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Mustafa POLAT<sup>1</sup>  
<sup>1</sup>Karabük University

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## A Comparative Analysis of Written Errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian Students in English Writing Skills

Mustafa POLAT\*

Karabük University

### Abstract

This study aims to do a comparative analysis of the writing errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian university students studying in English preparatory classes in the context of grammatical, lexical and spelling errors. The data of this qualitative case study were obtained from the 15 English preparatory class students from Turkey (N=5), Syria (N=5) and Azerbaijan (N=5). They were studying at A2 (pre-intermediate) level classes at the school of foreign languages of a state university in the northwest of Turkey. In order to get the information from the writing errors made by the students, 60 pieces of their writing portfolio papers were collected through the document analysis technique. The research data were analyzed through the content analysis. The results revealed that Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students have some differences in terms of both the number and the types of writing errors. On the other hand, Turkish and Azerbaijani students also have a great number of similarities, but they differ from Syrian students in almost all types of errors. In the light of the results of the study, it has been concluded that most of the errors resulted from the mother tongue and culture-related negative transfers are frequently encountered ones in the teaching process of writing skills.

**Key words:** Foreign language education, Writing skill, Errors in writing skills, Comparative error analysis, Interlingual errors

### Introduction

In the literature, it is frequently stated that foreign language teaching and learning process is based on four language skills which can be grouped as receptive skills that are listening and reading and productive skills that are writing and speaking skills (Bozorgian, 2012; Harmer, 2015; Hubackova & Golkova, 2014; Tosuncuoğlu, 2018). On the other hand, writing skill is considered as one of the most challenging and complex and skill to master for students (Graham, Harris & Mason, 2005; Tilemma, 2012; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013). Research on linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and social linguistics related to writing skills has shown that it is a very faulty approach to address this skill independently from the others because writing skill has a structure that is interrelated with the other language skills, the culture of the target language and the context presented (Hyland 2002; Kern 2000).

Although it has been seen as a practice area for the development of sub-skills such as grammar, vocabulary, and even reading skills in language teaching for many years; writing is an area where there is a dynamic interaction between the text, author and reader elements and in this respect it can be said that social and contextual factors have impacts over this language skill, so it is considered as a personalized productive skill area of communication and expression in a dynamic, creative and contextual way in current language teaching approaches.

It is so important to develop and implement writing activities which are motivating (Park & Brenna, 2015); requiring individuals to use different information and skills (Mohammad & Hazarika, 2016; Mokhamar, 2016). In addition, they should be presented within a context in order to gain effective writing skills which are based on a purpose and where students can reflect their own ideas and opinions freely instead of the activities which are controlled or limited and focused on mechanical forms rather than production.

Making errors is accepted as one of the most natural mark of the language development in language learning process (Phuket & Othman, 2015; Wu & Garzha, 2014) because they are the indicators of language learners'

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\* Corresponding Author: *Mustafa POLAT, mustafapolat@karabuk.edu.tr*

knowledge (Brown, 2000) and progress (James, 1998) and they can be considered as a guiding reference for teachers (Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn, 2017). Moreover, language learners' errors, especially the ones that they made in developing writing skills, are defined as the limelight for teachers, linguists and curriculum designers (Darus & Ching, 2009)

Accordingly, it can be stated that identifying the errors that students have made in the process of developing their writing skills and presenting them as feedback in terms of the frequency and types of their errors does not only play a crucial role in terms of learning process of students (Jabeen, Kazemian & Mustafai, 2015) but also in the process of examining or developing curriculum at both macro-level instructional designs for English preparatory programs and micro-level designs to develop their writing skills for all the stakeholders (Al-Khasawneh, 2010; Erdoğan, 2005; Khansir, 2012). To sum up, understanding the language learners' problems in writing skills is very critical in order to develop the quality of foreign language writing (Hammad, 2012).

A lot of studies have been conducted to find out the types and the causes of writing problems on learners' writing papers. While some of them tried to specify and thematize the types of errors in foreign language learners' various types of writings (Alhaysony, 2012; Jenwitheesuk, 2009; Liu, 2013; Phuket & Othman, 2015; Sermsook, Liamnimitr & Pochakorn, 2017; Taşçı & Aksu Ataç, 2018) others tried to explore the sources of their errors in writing (Heydari & Bagheri, 2012; Hinnon, 2014; Li, Ren and Zhao, 2016; Watcharapunyawong & Usaha, 2013; Zheng & Park, 2013). However, no comparative writing error analysis which focuses on the differences between the errors of students from different countries or cultures was found in the comprehensive literature view.

