

**A Comparative Analysis of Pair-work and Individual Assignments  
In two ELT Grammar Classes**

**Olcay Sert**  
**sertolcay@yahoo.com**

**Abstract**

Assignments prepared in pair-work have long been evaluated to be more successful when compared to individually prepared assignments in many respects in foreign language learning contexts. However, there is not much research conducted to reveal the advantages of pair-work in preparing assignments and the linguistic characteristics of the finished texts. In this paper, depending upon an experimental study with the first year students in Department of English Language Teaching at Hacettepe University, quality of pair-work assignments and the factors affecting the preparation process are discussed and compared to individual assignments. Results indicate a variety of advantages of student collaboration in preparing written work since outputs are far more grammatical, include less spelling mistakes, and indicate a higher level of grammatical awareness. Additionally, pair-work helps students build positive interpersonal relationships and create a high level of academic solidarity and confidence.

**Key words:** Pair-work assignments, error analysis, co-operation, academic solidarity, grammar.

**Özet**

Yabancı dil öğrenimi bağlamında, ikili grup ödevlerinin bireysel çalışmalarla karşılaştırıldığında birçok açıdan daha başarılı olduğu ileri sürülmektedir. Ancak, ikili çalışarak ödev hazırlamanın avantajlarını ve ortaya çıkan metnin dilbilimsel özelliklerini açığa çıkaracak çok fazla araştırma bulunmamaktadır. Bu makalede, ikili grup ödevlerinin niteliği ve hazırlanma sürecini etkileyen faktörler Hacettepe Üniversitesi İngilizce Öğretmenliği bölümü birinci sınıf öğrencileri üzerinde gerçekleştirilen deneysel bir çalışmaya dayanarak tartışılmakta ve bireysel ödevlerle karşılaştırılmaktadır. Sonuçlar, yazılı çalışmaların hazırlanmasında öğrenci işbirliğinin birçok avantaj sağladığını göstermektedir. İkili çalışma ödevleri dilbilgisel açıdan daha başarılıdır, daha az yazım hatası içermektedirler, ve daha üst düzeyde bir dilbilgisel farkındalık gösterirler. Buna ek olarak, ikili çalışma öğrencilerin kişiler-arası olumlu ilişkiler geliştirmesine yardımcı olmakta ve yüksek seviyede akademik dayanışma ve güven ortamı yaratmaktadır.

**Anahtar kelimeler:** İkili grup ödevleri, hata-analizi, işbirliği, akademik dayanışma, dilbilgisi.

## **1. Introduction**

The advantages or disadvantages of preparing assignments in pair-work have always remained partly uncertain since researches have not intensively focused on this particular area. Although commonsensical belief takes us to the idea that pair work (in addition to group work and co-operation) enhances learning and academic success, there is not much research on this particular issue which may lead the common sense to turn into a hypothesis or a theory. However, it is possible for a language teacher (also acting as a researcher) to conduct a research to reveal the weak and strong sides of pair-work collaboration as observed in assignments. Foreign language classroom settings can provide a variety of tools for the purpose.

According to Shirk (1995), collaboration increases motivation and learning because it provides for experiential problem solving. It should be kept in mind, however, that the variables affecting the process are the most exigent problems for the researcher; therefore the number of variables should be restricted to as much minimum as possible in such a research. Gibbs (1994) states that the variables for measuring the success level of pair-work assignments are dependent upon the consistency with the purpose of the project, relatedness with the objectives and requirements of the course, etc. In the present study, an understanding of the course objectives, learner needs, short and long term benefits of the assignments will be more lucid, since I have been the instructor of the related course (IDÖ 152-English Grammar II) and have been responsible for the analysis of the collected data in this study.

While trying to investigate the characteristics of pair-work assignments, this study does not draw upon a set of hypotheses to be tested (so the research will be data-driven), but the traditional belief about the positive effects of pair-work (like intensification of the interpersonal relations, higher level of success when compared with individual works, etc.) will be questioned and logical explanations drawing upon the data analysis and findings will be put forward.

