barajı var. S.8: Congo/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Ben 22 yaşındayım ve Amerikalı üniversiteden mezun oldum. (S.6-the USA/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Üç aydır garsonluk yaptım ve ehliyedim var. (S.6-the USA/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Her sabah kendi için zaman ayır! (S.17-Russia/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Polislere yardım etmek için çok teşekkür ederim. (S.18-Iraq/Prefix/suffixerror)
- Her zaman gerekli ilaçları yanımda alıyorum. (S.21-Russia/Prefix/suffixerror).
- Teknoloji olmasaydı şimdi eğitimsiz kalacağız çünkü eğitim teknolojiyen geçiyor. (S.25-Libya/Prefix/suffixerror)
- ...çünkü her vücut (vücudun) şekerli bir şeye ihtiyacı var. (S.7-Iran/Nounphraseerror)
- Bahçemizde ağaçlar çiçek açıyorlar. (S.10-China/Subject-verbagreement)
- Pencerelerin kapalı olduğundan emin olmalıyız, (bu durum) zihinsel olarak sizi rahatlatıcak. (S.19- Palestine/Lack of elements)
- Aynı zihne ve düşünelere sahibiz. (onunla) (S.26- Kazakhstan/Lack of items)
- Kişileri beslemekten hoşlanıyorum. (S.6- the USA/Misuse of words)

- Ben seyahat etmeyi beğeniyorum. (S.19- Palestine/Misuse of words)
- Yanıma diş fırçası, diş macunu, parfüm, kozmetik ürünleri ve birkaç elbise götürmeyi unutmam. (S.21- Russia/Misuse of words).
- Para tüm hayallerine bulaşacağınaen çok yardımcı olan şeydir. (S.23- Azerbaijan/Misuse of words)
- Sonra ben yedi yıl sonra ben bir rüya gördüm. (S.11- Kazakhstan/Unnecessary word use)
- Yemekleri daha fazla evde pişireceksiniz. (S.16- Kazakhstan/ Use of theword in the wrong place)

**Table 4 Errors Due to Spelling**

Errors		f	%
Spelling errors	Misspelled word	102	61
	Misuse of capital letters	51	31
	misspelling of the conjunction "de"	14	8
	<b>Total</b>	167	100

A total of 167 errors were detected when the texts created by the students who participated in the study were evaluated in terms of spelling errors. This number corresponds to 32.30% of all errors. In the spelling errors category, errors are divided into three sub-categories. Accordingly, the most commonly detected item is the misspelling of the word (61%). This is followed by misuse of capital letters (31%) and misspelling of the conjunction "de", respectively. Below are direct excerpts from the texts examined as examples of errors that can be evaluated in this category.

- Şimdi ben Türkiye'de yaşıyorum. Bir küçük şehirde, deniz yakın, hava temiz, bu şehiri çok seviyorum. (S.10- China)
- Merhabalar ahmet nasılsın? (S.14- Syria)
- Bende hafta içi şirkete gidiyorum ve hafta sonu dağcılıya gidiyorum. (S.9-Iran)
- Bunun için bütçeyi dogruayirmek gerekir (S.16- Kazakhstan)
- Çünkü biliyoruz, ayne şekilde günümüz geçecek. (S.17- Russia)
- Sunsun'da ailem ziyaret etmek ve biraz gezmek için bir hafta bir araba kiraladım. (S.18- Iraq)
- Şanlı urfade Aynı okulda okuduk. (S.20- Iraq)

- O çok güldü un dedi bende çok utandım ve koşarak şıktım. (S.22- Lebanon)
- Üniversiteden sonra hayatım nasıl olacak? (S.23- Azerbaijan)

**Table 5 Errors Due to Punctuation**

Errors		f	%	
Punctuation errors	Lack of punctuation	Period	32	34.04
		Comma	21	22.34
		Apostrophe	5	5.31
		Question mark	3	3.19
		Colon	2	2.12
		Triple dot	4	4.25
	Misuse of punctuation	Period	12	12.76
		Comma	10	10.63
		Exclamation mark	2	2.12
		Semicolon	3	3.19
<b>Total</b>		94	100	