According to the literature, it is considered that writing errors are derived from two main sources which are interlingual and intralingual (Brown, 2014; Phuket and Othman, 2015). Moreover, the interlingual error is stated as one of the most important factors resulting from negative transference from learner's mother tongue to the target language (Kaweera, 2013; Krashen, 1981;). Thus, by analyzing the writing errors that were made by language learners from different countries, of which cultures and mother tongues are different can be considered as a vital issue and a reference guide for both decision-makers and practitioners.

This study aims to do a comparative analysis of the writing errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian university students studying in English preparatory classes in the context of grammatical, lexical and spelling errors. In this context, research questions are:

1. What is the distribution of writing errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian university students in terms of grammar?
2. What is the distribution of writing errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian university students in terms of lexical items?
3. What is the distribution of writing errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian university students in terms of spelling?

## Method

The data of this qualitative case study were obtained from the 15 English preparatory class students from Turkey (N=5), Syria (N=5) and Azerbaijan (N=5). All the participants studying at A2 (pre-intermediate) level classes which were determined according to the result of the placement test that was conducted at the beginning of the academic year at the school of foreign languages of a state university in the northwest of Turkey were selected via purposeful sampling method which is commonly preferred in qualitative research for the identification of information-rich cases (Palinkas et al., 2015). Eight of the participants were male and seven of them are female. In addition, all the participants were between 18-20 years old and that was the first year at the school of foreign languages.

In order to get the information from the writing errors on their writing portfolio papers made by the students, 60 pieces of their writing papers constituted of about 80-100 words were collected through the document analysis technique which is a form of qualitative research where documents such as official publications, reports, records etc. (Patton, 2002), which is writing records of students in this study, are interpreted by the researcher to give a meaning around the topic (Bowen, 2009). The steps of error analysis suggested by Corder (1974) were followed. First, students' papers were read in detail and marked using the writing error codes by the researcher and two independent, who are experts from English language teaching department, sentence by sentence and word by word and then coding categories were generated. After that, in order to examine the occurrence of errors; the frequency and the percentage were calculated by counting the numbers of errors. Each error was

recorded according to its type and the characteristics of the errors, such as omission, unnecessary or wrong usage in an individual error record form. After the analyses of the papers were completed, individual interviews were done with the same students in order to reveal their thoughts about the reasons of their writing errors that they made and support the data which were obtained from their papers.

The research data were analyzed through the content analysis which can be defined as a systematic coding and categorizing approach in order to identify the characteristics of a document by counting occurrences of themes, words or phrases within the documents (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Gbrich, 2007). The data were identified and interpreted based on the themes, frequency and percentage values and direct quotations from the interviews done with participants. Findings confirmed by the participants and interviews serving for triangulation were used in order to ensure the validity and the reliability of the data. Furthermore, the findings were presented to the field experts and asked for their appropriateness. The interrater reliability values were between %93 and %98 which is interpreted as reliable (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

## Results and Discussion

The findings of the analysis of the errors of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students in their papers show that there are high number of differences between the students from different countries both in terms of the total number of errors and error types. As it can be clearly seen in Table 1, students having the highest number of writing errors are Syrians. Syrian students are followed by Turkish students and Azerbaijani students, respectively.

Table 1. The distribution of writing errors of students.

Themes	Turkish Students (N=5)		Azerbaijani Students (N=5)		Syrian Students (N=5)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Grammatical Errors</i>	330	48.96	231	50.55	278	31.56
<i>Spelling Errors</i>	225	33.38	131	28.67	540	61.29
<i>Lexical Errors</i>	119	17.66	95	20.78	63	7.15
Total	674	100	457	100	881	100

When students' writing errors are examined in terms of the types, it was seen that the types of errors of Turkish and Azerbaijani students are quite similar. Grammatical errors were the highest error type in both groups, and they were followed by spelling and lexical errors. The types of writing errors of Syrian students differed from Turkish and Azerbaijani students. The most common writing errors that Syrian students made were spelling errors, and they were followed by grammatical and lexical errors.