## **2. The problem**

Compliant with the data and methods to be used, the study is directed by particular research questions which will spell out and limit the scope of this paper. Although there can be a great number of variables that may impinge on the problem, the paper will draw mainly upon the research questions given below:

1. Is it possible to observe noteworthy differences between individual and pair-work assignment success in terms of:
  - 1.1. students' own written productions; grammatical mistakes and spelling?
  - 1.2. detection of ungrammatical but acceptable usages in original texts?  
(grammatical and communicative awareness)
2. In what ways does the pair work affect interpersonal relations, solidarity, academic confidence and the development of co-operation among the students positively?
  - 2.1. The reflection of co-operation at discourse level
  - 2.2. Contributions of pair-work assignments for building positive interpersonal relationships
3. Which assignment type leads to comparatively more successful outputs in terms of the development of the subject matter, information content, and results?

It seems that no existing study has the capacity to provide satisfactory answers to the research questions above. Within the limits of this paper, in order to reveal the positive effects of pair-work assignments; one technique, one method and a linear data collection procedure could not provide satisfactory results, so a variety of procedures have been applied as will be explained below in Method section.

In various books and articles, it is claimed that pair-work leads to success in academic life as well as in social life. However, there are neglected problems concerning the subject matter. Firstly, a comparative analysis does not exist, which reveals the characteristic difference of pair-work concerning the first research question. Secondly, the enhancement of inter-personal relations and reflections of co-operation in pair-works have not been tested. These features will be discussed as the answers to the second research question raised. It is hoped that the study brings some insights and suggests ways for the improvement of assignment understanding in educational environments, especially in EFL settings.

### **3. Method**

#### *Participants, Means of Data Collection, and Evaluation Procedures*

In order to reach as much comprehensive information as possible, ninety-one students (approximately 15% of which are males) participated in the study. In order to compare individual and pair-work assignments, while some of the students had to work individually, some others had to make pairs. The subjects were the first year students of ELT Department of Faculty of Education at Hacettepe University. At this point, it would be appropriate to present detailed information about the subjects and the level of students, as their proficiency level should be clarified to reach consistent and valid ideas about the subject matter.

It seems likely that most of the participants in the research are approximately at similar proficiency levels when ÖSS (University Entrance Exam) English language points are accepted as the set of formal criterion. In order to attend the undergraduate program in English Language Teaching Department at Hacettepe University, one must have a minimum score of 385.061, which is the third highest score following Bosphorus University (392.530) and Middle East Technical University (386.918) in the university entrance exam (“YDS”- accompanied with ÖSS- is the abbreviation for Foreign Language Examination which is the determinant for the assortment to undergraduate programs in the first place).

Before beginning their first academic year at Hacettepe University, the students are supposed to take the proficiency exam given by School of Foreign Languages. Drawing upon the results of this examination, the students either attend preparatory classes, which last for a full academic year if the requirements are fulfilled, or directly start their education in the department. Accordingly, the classes in the English Language Teaching Department are composed of students who have had a year of education in prep classes, and of the ones who have had a satisfactory score in the proficiency exam prepared by the university. Although this fact causes mixed groups when some students’ longer exposure to English language instruction at university is concerned, such a difference has not been taken into consideration within the limits of this study, for it has also been considered that these students were all exposed to a variety of courses in the Department during the first semester and the first half of the second semester of the first year. As can be seen in Table 1 and Table 2 below, the students are acquainted with courses which serve not only for the improvement of English grammar, but also for the improvement of four skills and communicative skills:

**(Table 1), First Semester (fall)**

| No | Course Code and Title                       | Hours/week |
|----|---|------------|
| 1  | EBB 145 Introduction to Teaching Profession | 3          |
| 2  | İDÖ 151 English Grammar I                   | 3          |
| 3  | İDÖ 153 Spoken English I                    | 3          |
| 4  | İDÖ 155 Reading Skills I                    | 3          |
| 5  | İDÖ 157 English Composition I               | 3          |
| 6  | İDÖ 159 Turkish I: Written Communication    | 2          |