Another category of errors detected in the texts examined are errors caused by punctuation errors. A total of 94 punctuation errors were detected in the text evaluated in this context. This number corresponds to a rate of 18.18% among all errors. In this category, errors appear to be aggregated around two subcategories: Lack of punctuation (71%) and incorrect use of punctuation (29%). When looking at the punctuation marks that are used both incompletely and incorrectly, it is seen that the period and comma come to the fore, respectively. Direct quotations from the analyzed texts are given below as examples of errors that can be evaluated in the punctuation category.

- Anne: O zaman kalkman lazım; bir tesisatçı çağır; bu iş yapar. (S.15- Yemen)
- Bana veda etmeye geldiğini söylemedi (.) (S.20- Iraq)
- ...un istedim ama ben ne dedim “on istiyorum” dedim sonra o anlamadı ... (S.22- Lebanon)
- Nouran tüm zor zamanlarımda yanımdaydı ve hala yanımda. (S.26- Kazakhstan)
- Başlatmakta et, tavuk, balık, köfte vb.. yiyebilirsin, ama dikkat et! (S.7-Iran)
- ... sonra deniz manzara göreceğimiz bir günlük eve tuttuk 4 gün 3 gece kaldık orada çok güzeldi. S.8: Congo)
- ... en güzel doğum günü hediyem eşim, Bugün çok mutluyum (S.10- China)
- Merhabalar sami iyiyim sen nasılsın?, (S.14-

Syria)

- Modern, denize yakın ve sessiz. (S.2- Egypt)

### Discussion and Conclusion

A total of 517 errors were detected when the written products created by 26 foreign students studying at B2 level were examined. These errors were categorically evaluated under three headings: narrative disorders, spelling errors and punctuation errors. Almost half of the errors detected were concentrated under the category of narrative disorders (49.51%). This is followed by misspellings (32.30%) and punctuation errors (18.18%).

When looking at the mistakes evaluated at the level of narrative disorders, it was observed that 71% of the 256 errors detected were caused by impairments in the level of grammar and 29% were caused by disorders in the level of meaning. These results are similar to those of a study conducted by Büyükkız and Hasırcı (2013) on international students learning Turkish at B2 level. Accordingly, grammatical errors detected in the writings of international students come second with 31%. According to Büyükkız and Hasırcı (2013), this is due to the fact that students are not given feedback to the relevant subject in their in-class writing studies and grammar rules cannot be internalized by the students. Again, the online teaching of Turkish to foreigners has a significant impact on the emergence of this situation. Due to the time problem, the lecturer is incapable of giving

the necessary conversion to the texts created by the students in the courses.

When we look at the semantic disorders detected at the grammar level, it is seen that four sub-categories emerged as phrase errors ( $f=11$ ), subject-verb agreement ( $f=12$ ), lack of element ( $f=25$ ), and prefix/suffix-related errors ( $f=133$ ). When we looked at the errors related to prefix/suffix, which are the subcategory in which the most errors were detected from this group, it was determined that items such as misuse of prepositional suffix ( $f=38$ ), misuse of the possessive suffix ( $f=29$ ) and lack of prefix/suffix ( $f=25$ ) stood out. Similarly, Çerçi, Derman, and Bardakçı (2016) concluded in their research on the written texts created by foreign students at all levels learning Turkish that the errors detected at the grammar level are mostly related to the use of suffixes, especially the wrong use of noun and verb conjugation suffixes. These results are in line with the results of our research in terms of errors caused by prefix/suffix use.

A total of 167 misspellings have been detected in the spelling errors category, which corresponds to 32.30% of all misspellings. The item that was found to be the most wrong in this category was the misspelling of the word (61%). This is followed by misuse of capital letters (31%) and misspelling of the conjunction “de”, respectively. At this point, it is worth noting that the courses were given in the form of distance education due to the Covid 19 pandemic during the research period. In this process, students created written products with the help of technological devices such as computers, tablets and smartphones. Writing text with such tools has its own challenges. It is thought that the findings of the research related to spelling errors are partly due to these difficulties.