### Results in terms of Grammatical Errors

As it can be seen in Table 2, grammatical errors of Turkish and Azerbaijani students were no/incorrect auxiliary verb, no/incorrect article, no/incorrect preposition, wrong tense, no/incorrect conjunction, respectively. The most common type of grammatical error made by Syrian students was no/incorrect preposition and it was followed by no/incorrect auxiliary verb, no/incorrect article, no/incorrect subject and wrong tense. This finding showed that although there are some differences in terms of the number of errors, the most common four grammatical errors of students from three countries were no/incorrect use of prepositions, no/incorrect use of auxiliary verb, no/incorrect use of article and use of wrong tense. On the other hand, while the fifth common grammatical error types of Turkish and Azerbaijani students was no/incorrect use of conjunction; it was no/incorrect use of subject for Syrian students.

Table 2. The distribution of grammatical errors of students.

Grammatical Errors	Turkish Students (N=5)		Azerbaijani Students (N=5)		Syrian Students (N=5)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<i>No / Incorrect preposition</i>	53	7.86	31	6.78	60	6.81
<i>No / Incorrect auxiliary verb</i>	66	9.79	49	10.72	48	5.45
<i>No / Incorrect article</i>	59	8.75	33	7.22	43	4.88
<i>No/ Incorrect subject</i>	7	1.04	5	1.09	26	2.95
<i>Wrong tense</i>	32	4.75	24	5.25	22	2.50
<i>No / Incorrect conjunction</i>	15	2.23	23	5.03	8	0.91
<i>Word order error</i>	15	2.23	13	2.84	20	2.27
<i>Subject-verb disagreement</i>	14	2.08	12	2.63	13	1.48
<i>No / Incorrect possessive</i>	14	2.08	11	2.41	8	0.91
<i>Infinitive or Gerund error</i>	8	1.19	6	1.31	8	0.91
<i>Sentence fragment</i>	12	1.78	7	1.53	8	0.91
<i>No / Incorrect pronoun</i>	13	1.88	10	2.19	5	0.57
<i>Singularity / Plurality</i>	11	1.93	7	1.53	4	0.45
<i>Repetition of words or ideas</i>	6	0.89	0	0	4	0.45
Total	330	48.96	231	50.55	278	31.56

*Preposition errors:* The majority of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students' errors in the use of prepositions were in the form of omission and misuse of prepositions. In addition, when the preposition errors were examined in detail, other common errors were about the exceptional use of prepositions, wrong use or overuse of prepositions in idiomatic expressions and phrasal verbs.

The opinion of TR1 (1st Turkish student) about the use of preposition: "...There are too many prepositions and I have difficulty in memorizing them. Moreover, some of them do not have any meanings, so I still don't understand why we use them in sentences..."

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

"...We arrived to\* (at) the station in the morning." (misuse).

"He goes to\* outside after he has dinner." (overuse).

The opinion of AZ2 (2nd Azerbaijani student) about the use of preposition: "In the past, I knew only at, in, on prepositions and I used them only before some time and place expressions, but now I feel that I need to use prepositions before everything".

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:

"Teacher is interested with\* (in) everyone in our class." (misuse)

"I was good for\* (at) singing songs." (misuse)

The opinion of SR2 (2nd Syrian student) about the use of preposition: "We can learn phrasal verbs only by memorizing them, when I think the meaning of the prepositions in the phrasal verbs I wrote, it seems that they are true but they are false according to the rules, but they say there are no rules in phrasal verbs?"

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

"...My family was looking before\* (after) the injured neighbors" (misuse).

"I don't like to\* him." (overuse).

It is considered that the structural differences between their mother tongue and the target language they have learned play a decisive role in the emergence of Turkish and Azerbaijani students' errors in the use of prepositions. Firstly, the prepositions are used in English before and after the words to be used together but in Turkish only after the word to be used together. Secondly, some of the prepositions used in English do not have any equivalents in Turkish. In addition, the prepositions are used as independent words in English but they are used as independent words in some cases and as a suffix to the words in other cases in Turkish. Finally, some verbs don't require any prepositions in Turkish but they do in English.