**(Table 2), Second Semester (spring)**

| No | Course Code and Title                  | Hours/week |
|----|--|------------|
| 1  | İDÖ 146 School Experience I            | 3          |
| 2  | İDÖ 152 English Grammar II             | 3          |
| 3  | İDÖ 154 Spoken English II              | 3          |
| 4  | İDÖ 156 Reading Skills II              | 3          |
| 5  | İDÖ 158 English Composition II         | 3          |
| 6  | İDÖ 160 Turkish II: Oral Communication | 2          |

In İDÖ 152 English Grammar II – the course in which the research was conducted- the particular aim was to give students a heightened awareness of ‘descriptive grammar’ (a way to study grammar by describing the language use of native speakers and explaining the rules drawing upon the collected data unlike prescriptive grammar in which the grammarian tells the rules with respect to traditional grammatical structures and formations in a subjective manner free from naturally occurring context) and grammar in discourse. In this sense, the instructor /researcher aimed to teach a discourse based grammar, which tries to introduce the naturally occurring language in real contexts with a descriptive manner and leads to the development of grammatical and/or linguistic performance in relation to communicative competence.

Towards the end of the second semester and in accordance with the aims of course “İDÖ 152-English Grammar II”, the students were asked to prepare a written assignment titled as “The analysis of ungrammatical yet communicatively acceptable usages confronted in literary texts, media texts, song lyrics and movies ”. During the first semester’s grammar course (İDÖ 151) , the learners were introduced to the forms and structures of English grammar at advanced level with reference to syntax, morphology and morpho-syntax. The aim in the first semester was to improve the grammatical and/or linguistic competence of the students mostly by focusing on

prescriptive rules. The exposure to language-in-use is possible in two ways; the first one is to live in the discourse community in which English language is spoken in real contexts accompanied by the social signs and codes of the related culture. The second one is through getting in contact with all forms of mass-media as well as texts of literature and arts (including novels, poems, stories, movies, songs, etc.). The first one is unfeasible in our case, owing to the fact that foreign language learners taking İDÖ 152-English Grammar II course in ELT Department at Hacettepe University do not have the opportunity to live in the target discourse community to get acquainted with naturally occurring native English throughout the semester. Therefore, by making use of a project based assignment which enables students to analyze the English grammar in discourses of mass media, literature, movies and songs; the learners were directed to the reflections of naturally occurring discourse in differing contexts in order to develop their ability to judge whether any string of language is grammatical or ungrammatical; ill-formed or well-formed from a prescriptive point of view and grammatical but acceptable from a descriptive point of view.

The primary aim of this assignment was to help students develop their grammatical awareness and have an understanding of English grammar in different contexts. Another important aim of the assignment was to enable students understand how native speakers communicate with each other even when the prescriptively correct rules of grammar are deviated. To this purpose, throughout the assignment process, the students were expected to seek ungrammatical or syntactically ill-formed structures in selected texts and were supposed to edit the phrases or sentences drawing upon their prescriptive grammatical knowledge and primary reference books. They were also asked to comment on the ungrammatical yet communicatively acceptable usages in the target culture. Therefore, this assignment would reveal the level of grammatical awareness of the students both in receptive and productive levels, since the students would first judge the ungrammaticality of the phrases or sentences in the data, and then, edit and comment on them with the reasons. Besides all, their own grammar problems would be scanned through their written productions as well.

The pairs and individual students to be assigned were selected randomly according to the students' preferences. Yet, each group was approximately equal in number. Collected assignments (the data) have been evaluated both qualitatively and quantitatively in the light of the research questions. Each assignment consisted of an average of 4800 words and there were a total

of sixty eight assignments (forty five individual, twenty three pair work assignments). In order to keep the number of assignments equal, a number of twenty three assignments were selected randomly out of the individual papers.

Throughout the comparative analysis of the assignments, significant differences were observed between the pair-work papers and individual papers. This has been determined by error analysis in terms of ungrammaticality of sentences or phrases and spelling mistakes, which were observed in the project papers of the learners, and the degree of grammatical awareness which was measured by the average number of wrongly evaluated data indicating a receptive incompetence on the part of the subjects. The accompanying statistical evaluation provides some evidence that there exist significant differences between pair-work and individual student assignments.

