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An investigation of lexical progress of teaching foreign languages (TFL) learners in terms of part-of-speech

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In the related literature, it has been discussed that issues related to foreign language lexicon have been ignored; therefore, a solid theory of foreign language lexicon has not been constructed yet. In the framework of Turkish as a foreign language, the literature lacks both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies. To this end, this longitudinal study tries to find out the lexical progress of learners of Turkish as a foreign language. 20 teaching foreign languages (TFL) learners from a variety of nationalities participated in the study which lasted about a year. The participants started at A1 level of language proficiency and were certificated with C1 proficiency level. The learners were asked to write compositions at two-month intervals. The topics for the compositions were chosen from the Common European Framework of Reference. The compositions were analyzed and the word contents were categorized based on their part-of-speech as verbs, nouns, interjections, adjectives, adverbs, conjunctions and pronouns. Each category was converted into ratios taking into account the total tokens in each composition. As the measures were taken from the same group at different intervals, Friedman's test was used. The results revealed that, among the part-of-speech categories, the ratio of nouns to the total tokens in the compositions decreased significantly while the ratio of verbs increased. In addition, there were statistically significant differences in the ratios of all the other part-of-speech categories.

Key words: Turkish as a foreign language, foreign language writing, part-of-speech, interlanguage.

INTRODUCTION

Any foreign language that is studied resembles a system and this system is generally known as interlanguage. Learners of Turkish as a foreign language (henceforth TFL) also create interlanguages for the Turkish language and these interlanguages involve aspects of the structures available in Turkish. The term interlanguage was coined by Larry Selinker in 1972 and it refers to an interim stage in which language learners are close to the

language that they are trying to learn and not far away from their native language. This stage is often referred to as a system on its own and Ellis and Barkhuizen (2005:54) describe this stage as follows:

A learner's interlanguage:

1. knowledge constitutes a system;

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2. consists primarily of implicit linguistic knowledge;
3. is permeable;
4. is transitional;
5. is variable;
6. is the product of multiple interacting factors, and
7. may fossilize.

Interlanguage is a system on its own, therefore problems that emerge during this stage are different from that of the first and the target language. From this point of view, Hinkel (2005:617) establishes micro and macro differences between first language (henceforth L1) and the target language (henceforth L2) writing. Textual features refer to those with a function of marking discourse organization and aiding the development of cohesion and coherence, and the macro features are global aspects of texts such as discourse construction, arrangements of ideas, cohesion, and coherence.

These micro and macro features of interlanguage are critical in terms of language pedagogy because without a clear understanding of these features, what language practitioners do in their teaching will go no further than intuition.

There have been numerous studies concerning different aspects of L2 writing. Unfortunately, most of these studies are predominantly related to learning English as a foreign or second language (Reichelt, 1999), and it has been discussed that two stances have been taken in terms of the nature of L2 written productions. The first stance sees L2 writing as a system on its own. For example, in a meta-analysis, Silva (1993) analyzed 72 reports that involve a direct comparison of L1 and L2 compositions, and the participants were from different language backgrounds such as Arabic, Chinese, Japanese and Spanish as L1s. The comparisons were based on fluency, accuracy, quality, structure, morphosyntactic/stylistic and lexicosemantic features. According to the results L2 writing is different from and less effective than L1 writing. L2 compositions appear to be more constrained, more difficult and less effective. L2 writers appeared to be doing less planning and having problems with setting goals, as well as generating and organizing materials. Their transcribing was more laborious, less fluent, and less productive. Reviewing, rereading and reflecting were less common, but they revised more. Naturally, they were less fluent and less accurate. In terms of lower-level linguistic concerns, L2 writers' texts were stylistically distinct and simpler in structure. Their sentences included more but shorter t-units, fewer but longer clauses, more coordination, less subordination, less noun modification, and less passivation (Ünalı and Kırkgöz, 2011).