When the subject is addressed in terms of Syrian students, some reasons such as not having the equivalents of prepositions in Arabic (Ho-Abdullah & Hasan, 2009; Asma, 2010); the quite limited number of prepositions in Arabic when it's compared to English (Al-Marrani, 2009) and having different meanings of the Arabic prepositions in English can be considered as the main factors that play in the occurrence of preposition errors. In addition, while there is an exceptional use of some prepositions which has some semantic changes in phrasal verbs in English, there is no similar usage of prepositions in Arabic so it can be seen as the rationale for especially the omission of prepositions in Syrian students' papers.

*Auxiliary verb errors:* Most frequently, nearly all of the students made their auxiliary verb errors by using incomplete or faulty auxiliary verbs in the process of writing negative or question sentences. It can be said that the possible reasons for Turkish and Azerbaijani students' auxiliary verb errors can result from one of the characteristics of the English language; because while English is an isolating language which means that auxiliary verbs "be, do, have" are used as independent words; Turkish is an agglutinative language so it does not have a similar systematics for auxiliary verbs and auxiliary verbs are added as suffixes to the verbs, adjectives or nouns.

The opinion of TR2 (2nd Turkish student) about the use of auxiliary verbs: "For example, when I write a sentence about the activities we did with our friends I know I should write in simple past tense so I use "did" but my teacher says: No, you should use "was"; or I use "was" my teacher says: No, you should use "did". Ok, but why?"

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

"...I am not\* (don't) wake up early in the weekends" (misuse).

"My father asked: "How much money (do\*) you need to go to the match" (omission)

As Abushibab (2012) highlighted that Turkish learners acquire "be" as the main verb before they acquire "be" as an auxiliary verb and although there are not any differences in auxiliary verbs which are in the form of suffixes that were added to the verbs, nouns or adjectives in Turkish; auxiliary verbs in English vary according to the subjects of the sentences, so this difference can be one of the reasons of a great number of errors that were made in the use of "be" and "do" auxiliary verbs in negative sentences by Turkish and Azerbaijani students.

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:

"When they came to school, we (were\*) playing football" (omission).

"Their apartment (is\*) the most expensive in our site" (omission).

When the issue is considered from the aspects of Syrian students' errors, being totally different of the use and functions of auxiliary verbs in Arabic and English; the difference between the types of auxiliary verbs in English language which has primary auxiliaries and modal auxiliaries, and Arabic language which has kaana group, verbs of beginning, verbs of appropinquation ve particles which behave like auxiliaries; having no equivalence of the most frequently used English auxiliary verbs in the context of present continuous tense, which are "do" and "be", in Arabic language can be interpreted as the reasons that explain the auxiliary verb errors of Syrian students.

The opinion of SR1 (1st Syrian student) about the use of auxiliary verbs: "You can express opinions and ideas more in Arabic, you do not need to use auxiliary verbs all the time like in English."

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

"It (is) my favorite place to relax" (omission).

"I love may so much and I be so happy at this time of the year" (misuse).

*Article errors:* When the errors of the Turkish students regarding the use of the articles were examined, it was seen that the most common error was related to the use of the definite article "the". Turkish students sometimes misuse the definite article "the" in the sentences as a result of overgeneralization or they didn't use the definite article "the" when it is necessary. The use of the definite article "the" is highly challenging for individuals having a native mother tongue which does not have a similar article system like in English. Unlike English, the definite article is not used as independent words; definiteness is added to the nouns as suffixes, thanks to the order of words in sentences or word/sentence stress in Turkish (Göksel & Kerslake, 2005).

The opinion of TR3 (3rd Turkish student) about the article errors: “Absolutely, the most challenging grammar topic is use of articles because it’s very complicated and especially article “the” does not have any meanings but we use in sentences.”

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:  
We went to the\* holiday with my family.” (overuse)

In addition to the definite articles, there are also a great number of errors in the use of indefinite articles. Although there is an indefinite article in Turkish, differences in usage in Turkish is considered as another important factor in the occurrence of this kind of errors.

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:  
“I and my sisters are student(s) but my brother is (a\*) worker now.” (omission).