As each research question requires a particular method on its own right, a variety of methods had to be applied. While dealing with the first research question, error analysis techniques have been used. In handling the second research question, students' discorsal features in assignments have been analyzed on the basis of solidarity and pair identity aspects. Additionally, observation and interview techniques have been used as applied in similar descriptive and qualitative research designs while trying to reveal the role of pair work assignments in developing interpersonal relationships.

In fulfilling the requirements of the third research question, a self-prepared checklist was used which fit with the course objectives and the aim of the present research. Depending upon the statistical outputs, the assignment type which led to comparatively more successful outputs in terms of the development of the subject matter, information content, and results became clear with reliable measuring. The mentioned criteria and related findings are discussed in Section 4.5. Below is the table which illustrates the criteria for the evaluation of the papers and the explanation for each criterion:

(Table 3) The criteria for evaluating the assignments

| THE CRITERION            | POINTS/100 | PERCENTAGE |
|--------------------------|------------|------------|
| Validity of the data     | 18         | 18%        |
| The analysis of the data | 18         | 18%        |
| Grammar                  | 18         | 18%        |
| Spelling                 | 16         | 16%        |
| Quality of the data      | 14         | 14%        |
| Findings                 | 12         | 12%        |
| Paragraph organization   | 4          | 4%         |

**The interpretation of each criterion**

**\*Validity of the data:** Whether the ungrammatical or syntactically ill-formed sentences are selected appropriately and judged correctly which is in close relation with grammatical awareness.

**\*The analysis of the data:** Whether the collected sentences are analyzed by the procedures and certain steps that are instructed before: 1. The grammatically correct sentence is put forward, 2. The

problem is pointed and corrected via own judgments and/or with the help of reference books by using the demanded terminology, 3. Whether the underlying reasons for the uses of structures in these discourse types are discussed if there are any.

**\*Quality of the data:** Whether the focused structures in selected sample texts are far more below the proficiency level of students or the ungrammaticality is not comprehensible or ambiguous in the given context.

**\*Grammar:** The use of grammar while presenting the outputs in written form.

**\*Spelling:** The avoidance of making spelling mistakes in the papers.

**\*Findings:** Whether the explanations and comments are put forward appropriately in the findings section following the data analysis. This section requires students to explain what they've found in general in analyzing the data with a holistic perspective.

**\*Paragraph organization:** Whether the assignment is well-organized with its sections and sub-sections with appropriate paragraphing procedures.

#### **4. Findings**

The findings of the analysis will be presented in accordance with and parallel to the research questions mentioned in section 2. Each section below stands as a response for the related research questions and will be handled separately in different sections. In discussion part, the inductions arising from the analysis will be introduced with a critical perspective.

#### 4.1. Grammatical mistakes in own written productions

It has been found out that language used in individual assignments include more grammar mistakes on the production level when compared with pair-work assignments. Individual assignments included a total of 351 ungrammatical structures, which makes an average of 15,2 ungrammatical usages per-assignment. On the other hand, the pair-work assignments included a total number of 188 ungrammatical and grammatically ill-formed structures, which makes 8,17 ungrammatical usage per paper as Table 4 indicates.

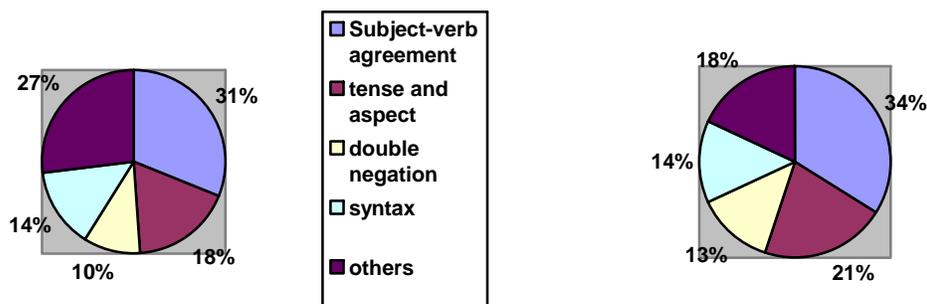
(Table 4), The number of grammatical mistakes

|  | Individual assignments | Pair-work assignments |
|--|------------------------|-----------------------|
| The total number of grammatical mistakes   | 351                    | 188                   |
| The average number of grammatical mistakes | 15,2                   | 8,17                  |