The second point of view sees L2 written production as a process through which L2 writers transfer their L1 writing habits or strategies into the target language. According to Matsumoto (1995), for example, "L2 research paper writing process is perceived as virtually

equivalent to their L1 counterpart, which suggests that already existing L1 writing strategies transfer to L2 writing." (p. 17). It has also been put forward that writing in general has nonlinguistic and cognitive-strategic aspects that, when missing, lead to ineffective written productions (Taylor, 1981).

The findings of numerous studies actually are more in line with the first stance mentioned above. Naturally, to find clear evidence to back up this stance, L2 writers from different L1 backgrounds must be compared. With this motive, Hinkel (2001) compared native English speakers with speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indonesian in terms of the frequency rates of overt exemplification markers in essay texts, listed in full, (as) *an example, for example, for instance, in (my/our/his/her/their) example, like, mainly, namely, such as ..., that is (to say)*. 1,087 essays were analyzed, and the analysis showed that, compared to the native speakers, nonnative speakers employed more example markers (conjunctions), first person pronouns, and past tense verbs in their academic texts. The overuse of personal pronouns at this point is noteworthy; Biber (1995), after the analyses of large English-language corpora, points out those first person pronouns serve as markers of interpersonal discourse and direct involvement of the writer, and they are usually more characteristic of spoken rather than written registers. From Hvitfeldt's (1992) pragmatic point of view, the idea of truth results from everyday experience, and personal examples can be just as valid as the information obtained from literary sources, which may be why language learners make use of personal pronouns more than necessary to consolidate their *truths*. In line with this insight Hinkel (2001) concludes that speakers of Chinese, Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, and Indonesian who have completed their training in ESL and writing courses rely on accounts of personal experiences and stories as a means of thesis support in formal essays significantly more frequently than native speaking students do.

In another similar study Hinkel (2002) analyzed 68 lexical, syntactic and rhetorical features of texts written in a foreign language. The participants were advanced learners of English from six different first language backgrounds: Arabic, Chinese, Indonesian, Japanese, Korean and Vietnamese. Hinkel stated that, even after years of study in English, language learners still lack some aspects of the target language that native speakers have. The results of this study indicate that L2 writers have a limited lexical and syntactic repertoire. This led the learners to produce simplistic texts which are rooted in conversational discourse in English language. The results reveal that there appears to be a big gap between L1 and L2 texts in terms of basic academic writing. The summary of the results of this study is presented as follows (Hinkel, 2002:530).

Micro features of L2 writing: compared to L1 prose, L2 texts:

1. exhibit less lexical variety and sophistication;
2. contain significantly fewer idiomatic and collocational expressions;
3. have smaller lexical density and lexical specificity, and more frequent vocabulary misuses;
4. rely on shorter sentences and clauses (aka T-units) with fewer words per clause and fewer words (e.g., nouns and modifiers) per verb;
5. involve high rates of incomplete or inaccurate sentences (e.g., missing sentence subjects or verbs, incomplete verb phrases, sentence fragments);
6. repeat content words more often (that is, nouns, verbs, adjectives, and adverbs);
7. provide twice as many simple paraphrases or avoid paraphrasing altogether with a preponderance of referential pronouns (e.g., *this, that, it*);
8. use shorter words (fewer words with two or more syllables), more conversational and high frequency words (e.g., *good, bad, ask, talk*);
9. incorporate fewer modifying and descriptive prepositional phrases, as well as a higher rate of misused prepositions;
10. employ less subordination and two to three times more coordination.

L2 texts also employ 11 fewer passive constructions:

1. fewer lexical (e.g., adjectives and adverbs) and syntactic modifiers (e.g., subordinate clauses) of sentences, nouns, and verbs;
2. inconsistent uses of verb tenses;
3. more emotive and private verbs (e.g., *believe, feel, think*);
4. significantly higher rates of personal pronouns (e.g., *I, we, he*) and lower rates of impersonal/referential pronouns (e.g., *it, this, one*);
5. markedly fewer of abstract and interpretive nouns, and nominalizations (e.g., *rotation, cognition, analysis*);
6. fewer adverbial modifiers and adverbial clauses;
7. fewer epistemic and possibility hedges (e.g., *apparently, perhaps*) and more conversational hedges (e.g., *sort of, in a way*);
8. more conversational intensifiers, emphatics, exaggeratives, and overstatements (e.g., *totally, always, huge, for sure*);
9. fewer downtoners (e.g., *almost, hardly*);
10. more lexical softening devices (e.g., *maybe*).