It has been observed that students often get it wrong in the writing of sounds such as *i, ö, ü*, which are not found in their native language. It should be considered that factors such as the different keyboard used, participating in online writing lessons by phone, and not receiving sufficient feedback on their written expressions also contributed to this situation. In the same way, Çerçi, Derman, and Bardakçı (2016) found that spelling errors caused by phonemic harmony were reflected in the written expressions of

the students in their study on international students learning Turkish. However, some misspelled words also involve negative transfers from the alphabet students use in the native language. Yılmaz and Bircan (2015) pointed out a similar point in their study on the errors in written compositions of international students and pointed out that this situation should not be seen as intralinguistic developmental errors. In the same way, Bölükbaş (2011) states that in his study in which he identified the errors in the written texts of Arab students, the pronunciations of letters such as “o, ö, u, ü, a, e” sound the same to students and they are undecided about which one to use.

A total of 94 punctuation errors were detected in the texts created by the students. Of all the errors, this number corresponds to 18.18%. It is seen that the detected punctuation errors are gathered around two sub-categories: Lack of punctuation (71%) and incorrect use of punctuation (29%). The prominent punctuation marks in both subcategories are periods and commas. In the literature, it is seen that the most common errors in the studies on the texts written by international students learning Turkish are spelling and punctuation errors (Şahin, 2013; Çetinkaya, 2015; Karababa, 2009; Önder & Uzdu Yıldız, 2017; Yılmaz & Bircan, 2015; Kahraman, 2019). İnan, 2014). In terms of spelling and punctuation, our research found relatively few errors. This is likely to be due to the fact that the categorical distinction is different from other studies and that the courses are in the form of distance education due to pandemic conditions. Preparing and sending written texts of students in a computer environment may also lead to fewer errors than observed in the literature. As a matter of fact, the tools used for writing today have intelligent systems that also warn about spelling errors. In order to correct the errors detected in terms of punctuation and to ensure that the students are well trained in this regard, the subject should be handled carefully, especially at the basic levels. According to Bölükbaş (2011) these problems of students with spelling and punctuation problems should be solved at the basic Turkish level, there is a risk that related errors will become permanent at intermediate and advanced levels.

## Suggestions

In language teaching, basic skills should be perceived and taught as a whole rather than being independent of each other. In order to turn the taught knowledge into skills, the student should be given the necessary feedback. Course planning should be done considering that the language teaching applied online has different dynamics than face-to-face courses.

In teaching writing skills, emphasis should be placed on the written equivalents of the sounds that are not in the native language of the international student learning Turkish, and speaking and writing skills should be presented integrated at this point.

It is a fact that many international students from different countries study in the same classroom environment. Considering that the language families to which the languages belong have different qualities, it may be possible to carry out several activities related to the same subject simultaneously when necessary.

The curriculum in which the grammar subjects are presented in a planned and hierarchical manner should be adhered to, but the next subjects should not be moved until the subjects that are not understood, poorly understood or misunderstood are discussed and taught again. As a matter of fact, an error can continue by triggering other errors in a sequence.

It is possible to make the courses more interesting with technological tools and materials. It is possible to use technology products and design new and creative activities to produce rich content that can appeal to students of different qualifications. However, while writing activities are carried out, planning should be done by considering the adverse effects of technological tools on the writing process. For example, the possibility of students copying a text from the internet and submitting it to the teacher regarding the subject planned to be written in the lesson should be taken into consideration. In order to prevent this, care should be taken to highlight the personal perspectives and experiences of the students in the selection of topics.

International students sometimes have difficulty expressing subjects they do not understand for various reasons. At this point, the instructor has a great responsibility. Care should be taken to

encourage students by correctly approaching them.

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