The observed problems of grammar in production are grouped as: subject- verb agreement, tense and aspect, double negation, and syntax. It is found out that the violation of subject-verb agreement dominates most of the ungrammatical structures when both the experiment group and the control group are considered. The diagrams below indicate the types of the ungrammatical structures with a comparison of the two groups.

Diagram 1: Pair-work

Diagram 2: Individual assignments



Grammar is traditionally sub-divided into two inter-related areas of study: morphology (the study of how words are formed out of smaller units) and syntax (the study which reveals the ways in which words can be combined together to form phrases and sentences) (Radford, 1997:1). It is obvious from the analyzed data that the ungrammatical structures mainly emerge from morphological reasons. The frequent grammatical mistakes resulting mainly from faulty use of derivational and inflectional affixes or bound morphemes are far more visible in the assignments of students who worked individually.

#### **4.2. Spelling mistakes**

When spelling mistakes are considered, the analysis reveals that the individual assignments include more mistakes than the pair-work assignments. The papers of students who have worked individually have 129 spelling mistakes in total. When compared with individual assignments, pair-work papers are far more successful with a number of sixty one mistakes (Table 5).

The underlying reasons for misspelling may vary. In pair-works, there is much more control on what is written when compared with the individual studies. Of course, varying attitudes of students may have a significant effect on this issue. Yet, all of the variables (like psychological reasons) could not be controlled in this research.

**(Table 5), Spelling mistakes**

|  | <b>Individual assignments</b> | <b>Pair-work assignments</b> |
|--|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>The total number of spelling mistakes</b>   | 129                           | 61                           |
| <b>The average number of spelling mistakes</b> | 5,6                           | 2,65                         |

#### **4.3. The degree of grammatical awareness**

The other problem to deal with concerning grammar is the degree of “grammatical awareness”. The students were supposed to analyze thirty ungrammatical sentences and this would give some ideas about their “grammatical awareness”. Here, I suggest the term

“grammatical awareness” which covers both the grammatical competence and performance. According to Chomsky “Competence is the speaker’s or hearer’s knowledge of his language, while performance is the actual use of language in concrete situations” (cited in Radford:1997). However, we will restrict ourselves to the term ‘grammatical awareness’ as its limits seem to be more appropriate to the aim of this research. Drawing upon this, the evaluation of the data can not be considered solely as the reflection of grammatical competence; since the written output should be accepted as an outcome of grammatical performance. The terms ‘Grammaticality judgments’ is more or less closer to grammatical awareness, since it is defined as the speakers’ judgments about whether sentences are well-formed or not (Akmajian et al., 1997:137).

Out of the 690 ungrammatical structures (for each group) analyzed by the students, the individual assignments included seventy two grammatical sentences, which were attributed as ungrammatical usages. On the other hand, the pair work assignments included a total number of thirty three wrongly evaluated sentences (Table 6). This clearly indicates the fact that in pair-work assignments a higher degree of grammatical awareness is observed when compared with individual assignments.

**(Table 6), Grammatical unawareness**

|   | <b>Individual assignments</b> | <b>Pair-work assignments</b> |
|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| <b>The total number of wrongly evaluated structures</b>   | 72                            | 33                           |
| <b>The average number of wrongly evaluated structures</b> | 3,13                          | 1,43                         |

#### **4.4. The social and academic contributions of pair-work in terms of solidarity and building positive inter-personal relationships**

The reflection of a group identity may be both in lexical level and in underlying structures of syntactic, morphological and morpho-syntactic level (Fairclough:1995). As mentioned before, the overuse of the first person plural pronoun and accordingly “us” and “our” indicates a group

identity at lexical level. At this point, it would be appropriate to check the sample sentences and try to reach conclusions with a “critical discourse analysis” perspective:

1. **We** tried to cover the data holistically.
2. The particular aim of **our** study is to... .
3. **We** were **unable** to bring logical explanations for this sentence.
4. The project supplied **us** with ... .