These features are apparently related to learners of English as a foreign language, and we need to see these aspects for other foreign languages, and in our case the same framework that has been mentioned so far is applied to the TFL context. Although the number of TFL learners has been on a steady rise, the number of studies concerning these learners are surprisingly low (Göçer and Moğul, 2011). What makes studies concerning

Turkish might be that the Turkish language is classified as an agglutinative language (Elder and Davies, 1998). In agglutinative languages, words are made up of a linear arrangement of different morphemes; morphemes *glue together* with a high rate of affixation and a relatively low level of irregularity.

There are certain problems in TFL contexts because several aspects of the process such as the native languages of learners, their ages, and their sociocultural backgrounds are disregarded. In addition to these, the use of out-of-date methods and materials is another factor affecting the learning/teaching process negatively. According to Alyılmaz (2010:729) people in Turkey, even after years of study from primary school to higher education in their native language, cannot reach to an ability to make effective use of their native language, and when the issue is TFL, it is a fact that a satisfactory level has not been reached yet. Moreover, its script, and several idiosyncrasies available in the Turkish language make it a difficult language to master (Er et al., 2012).

In terms of function/content word distinction, Turkish is not different from other languages. Content words are nouns and verbs, and function words are postpositions, conjunctions and interjections. Content words have meanings on their own while function words are meaningless as such words gain meaning in sentences. However, like in many languages, in Turkish there are transitions among different types of words. For example, in the following sentence 'Kırmızıyı çok severim.' (*I love red very much.*) kırmızı (*red*) is a noun while in this sentence 'Kırmızı kazağımı çok severim.' (*I love my red jumper very much.*) the same word kırmızı is an adjective. While the meaning of the word stays the same, because of the context in which it is being used, its type changes from noun to adjective (Korkmaz, 2009).

From a pedagogical point of view, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (henceforth CEFR), there are three main proficiency levels for foreign languages in general namely, the basic level as A1 (Breakthrough) and A2 (Waystage); the independent level as B1 (Threshold) and B2 (vantage) and the proficient level as C1 (Effective Operational proficiency) and C2 (Mastery) (MEB, 2013).

The focus of the current study is the lexical development of TFL learners in terms of word types or part-of-speech; that is, our main concern is to see the changes of word type ratios in TFL learners' written texts across proficiency levels. For these learners, the most important factor affecting the part-of-speech ratios in written production might be related to the learning outcomes for their proficiency levels and their lexicon to be used to reflect these outcomes. At A1 level of proficiency, for example, concrete needs of the learners are at the center. Therefore, introducing oneself and others, the place of living, the things owned and the acquaintances are all related to this level of language

proficiency. At A2 level, a language learner is supposed to provide and understand information related to family, shopping, work and close environment (MEB, 2013).

According to CEFR, depending on their language proficiency levels, expectations from language learners in terms of written register are gradual and varies as follows:

A1 Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences.

A2 Can write a series of simple phrases and sentences linked with simple connectors like 'and', 'but' and 'because'.

B1 Can write straightforward connected texts on a range of familiar subjects within his field of interest, by linking a series of shorter discrete elements into a linear sequence.

B2 Can write clear, detailed texts on a variety of subjects related to his/her field of interest, synthesizing and evaluating information and arguments from a number of sources.

C1 Can write clear, well-structured texts of complex subjects, underlining the relevant salient issues, expanding and supporting points of view at some length with subsidiary points, reasons and relevant examples, and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.

C2 Can write clear, smoothly flowing, complex texts in an appropriate and effective style and a logical structure which helps the reader to find significant points (Council of Europe, 2001).

When these learning outcomes are analyzed, we can see that what is expected from learners is, as they move forward in terms of proficiency level, to be able to write compositions involving some kind of variety moving from concrete to abstract.

