

Error analysis in usage of basic tenses in Turkish by Kirgiz students

Fatma Bölükbaş* – Ayşegül Yargın**

1. Introduction

The attention paid to Turkish, of which roots date back centuries before and which is among the most frequently spoken languages in the world, increases day by day, in parallel with the transformation experienced in the world. For this reason, new methods and techniques for teaching Turkish as a foreign language as well as researches dealing with problem-focused approaches have become common in recent years. One of the problem-focused approaches in language learning is error analysis.

Error analysis is a topic within the scope of contrastive linguistics. Contrastive linguistics is a sub-theory of applied linguistics, which covers the comparison of two or more languages with the aim of determining their differences and similarities (Fisiak 1980). Contrastive linguistics is a branch of applied linguistics which aims to generate effective methods for language teaching by comparing native language with a foreign language and determining the differences, distinctions and contradictions between them. Specifying the distinctions between languages in areas such as phonetics, lexicology and syntax by making regular comparisons have become the topic of many researches especially after 1950. Integrating these comparisons with researches dealing with the types of student errors have resulted in obtaining exceptionally beneficial outcomes and effectively contributed to educational science (Vardar 1988).

By comparing the native language and the target language, it is possible to predict the difficulties that students will experience while learning the target language. Knowing about the difficulties to be experienced by students beforehand may prevent errors. According to Lado (1957: 2), individuals tend to convey the forms and the meanings of their own language and culture to a foreign language or culture. This happens not only when they try to speak and make a performance in the new culture as producers, but also when they try to understand people who have the target language as their native language as receivers. Bearing this in mind, predetermining the difficulties that students can face by making contrastive analysis and planning the educational environment accordingly can prevent students from making errors. According to Fries (1945), the most effective tools of foreign language are those based on the scientific analysis of the target language, in the light of the information obtained from the comparison made between the native language and the target language.

According to Lado (1957: 2), a student learning a foreign language finds the sides of that language which are similar to those in his/her native language easier, while he/she finds those which are different difficult. This view of Lado's is *the strong version*, one of

* Istanbul University.

** Manas University.

the versions put forward with contrastive analysis. According to *the strong version*, the reason behind the errors made while learning a new language is negative transferring from the native language. Possible errors of the students can be predicted and suitable precautions can be taken by making a contrastive analysis between the target language and the native language, and this results in smaller numbers of errors.

The other view put forward regarding the utilization of contrastive analysis in foreign language teaching is *the weak version*. According to *the weak version*, as language is a whole consisting of thousands of elements, it is impossible to predict all the errors to be made by the students or to develop precautions against them (Wardhaugh 1970).

The fact that contrastive linguistics provides information about the similarities and the differences between the native language and the target language, about possible difficulties and problems to be encountered by students and about parts of language which are easier to learn cannot be denied. However, all student errors cannot be attributed to native language attempt or transferring. As a matter of fact, native language attempt is not the only reason behind all errors. Considered by contrastive linguistics as the ultimate reason, native language attempt is only one of those errors (Dede 1985: 123).

2. Error Analysis

Error analysis is the process of observing the errors made by students, to classify and to analyze these errors according to a certain system. Error analysis is a guide for a teacher while revising his/her teaching method and educational materials, assessing teaching process and reforming his/her teaching program.

According to Corder (1967), analyzing student errors in language learning process has three benefits: First, it informs the teacher about how many of learning targets have been achieved. Second, it demonstrates the researchers how language is learned or acquired. Third, errors are of utmost importance for students, as making errors is a way used by students for learning.

Within the framework of error analysis studies which include contrastive analysis, errors made by students can be classified and investigated in two groups (Richards 1974: 145, Demircan 1990: 61).

2.1. Negative transferring errors stemming from native language (interlingual/transfer errors): Students' behaviours in their native languages (rules, language system, etc.) negatively impact them while learning the rules of the target language or causes them confuse the rules (Corder 1971). Negative transfer is the negative impact of the native language on the target language (Lado 1964).

2.2. Intralingual developmental errors: These are errors independent from the native language. According to Richards (1974), developmental errors are those not stemming from the native language but which emerging due to the generalization of some of the rules in the target language. In this case, new rules which actually exist in neither the native nor the target language are developed.

According to Richards (1974: 176–178), intralingual developmental errors can be investigated under four titles:

a. **Overgeneralization:** All foreign language learner individuals try to find out the other rules of the language by taking a form he/she learned as a starting point. In this situation, the student creates defective structures by overgeneralizing some of the forms in the target language. This case generally stems from the tendency of the student to reduce the learning load and to remove the structures that he/she thinks is extra.

b. **Unawareness regarding rule limitations:** This error type is quite similar to overgeneralization. Students' failure in recognizing the special limitations of rules results in errors. Occurring due to applying rules on inappropriate forms, these errors are among the most frequent error types experienced during language learning.

c. **Inadequate application of rules:** These errors stem from students' failure in learning and applying the rules necessary for creating a meaningful structure completely.

d. **Developing incorrect concepts:** These errors cover the defective structures created due to misunderstanding a structure while learning a foreign language.