Although the students were instructed many times not to overuse the subject pronouns for the sake of academic writing, these sample sentences indicate an unconscious resistance which is reflected by the written discourse of the learners. When the second sentence is considered, the use of “our” clearly indicates a possession, and is an absolute reflection of a group identity and high intimacy level. In social psychology, ‘us-them distinction’ is a term used to indicate a group identity (which is also included in the terminology of critical discourse analysis). Although there are no clear opponents (other groups referring to “them”) in this project, the students may have accepted other learners as their rivals and this leads to “us-them distinction” in underlying level.

When the third sentence is taken into consideration, it is observed that the use of “we” is preceded by an indicator of ability “able” which is negated with the prefix un- at morphological level. It is mentioned that “model markers...indicate the psychological conditions that the process is expressed by the verb” (Büyükkantarcıoğlu, 1999:127). Drawing upon this, it may be claimed that the individuals in the peers support each other even in a statement which indicates an ‘inability’ at both morpho-syntactic and lexical levels. Therefore, one may speak of ‘peer solidarity’ which is constructed through a project prepared with peer-work. It is the case that as well as inabilities, the group members also reflect their success with the use of first person plural pronoun and its forms. Consequently, these lexical and morpho-syntactic findings somehow indicate the existence of a group identity and co-operation in addition to high intimacy level when “solidarity” (in socio-linguistic sense) is considered.

By making use of interview techniques, the students who performed pair-work were asked to decide whether the project had positive contributions to the interpersonal relations with their peers. However, twenty three assignment peers can not be drawn upon during this evaluation process; since some of the peers were highly intimate before the project began. So, twelve peers were selected out of twenty three drawing upon the pre-interviews. In both interviews, the

individuals in the pairs were interviewed separately. Some of the questions during the interview process were as follows:

- Did you share more personal information after the project?
- Did the frequency of social activities or meeting increase after the project?
- Do you think that you know more about your peer know?
- Do you think that this project contributed positively to your friendship?
- Would you participate to another project with him/her?
- Was the peer-work beneficial during the research process?
- Did you learn new information about grammar and English use from your peer?
- Has your partner indicated any fossilized mistake in your grammar or use of English?

Out of twelve pairs, the interpersonal relationships of nine peers seem to be affected positively drawing upon the interviews (which makes 75%). It should be kept in mind that these nine peers (so eighteen students) were evaluated via the criterion that the ones who had answered positively to the 80% of the questions existed in the interviews. So the peer-work assignments may also have affected the other three peers positively to some extent.

Another contribution of the project and the course in general was that an e-mail group was conducted by the instructor. So the students had the opportunity to heighten their intimacy level and were able to communicate more frequently via electronic mails. In addition to these long-term benefits of the e-mail group, it was observed that additional materials that were delivered by the instructor had positive contributions to the development of the project. Furthermore, the students shared their ideas about the project and discussed on grammatical issues via the e-mail group, which is the short term success when the aims of the course, assignment and this research are considered. Therefore, communication of information -in which 'the code' is e-mail- is the most important academic contribution (concerning transformation of information among the students, peer-correction, etc.) for the students and may be suggested as an efficient technique with its wide ranging benefits.

#### **4.5 The evaluation of the success level of the assignments with a comparative manner**

In evaluating the success level of both the individually prepared and pair-work assignments, the outputs are handled in terms of the development of the subject matter,

information content and results. So, I –as the instructor- used a checklist to evaluate the papers of the students drawing upon pre-determined criteria. The analysis and interpretation of the data constructed by the criteria which are used to indicate the distinction between the success levels of individual and pair-work assignments reveal the underlying superiority of pair-work assignments in many respects.