Language learners' written productions have been studied from various aspects. However, although it has been long known that the most serious errors for the language learner are related to the target lexicon and they outnumber any other type of error (Politzer, 1978: 257), lexical features of language learner productions, either spoken or written, have been ignored for a long time (Meara, 2002). In addition to this, the related literature lacks studies concerning the types of part of speech in language learners' productions, and when the topic is learners of Turkish as a foreign language, the related literature is definitely nonexistent. As was mentioned before, studies concerning L2 written productions have been predominantly related to teaching and learning the English language, and more studies concerning L2 written productions in languages other than English are needed to fill this gap. Therefore, the current study tries to answer the following research questions:

Research question 1: What are the ratios of types of part

of speech to the total number of words used in compositions written by learners of Turkish as a foreign language at different proficiency levels?

Research question 2: Do the ratios of types of part of speech to the total number of words used in compositions written by learners of Turkish as a foreign language change significantly from A1 to C1 proficiency levels?

METHODS

In the current study, within a scientific survey model, content analysis technique was used. The basic aim in content analysis is to reach concepts and relationships which will help the researcher to make interpretations concerning the data at hand. The primary focus in content analysis is to gather data with similar aspects together through the use of framework of certain concepts and themes and then to organize and interpret them so as to make them clear to the audience (Şimşek and Yıldırım, 2011:227).

Participants

20 TFL learners participated in the current study during the academic years 2014 to 2015. They started the TFL course at A1 and were certificated at C1 level of language proficiency. Demographic data related to the participants and their gender distributions are provided in Table 1.

Table 1 provides gender distributions of the participants. As can be shown in the table, 11 of the participants (55%) were females, and nine of them (45%) were males. In addition to gender distributions, nationalities of the participants can be examined in Table 2. The table provides demographic information concerning the nationalities of the participants: Five of the participants are from Afghanistan, three of them from Kenya and Pakistan, and one from Chad, Palestine, Gambia, Ghana, Ruanda, Somali, Tunisia, and Zambia. In the following table, participants' total time spent in Turkey can be analyzed.

Information concerning how much time the participants spent in Turkey is provided in Table 3. In addition to the information provided in Table 3, it should be noted that all the participants arrived in Turkey around the same time and that the participants' periods of stay in Turkey are the same with their periods of TFL education. As for the academic levels of the participants, Table 4 can be checked.

Academic levels of the participants are given in Table 4. 15 of them (75%) are undergraduate students while four of them (20%) are graduate students, and one of the participants is a PhD student.

Data collection and analysis

Data were collected from compositions written by 20 TFL learners at one of the Turkish Teaching, Application and Research Center (TOMER) at a state university in Turkey. The compositions were written in examination settings and the following prompts were provided to the learners at A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 levels. The prompts included the followings:

A1. Write a letter to your family (Where are you living right now? What kind of a place is it? What is in this place and around it?)

A2. A friend of yours is coming to visit you as your guest. How would you spend a day with him/her? Write a composition about it.

B1. Today, technology makes people's lives easier. How would our

Table 1. Gender distributions of the participants.

Gender		%
Female	11	55
Male	9	45
Total	20	100

Table 2. Nationalities of the participant.

Country	f	%
Afghanistan	5	25
Chad	1	5
Palestine	1	5
Gambia	1	5
Ghana	1	5
Kenya	3	15
Pakistan	3	15
Ruanda	1	5
Somali	1	5
Tunisia	2	10
Zambia	1	5
Total	20	100

Table 3. Total time spent in Turkey by the participants.

Proficiency level in Turkish	Total time of visit (months)
A1	0-2
A2	2-4
B1	4-6
B2	6-8
C1	8-10

Table 4. Academic levels of the participants.

Academic level	f	%
Undergraduate	15	75
Graduate	4	20
PhD	1	5
Total	20	100

life be if we did not have any technological devices like refrigerators, computers or cell phones? Write a composition to express your ideas about this matter.