Although Richards (1974: 176–178) proposes to study target language development errors in four categories as explained above, these categories cannot be strictly separated from each other according to Dede (1985: 131). An error may appear to stem from both overgeneralization and unawareness of the limitations of rules, or the teacher may have difficulties in deciding to which category an error belongs. However, this situation is not significant to an extent which will obstruct the contribution of error analysis to learning. Analyzing student errors regularly informs the teacher and the person who prepares the learning materials about the characteristics of the difficulty the students encounter, even though categorizing them may be difficult; it acts as a guide showing which parts of language should be dwelled upon.

3. Purpose and method

In this study, the skills that Kyrgyz students learning Turkish as a foreign language have in using simple tenses in Turkish have been evaluated in accordance with error analysis approach. This study has been carried out on 50 students who learn Turkish as a foreign language in Kyrgyzstan Manas University. The data of this study has been gathered through a success test developed by the researchers. The data obtained have been classified and assessed in four categories as overgeneralization, unawareness regarding rule limitations, developing incorrect concepts and inadequate application of rules.

4. Findings and comments

Examining the data obtained from the application conducted with the aim of assessing the skills of Kyrgyz students in using basic tenses in Turkish, it can be seen that students most commonly make errors in reported past tense and simple present tense and future tense.

Table 1. The dispersion of the errors made by elementary and intermediate students in basic tenses.

Basic Tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Present continuous tense	% 5,55	% 3,33
Future tense	% 26,25	% 18,75
Simple past tense	% 6,11	% 5,83
Reported past tense	% 52,85	% 30,7
Simple present tense	% 40,83	% 26,38

4.1. Analysis of errors made in present continuous tense

The percentages of the error made on the issue of continuous tense in a 50-item test which involved 10 present continuous tense questions are given below:

Table 2. The dispersion of the errors made by elementary and intermediate students in present continuous tense.

Basic Tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Present continuous tense	% 5,55	% 3,33

An analysis has been carried out for determining the types of errors made in present continuous tense. In the wake of this analysis, it has been observed that the most common reason behind these errors is students' unawareness regarding rule limitations.

Table 3. The percentages of the types of the errors made in continuous tense.

Types of errors	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Unawareness regarding rule limitations	% 55	% 66
Inadequate application of rules	% 23	% 17
Overgeneralization	% 13	% 11
Developing incorrect concepts	% 9	% 6
TOTAL	100	100

Below are some of the errors made by students while using continuous tense.

*Asel Türkçe şarkıları anlamıyor.
Evimdeki çiçekleri annem sulamıyor.*

The errors in the sentences above stem from the fact that students don't know the rule of palatal harmony.

*Türkçe şarkı dinliyor.
Asel Türkçe şarkıları anlamıyor.*

In these two sentences above, students made errors as they did not apply the function of narrowing of continuous tense.

On the other hand, some students used “Iyor” structure also in negative sentences by making overgeneralization:

*Çocuklar uyuyuyor.
Vejetaryenler et yemeyiyorlar.*

In some examples, a completely erroneous concept was developed by adding continuous tense suffix to nouns, which is supposed to be added only to verbs:

*Ben şimdi Bişkekyorum.
Deniz çok soğukyor.*

4.2. Analysis of errors made in simple past tense

The percentages of the errors made on the issue of simple past tense in a 50-item test which involved 10 simple past tense questions are given below:

Table 4. The dispersion of errors made by elementary and intermediate Turkish level students in simple past tense.

Basic tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Simple past tense	% 6,11	% 5,83

The percentages of the types of errors made by students in simple past tense are as below:

Table 5. The percentages of the types of errors made by students in simple past tense.

Types of errors	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Unawareness regarding rule limitations	% 50	% 53
Inadequate application of rules	% 40	% 38
Overgeneralization	% 10	% 9
Developing incorrect concepts	-	-
TOTAL	100	100

It is obvious that the most common reason behind the errors made by Kyrgyz students is the unawareness regarding the limitations brought by rules such as palatal harmony and consonant lenition:

*Dün arkadaşımı ziyaret etdim.
Denize giremedik, çünkü deniz soğukdu.
Ali'nin kardeşi yaramaz değildi.*

Besides, inadequate application of rules and overgeneralization also caused the students made errors in simple past tense:

*Ben iki gün önce İstanbul'dadım.
Sınavın nasıl geçti? Sorular kolay mıdı?
Denize girmedik, çünkü deniz soğukudu.
Ayşe ile Ömer geçen yıl mı evlendiler mi?*

4.3. Analysis of errors made in reported past tense

The percentages of the errors made on the issue of reported past tense in a 50-item test which involved 10 reported past tense questions are given below:

Table 6. The dispersion of errors made by elementary and intermediate students in reported past tense.

Basic tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Reported past tense	% 52,85	% 30,7

The percentages of the types of errors made by students in reported past tense are as below:

Table 7. The percentages of the types of errors made by students in reported past tense.