Drawing upon the criteria given in section 3, the papers were evaluated as objective as possible within the limits of each criterion; however I may not have always isolated myself from my personal expectations concerning the outputs. But this problem seems to have been overcome, as the related criteria were built considering the aim and objectives of the course and the assignment. The grading and analysis of both individually prepared and pair-work assignments indicate that the outputs of pair-work assignments are more successful concerning the development of the subject matter, information content and the results as the case seems to be obvious in table 7 below:

**(Table 7), The comparison of the success level of outputs**

| <b>THE CRITERION</b>            | <b>The average points for individual assign.</b> | <b>The average points for pair-work assign.</b> | <b>The superiority of pair-work to individ. assign.</b> |
|---------------------------------|--|---|---|
| <b>Validity of the data</b>     | 14,8 / 18  | 15,9 / 18                                       | 6,1%  |
| <b>The analysis of the data</b> | 15,1 / 18  | 15,3 / 18                                       | 1,1%  |
| <b>Grammar</b>                  | 13,9 / 18  | 14,9 / 18                                       | 5,5%  |
| <b>Spelling</b>                 | 12,3 / 16  | 14,1 / 16                                       | 11,2%   |
| <b>Quality of the data</b>      | 10,7 / 14  | 11,5 / 14                                       | 5,7%  |
| <b>Findings</b>                 | 8,8 / 12   | 10,1 / 12                                       | 10,8%   |
| <b>Paragraph organization</b>   | 2,6 / 4  | 3,2 / 4   | 15%   |
|                                 | 78,2 / 100                                       | 85 / 100  | 6,8%  |

Following table 7, it is understood that the quality of the outputs with reference to the pre-given criteria vary between individually prepared and pair-work assignments. The total average point (78,2 for individual and 85 for pair-work assignments over 100 points) seems to draw a

clear distinction concerning the differing quality of the results, if one is to consider the fact that 85 over 100 stands for 'A2', but 78,2 over 100 for 'B1'. So, a percentage of 6,8% seems to be satisfactory for claiming the superiority of pair-work assignments to individual ones in this context.

Drawing upon the analyzed data, the superiority of the pair-work assignments to individual assignments can be numerically uttered when the average point of each paper is considered. At this point, it may be stated that the criteria in evaluating these 'original' assignments are bound to the aim and objectives of 'IDÖ 152-English Grammar II' course and may not be valid for evaluating other types of assignments in different grammar courses; but is strongly recommended to educators or researchers sharing the same goals as mine. Accordingly, the superiority of pair-work assignments to individually prepared ones revealed in this research is limited to some particular subject matters and content. However, the data collection, evaluation and analysis procedures are consistent with the aims and results of the study and are valid in the context of this paper. In relation to this, external reliability of this research will only be possible through further researches conducted in different settings by different researchers. In this respect, the leading role of this research should not be neglected.

The underlying reasons for better quality output may have a wide ranging determinants changing from peer-correction to double check and will further be discussed in section 5. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that one may not speak off certain determinants and factors which lead to the development of better quality outputs, since the research environment in this project is far from absolute control and manipulation of the researcher.

## **5. Discussion**

Trying to answer the aforementioned research questions, general ideas were gained about the positive contributions of peer-work assignments both for the sake of academic success and positive inter-personal relationships. The first concern of this project has been to reveal the academic success level of pair-work assignments over individual assignments by making use of error analysis techniques to reveal the quality of assignments in terms of grammaticality and spelling, as well as the consideration of the 'grammatical awareness' of the students.. It is found out that the students who were involved in peer-work are far more successful in grammar (both in

perception and production levels) and spelling than the students who studied individually as tables 4, 5 and 6 suggest.

The statistics which are concluded in relation to first research question obviously indicates a superiority of peer-work to individual work concerning the assignments given which have become the data for this research. The reasons for this may vary, but there seem to be some basic ones. It may be put forward that ‘peer control’ and ‘peer correction’ lead to betterment in producing higher quality outcomes. It is an obvious case that ‘double-check’ enhances the production of well-organized, carefully prepared and academically written assignments. On the other hand, a foreign language teacher should also consider the exceptional cases in which negative peer-control arise, which may even lead to fossilized mistakes on the part of the learners in long term.