B2. Write a composition about the pollution caused by technology today.

C1. It has been nine months since you have left your country. What has changed during this period? Write a composition about these changes.

The participants produced compositions by using the prompts given

above. The total number of words used in the compositions changed from A1 to C1 level of proficiency as was expected. Table 5 provides the mean number of words used in learners' compositions according to their proficiency levels.

The compositions written by the participants were analyzed in terms of parts of speech. All the parts of speech available in these written productions were converted into percentages by taking into account the total number of words in each composition. Then, the results were compared through the use of SPSS to see if there

Table 5. The mean number of words in the compositions across proficiency levels

Proficiency level	Mean number of words
A1	81.3
A2	122.6
B1	116.1
B2	133.8
C1	132.4

Table 6. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of nouns to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	52.34	9.59	4.10			
A2	20	42.92	6.48	2.50			
B1	20	48.81	7.70	3.23	31.29	4	0.00
B2	20	49.64	6.30	3.60			
C1	20	38.21	4.32	1.58			

Table 7. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of verbs to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	8.08	3.27	1.65			
A2	20	15.72	3.64	3.80			
B1	20	15.41	6.33	3.55	31.12	4	0.00
B2	20	11.23	3.84	2.25			
C1	20	15.25	5.82	3.75			

were any statistically significant differences. A non-parametric test was used because the number of the participants were relatively low ($n = 20$) and the data was not normally distributed. For these reasons, Friedman Test was used to measure the significance of the results obtained from the same study group in intervals (Field, 2009:573).

FINDINGS

Part of speech types available in the participants' written productions during examinations were analyzed, and total number of each part of speech type in a composition was compared to the total number of words in the same composition, after this process these ratios were compared among proficiency levels. These ratios and their comparisons across proficiency levels are analyzed in the following eight tables. First of all, the ratios of nouns to the number of the total words in each composition were examined and the results are exhibited in Table 6.

A quick look at Table 6 will reveal that the difference of the ratios of nouns to the total number of words from A1 to C1 proficiency level is statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 31.29, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). While the ratio of nouns to the

total number of words is 52.34% at A1 proficiency level, this ratio appears as a decrease to 38.21% at C1. In addition, this decrease is stable throughout proficiency levels, which means that the ratio of nouns to the total number of words in learners' compositions decreases constantly at each proficiency level. The next aspect to be examined was the ratios of verbs to the total number of words in each composition, and Table 7 shows the related results.

Table 7 reveals the Friedman Test results about the ratios of verbs to the total number of words, and the difference of the ratios of verbs to the total number of words at A1 and C1 level appears to be statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 31.12, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). It is clear that the ratio of verbs to the total number of words is 8.08% at A1 proficiency level and the same ratio is 15.25% at C1 with a considerable increase. An interesting point about this result is that, the ratios of nouns to the total number of words at A2, B1, B2 and C1 level are quite similar to each other as 15.72, 15.41, 11.23 and 15.25%, respectively. Next, the ratios of adjectives to the total number of words were analyzed as can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8. Friedman Test results concerning the ratios of adjectives to the total number of words

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	14.26	5.74	3.30	10.20	4	0.04
A2	20	13.63	4.33	2.75			
B1	20	11.42	3.79	2.15			
B2	20	14.07	4.69	3.20			
C1	20	16.16	4.82	3.60			

Table 9. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of adverbs to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	8.28	5.32	2.70	21.60	4	0.00
A2	20	8.49	3.07	3.05			
B1	20	8.18	4.92	2.75			
B2	20	6.51	2.79	2.15			
C1	20	13.19	4.36	4.35			

Table 10. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of pronouns to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	9.58	4.57	3.65	37.08	4	.00
A2	20	10.26	4.01	4.40			
B1	20	3.99	2.69	1.80			
B2	20	4.43	2.56	2.10			
C1	20	6.56	3.08	3.05			

In Table 8, a difference of the ratios of adjectives to the total number of words at A1 and C1 level can be observed, and this difference is statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 10.20, p = 0.04 < 0.05$). The ratio of adjectives to the total number of words is 14.26% at A1 proficiency level and 16.16% at C1. Another related issue was the ratios of adverbs to the total number of words in each composition, and the results are displayed in Table 9.