Types of errors	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Unawareness regarding rule limitations	% 13,17	% 15,51
Inadequate application of rules	% 11,83	% 12
Overgeneralization	% 51,93	% 41,24
Developing incorrect concepts	% 23,07	% 31,25
TOTAL	100	100

As can be seen on Table 7, the most common reason behind the errors made by students in reported past tense was overgeneralization. As reported past tense suffix is defunct in Kyrgyz language, the suffix *-DI*, which is the suffix of simple past tense, is used instead. For this reason, made overgeneralization by considering both of them as past tenses and used simple past tense instead of reported past tense.

*Partiye kimleri çağırmuş? – Kuzenlerini çağırdı.
Mert ile Ali'yi çağırmış mı? – Evet, ama onlar gitmedi.*

4.4. Analysis of errors made in future tense

The percentages of the errors made on the issue of future tense in a 50-item test which involved 10 future tense questions are given below:

Table 8. The dispersion of errors made by elementary and intermediate students in future tense.

Basic tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Future tense	% 18,75	% 26,25

The percentages of the types of errors made by students in future tense are as below:

Table 9. The percentages of the types of errors made by students in future tense are as below:

Types of errors	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Unawareness regarding rule limitations	% 52,5	% 30,2
Inadequate application of rules	% 40,5	% 38,1
Overgeneralization	% 4,6	% 1
Developing incorrect concepts	% 2,4	% 30,7
TOTAL	100	100

As seen on Table 9, the most common reasons behind the errors made by students in the usage of future tense are unawareness regarding limitations of rules and inadequate application of rules. Students' failure in applying palatal harmony and consonant lenition lies at the bottom of these errors.

2050'nin dünyasında her şeyi robotlar yapacak.

Yarın arkadaşımı ziyaret eteceğim.

Ofiste bir şeyler yeyeceğim.

Uçacağımız 10 dakika içinde havaalanına inicek.

4.5. Analysis of errors made in simple present tense

The percentages of the errors made on the issue of present tense in a 50-item test which involved 10 present questions are given below:

Table 10. The dispersion of errors made by elementary and intermediate students in present tense.

Basic tenses	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Simple present tense	% 40,83	% 26,38

The percentages of the types of errors made by students in present tense are as below:

Table 11. The percentages of the types of errors made by students in present tense are as below:

Types of errors	Elementary class	Intermediate class
Unawareness regarding rule limitations	% 21,40	% 25,20
Inadequate application of rules	% 20,60	% 25,60
Overgeneralization	% 55,78	% 46,22
Developing incorrect concepts	% 2,22	% 2,98
TOTAL	100	100

One of the tenses in which Kyrgyz students make errors the most frequently is simple present tense, as present tense does not exist in Kyrgyz language in terms of suffixation. Present tense meaning is loaded onto a sentence through time adverbials. The biggest reason behind student errors on this issue is overgeneralization. They used the simple present suffix only as *-ar* or *-er*, which actually varies as *-ır*, *-ir*, *-ur*, *-ür*, *-ar*, *-er* in accordance with the verb.

*Su 0 derecede donur, 100 derecede kaynar.
Her canlı doğar, büyür, öler.
Çocuklar günde ortalama sekiz saat uyarlar.
Umarım hava güzel olar da pikniğe gideriz.*

5. Conclusion

In the wake of this research, it has been concluded that students have made errors most frequently in the usage of reported past tense. They have generally used simple past tense instead, as a result of thinking that they are both past tenses, as reported past tense suffix is a defunct one Kyrgyz language and *-DI*, which is the suffix of simple past tense, is used instead. Most of the errors made in this part is caused either by overgeneralization or developing incorrect concepts.

Another tense in the usage of which students have difficulties is present tense, as present tense does not exist in Kyrgyz language in terms of suffixation. Present tense meaning is loaded onto a sentence through time adverbials.

The topic of this test in which the students were the most successful were the part involving questions related with continuous tense. Continuous tense meaning is achieved in Kyrgyz language in a way completely different than that in Turkish. Using the suffix *-yor* for continuous tense is a new topic for Kyrgyz students. Therefore, most of the errors made in continuous tense stem from students' unawareness regarding rule limitations.

Another issue on which the students were successful besides using continuous tense is simple past tense. The reason behind is that this suffix (-DI) is used in the same way and serves the same function.

In the usage of all basic tenses, intermediate Turkish students are more successful than elementary Turkish students. The reason for this is that language learning is a process in which old topics are reinforced as new ones are learned.

To sum up, it can be said that students have difficulties in learning the structures which do not exist in their native languages, that they use the structures they have in their native languages instead of these new ones, and that most of their errors stem from the fact that they do not know rule limitations. Considering all of these, it would be a worthy recommendation to determine student errors as early as possible by conducting minor examinations frequently, to specify where those errors concentrate by making error analysis and to put emphasis on relevant issues accordingly.

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