In trying to reveal the reflection of co-operation in written discourse, mainly the terminology of critical discourse analysis was of use. The analysis included the lexical and morphological, as well as morpho-syntactic choices of students and the data were evaluated with a discourse perspective. The findings somehow indicate the existence of a group identity and co-operation in addition to high intimacy level when “solidarity” in socio-linguistic sense is considered. Although the analysis seems to focus dominantly on first person plural pronoun and its inflexions in addition to a restricted number of words, it is not limited given that the frequent use of aforementioned phrases stands as a satisfactory evidence for the claim. It is noteworthy that language classrooms are discourse communities with their own linguistic repertoires; therefore they should be treated like any social groups in the society for which any sort of social psychological or sociolinguistic phenomena are applicable.

When we are to evaluate the outputs of the interviews concerning the second research question, the positive contributions of the pair work assignment become very clear for building positive inter-personal relationships. The rate of 75% seems to be very satisfying in this sense. However, it is worth mentioning that the building of positive inter-personal relationships among the learners is a long-term contribution and is not an immediate benefit of pair-work assignments in academic sense. Although it seems reasonable, it is not easy to measure the positive correlation between the high intimacy level and the level of success.

It may be suggested that the pair-work assignments are superior to individually prepared ones concerning the quality of the outputs which is measured via the pre-determined criteria

presented in section 3. It may again be stated that ‘peer-control’, ‘peer-correction’ and double (or multiple) check are the most important determinants which lead to the production of higher quality assignments with pair work. Yet, peer-correction is a problematic case as there are conflicting findings on the issue when it is handled in the classroom setting. According to a research, only 36% of learners would not mind having their written work corrected by peers, while a vast majority of 64% are against peer-correction in the classroom (Kavaliauskienė, 2003). However, it should be considered that this research reflects the attitudes of the learners in classroom environments; so there are psychological reasons regarding the students’ attitudes. In this paper, peer-correction is not performed in the class, through which the negative aspects of the phenomenon is avoided.

## **6. Conclusion**

Concluded from the data analysis, the findings of this research which try to bring logical explanations to test the common-sense knowledge about the superiority of pair-work assignments to individual assignments clearly indicate that pair-work assignments have positive contributions both at academic and social levels in many respects. It should be stated that more comprehensive and applicable researches are still required. Although the number of subjects and the variables controlled seem to be adequate in this context; expansion in the number of subjects and specification of research questions are required for the sake of both internal and external validity and reliability.

The results seem to be satisfying as the project covers wide ranging research questions. The use of both qualitative and quantitative methods may be questioned, which leads to the inclusion of both subjective and objective interpretation of the data. Yet, it should be mentioned that subjective evaluations which are put forward throughout the paper draw mainly upon specific data most of which can be tested numerically. To conclude, this project may be one of the steps for furthering the developments in this specific area and is expected to make some useful contributions to ELT.

## References:

- Akmajian, A.& Demers, R.& Farmer, A.& Harnish, R. (1997)., Linguistics: An introduction to language and communication. London: MIT Press,
- Büyükkantarcıoğlu,N. (1999). Favouritism in Sports Discourse. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*. 16:2. 117-130
- Fairclough, N. (1995). Critical Discourse Analysis: The critical study of language. London: Longman
- Gibbs, G. (1994). Learning in teams: A student manual. Oxford: Oxford Brooks University
- Kavaliauskienė,G. (2003). Role of self-correction in learning.*English for Specific Purposes*. 2,5
- Radford, A. (1997). Syntax: A minimalist introduction. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Shirk, H. N. (1995). The fallacies of collaboration. *Education, training and research*. Pg,78-82 <http://www.stc.org/confproceed/1995/PDFs/PG7982.PDF>

This article is a revised version of the article entitled “Comparative Analysis of Pair-work and Individual Assignments in two ELT Classes” published in Journal of Language and Learning.

### Biography:

Olçay Sert is a linguist graduated from English Linguistics Department at Hacettepe University in 2004. He is presently a research assistant and instructor in English Language Teaching department at Hacettepe University. For more information: <http://www.elt.hacettepe.edu.tr/sertolcay.php>