Table 9 reveals the Friedman test results about the ratios of adverbs to the total number of words. A quick analysis of the results will show that the difference of the ratios of adverbs to the total number of words at A1 and C1 level are statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 21.60, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). At A1 level the ratio is 8.28%, and at C1 level of proficiency it increases to 13.19%. The next part of speech type in the analysis process was pronouns as shown in the following table.

The ratios of pronouns to the total number of words and related Friedman test results are provided in Table 10. It is clear from the table that the ratio changes from A1 to C1 is statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 37.08, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). This ratio showed an unstable change from A1, A2, B1 to C1 as from 9.58, 10.26, 3.99, 4.43% to

6.56, respectively. As the next variable, the ratios of conjunctions to the total number of words in each composition can be examined in Table 11.

Table 11 shows the results of Friedman test on the ratios of conjunctions to the total number of words according to participants' proficiency levels. There is an obvious change from A1 level to C1 and this change is statistically significant ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 14.40, p = 0.01 < 0.05$). This ratio appears to have changed in the following order 5.89, 7.30, 8.06, 9.82, 8.18 at A1, A2, B1, B2 and C1 in that order. The next variable is the ratios of interjections to the total number of words are shown in the next table.

Friedman test results concerning the ratios of interjection to the total number of words are given in Table 12. According to the results, there is a statistically significant difference among proficiency levels in terms of interjection use ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 12.82, p = .01 < .05$). The use of interjections decreased from 0.77 at A1, to 0.46 at A2, to 0.08 at B1, to 0.32 at B2, and finally to 0.25 at C1. This change, like that of pronouns, seems to exhibit an unsteady nature. As the last point concerning the ratios of type of part of speech is the prepositions, and the next

Table 11. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of conjunctions to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	5.89	3.18	2.25			
A2	20	7.30	2.11	2.65			
B1	20	8.06	4.09	2.95	14.40	4	.01
B2	20	9.82	2.67	4.05			
C1	20	8.18	3.50	3.10			

Table 12. Friedman test results concerning the ratios of interjection to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	0.77	0.825	3.70			
A2	20	0.46	0.685	3.20			
B1	20	0.08	0.363	2.43	12.83	4	0.01
B2	20	0.32	0.625	2.85			
C1	20	0.25	0.405	2.83			

Table 13. Friedman Test results concerning the ratios of postpositions to the total number of words.

Groups	N	Mean	SD	Mean rank	X ²	DF	p
A1	20	0.41	0.60	1.23			
A2	20	2.30	1.59	2.80			
B1	20	4.34	2.53	4.00	40.35	4	0.00
B2	20	3.93	2.70	3.90			
C1	20	2.22	1.22	3.08			

table presents the related results.

In Table 13, we can see the results of Friedman Test revealing the ratios of postpositions to the total number of words according to each proficiency level from A1 to C1. There seems to be a statistically significant difference among proficiency levels in terms of postposition use ($X^2_{df=4, N=20} = 40.35, p = 0.00 < 0.05$). The use of postpositions changed from 0.41 at A1 level to 2.22 at C1 level.

DISCUSSION

The results of the current study showed that the ratios of nouns to the total number of words in each composition decreased from A1 to C1 level of proficiency and this appears to be a statistically significant change (Table 6). The use of nouns by the participants was considerably high at A1 level and it steadily decreased throughout A2, B1, B2 and C1.

When the learning outcomes mentioned in CEFR are analyzed, the aim is a general comprehension and production of concrete concepts, and these concepts dominantly overlap with nouns, and this could be

associated with this decrease. On the other hand, the next variable in the study, the verbs, exhibited an opposite trend. The ratio of verbs to the total number of words in the compositions increased significantly from A1 to C1 level. Actually, among the variables nouns and verbs seem to have a direct and negative relationship as exhibited in Figure 1. In the figure, a comparison of noun (represented black) with the verb ratios (represented in grey) can be seen. It is clear that at A1 level of proficiency the participants made considerable use of nouns in their compositions, and this usage decreased steadily at every proficiency level reaching to the lowest level at C1. On the other hand, when the ratios of verbs are checked at every proficiency level, the same trend can be observed but the other way around; the usage of verbs increases throughout proficiency levels. Obviously, in order to reach to a certain amount proficiency, language learners need to make use of verbs as they are used to talk about actions, states or processes (Banguoğlu, 1995). This increase in verb use could be related to the higher possibility of making mistakes with verbs at low levels of proficiency because in the related literature there are studies whose results state that TFL

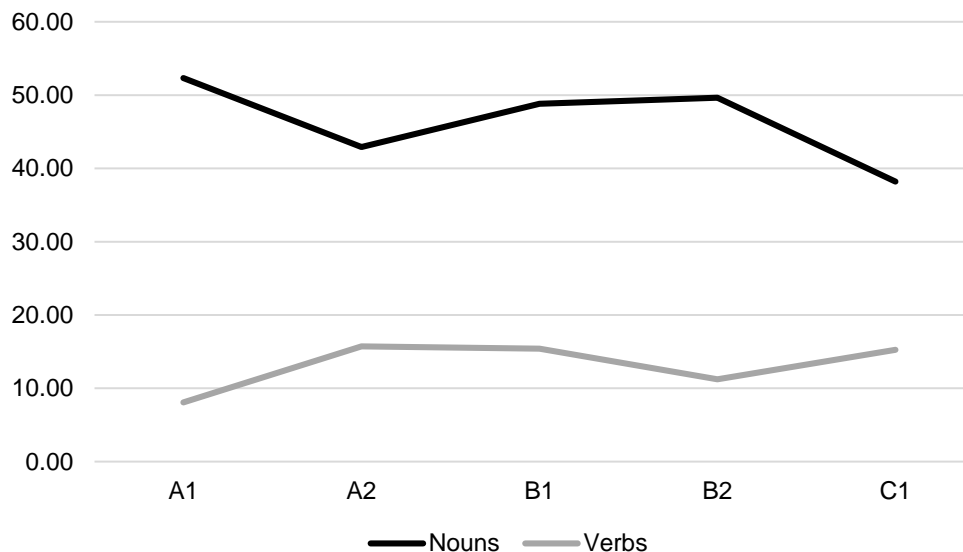


Figure 1. Comparison of noun and adjective ratios throughout proficiency levels.

learners' errors/mistakes are mostly related to verb conjugations (Şahin, 2013). It could be argued that decrease of noun usage is being compensated with the verb usage. However, this interaction between the nouns and the verbs could also be argued from a learner-strategy point of view. In other words, the participants could somehow be *avoiding* the use of verbs at beginning levels not to make mistakes because of the highly agglutinative nature of the Turkish language. In general terms, avoidance strategy refers to the process of substituting the required form or structure in a target language with another (Faerch and Kasper, 1983). Language learners find particular aspects of target languages difficult to deal with and by avoiding their usage they *dodge* possible mistakes and errors, which is somewhat different from total ignorance. Some researchers claim that this strategy is related to the interlanguage created by the learners while some other relates it to the learners' L1 backgrounds. It has been discussed that there are three potential cause of structural-lexical avoidance in adult L2 learning, and two of these are cross-linguistic and the third intralinguistic, which are LI-L2 difference, LI-L2 idiomatic similarity, and inherent L2 complexity (Laufer and Eliasson, 1993). Our point of view on this matter is that, as was mentioned previously, the inherent complexity of Turkish might be one of the most triggering effects which cause avoidance. The first two cross-linguistic causes for avoidance should be eliminated in our study because the participants in our study come from a variety of L1 backgrounds (Table 2). Therefore, intralinguistic factors seem to be at play in the process.

The use of adjectives by the TFL learners who participated in the current study is another point worth mentioning. It is clear that adjectives need nouns to

operate (Ergin, 1993), so it could be argued that adjectives should be acting in line with nouns. Therefore, the expectation would be that in TFL learners should be making use of adjectives with a similar ratio of nouns. However, the results of the current study show that at C1 level, where the ratios of nouns are the lowest, the ratio of adjectives is relatively high. It could be argued that the learners are starting make effective use of adjective phrases, which could be interpreted as a sign of high language proficiency. As was mentioned before, according to the CEFR, description skills of language learners are supposed develop in accordance with proficiency level.

The same rationale with adjectives could also function with the adverbs. Adverbs are directly related to adjectives and prominently to verbs (Ergin, 1993). Again, the expected scenario is an increase in adverb use in parallel with verbs, which is in line with the results of the current study. The results concerning pronoun ratios across proficiency levels are similar to nouns. Pronouns are used as replacements of people or objects, hence all kinds of nouns (Banguoğlu, 1995). The results revealed that in the compositions of the participants there is a certain amount of increase in the use of pronouns at C1 level of proficiency. The reason for this could be related to the personalization of the writing prompt by the learners. As was mentioned before, Biber (1995) sees personal pronouns as markers of interpersonal discourse and direct involvement of the writer, and holds the opinion that they are usually more characteristic of spoken rather than written registers. In addition, Hvitfeldt's (1992) sees this fact as a strategy used by language learners to consolidate their truths. An interesting point worth mentioning is that Turkish is a prodrop language, which means that, depending on the context, dropping

the subject pronoun is allowed, but this kind of drop is highly context-bound and it is difficult for a nonnative to decide when to leave the subject pronouns out and when to emphasize them; however, this process is qualitative rather than quantitative, so the use of subject pronouns by TFL learners is a concern of a qualitative study as well.

The ratios of pronouns, conjunctions and interjections were also analyzed in this study. The results indicate that their ratios to the total number of words used in learner compositions are very unstable. Generally, these word types do not bear meanings as their meanings depend on the sentences in which they are used (Korkmaz, 2009). They construct relations among phrases and sentences and cause changes in meaning; they act over and above sentence level, which means they also need to be analyzed through a qualitative approach.

The results presented in the current study cannot be regarded as conclusive, and it is also not free of criticism by any means, yet it surely is the first attempt to analyze TFL learners written productions in terms of lexical structures. The results indicate ineffective use of these structures by TFL learners, but an argument worth mentioning at this point is related to the needs of TFL learners in terms of writing in Turkish. It seems that trying to teach writing in a foreign language without solid needs analysis will make little sense and as a solution "rather than adopting wholesale the practices of LI and L2 English composition, FL writing might instead borrow the concept of needs analysis by investigating FL students' needs for writing in the target language" (Reichelt, 1999:194). The concept of needs analysis in English language teaching might not be a new one, but in the TFL context it sure needs to be taken into consideration because there seems to be no discussion concerning TFL learners' writing needs in real life situation. It might be the case that the intended writing skill outcomes in the related curriculums that are imposed on these learners are 'wholesale' approaches to pedagogy of writing in a foreign language.

There are many more aspects of TFL written productions to be analyzed. From the basic word counts, type/token ratios and word frequency counts to more complex aspects like syntactic, morphological and discourse structures of these productions seem to be open to discussions. Nevertheless, corpus based studies of the Turkish lexicon are beginning to appear (Bardaççı et al., 2016).

Conclusion

The results of the current study indicate that, on one hand, learners of Turkish as a foreign language, no matter what their first language background is, start off writing with a lexical repertoire that is rich in nouns and poor in

verbs. As they become more proficient in Turkish, they start using more verbs and less nouns. On the other hand, the other lexical structures such as adjectives, postpositions, adverbs and conjunctions exhibit quite unstable distributions across proficiency levels making it difficult to reach to related conclusions. One of the main reasons for this, the researchers believe, might be due to the agglutinative nature of the Turkish language, which puts crucial roles on verbs and indirectly on nouns as their complements. This deduction makes intralinguistic studies more to-the-point compared to cross-linguistic ones.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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