On the other hand, although the indefinite article is also used in Azerbaijani Turkish, differences in usage between the two languages cause students to make errors in the use of indefinite articles “a, an” especially with uncountable nouns. Moreover, both the lack of definite article in Azerbaijani Turkish and the absence of definite and indefinite articles in Russian which is the first foreign language in which Azerbaijani students learn at an early age can be considered as some reasons that explain the article errors that students made.

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:  
“The\* animals are our friends but I don’t like some of them.” (overuse).  
“I like listening to a\* music or going to (the\*) cinema” (overuse & omission)

The most common article errors made by Syrian students are; omission of definite article “the”, omission of indefinite articles “a, an” and misuse of definite article “the”. The structural distinct differences of the use of articles in two languages may lie at the roof of Syrian students’ article errors. Moreover, the absence of indefinite articles “a, an” in Arabic and the use of “-al” which is the equivalent of “the” in Arabic has different functions in different context can be expressed as the determinants behind Syrian students’ article errors.

The opinion of SR3 (3rd Syrian student) about the article errors: “We have also articles in Arabic but the system is very different. We don’t use any articles where they must use and we use articles where they shouldn’t use!”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:  
“It is a\* large and comfortable” (overuse).  
“(The\*) third reason is its size.” (omission).

*Tense errors:* Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students made the most common errors in the structure of perfect tenses. It is considered that the absence of the equivalence of the perfect tenses and other grammatical differences in these languages play the most important role in these kinds of errors. Misusing of simple past tense or simple present tense instead of present perfect tense in the sentences supports that interpretation.

Some of the examples made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students in their papers:  
“I didn’t see\* him since I went to school.” (misuse).  
“My family is living\* in İstanbul” (misuse).

The opinion of SR2 (2nd Syrian student) about the tense errors: “Actually, I can find the correct answer in a multiple choice test about the tenses but I feel confused about the use of them in writing.”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:  
“We are meeting\* together one time in a year” (misuse).  
“I was lived\* in Turkey since 2015” (misuse)

*Conjunction errors:* While the conjunction error is the fifth common error of Turkish and Azerbaijani students, it is not among the most common errors of Syrian students. In the analysis, it was observed that the students use conjunctions in the wrong order in sentences or they use more than one conjunctions unnecessarily.

Some of the examples made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students in their papers:  
“Although\* I was cold but\* picnic was wonderful time.” (overuse).  
“I was very happy. Because\* my father gave me his car.” (wrong position).

Conjunctions are used in all languages in a similar way, so it is difficult to say the conjunction errors result from the differences between mother tongue and target language. The lack of understanding of the semantic equivalents of the conjunctions, carelessness, and the use of a large number of connectors to strengthen the meaning of the sentence may have played a role in the emergence of such errors.

The opinion of TR1 (1st Turkish student) about the tense errors: “There are different conjunctions which can be used for the same purpose but they are used in different places in the sentences; some of them are used at the beginning, some of them are used in the middle and others at the end of the sentence but why? It’s so nonsense.”

*Subject errors:* While the omission or misuse of subjects are in the fifth place among the type of grammatical errors of Syrian students, they are not among the common types of errors made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students. In the analysis, it was determined that Syrian students don’t use any subjects or use them in the wrong order while writing a sentence.

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“At first, am going to I\* talk about the good things.” (wrong place)”

Interviews with students showed that the word order in Arabic is in the form of “Verb+Subject+Object” which is quite different from English language can be one of the important factors explaining the reasons underlying these errors.

Because of the frequent use of null subject and the characteristics of the verbs giving information about the number, gender and person in Arabic; it is not necessary to write the subject pronoun all the time in sentences (Jalabneh, 2011), so it can be considered as another factor clarifying the causes of subject errors.

The opinion of SR2 (2nd Syrian student) about the subject errors: “We can understand who did the action even if we didn’t write the subject pronouns in the sentences, so sometimes I forget to use them in English. It’s just like a habit.”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“I love simming(swimming) so much and (I\*) am ready to stay...” (omission).

“(I\*) am in turky (Turkey) and my parents are in Saudi Arabia.” (omission).

## Results in terms of Spelling Errors

When the students' writing errors related to the use of spelling rules are examined, the findings are as follows. Errors of Turkish and Azerbaijani students are listed as punctuation mark errors, typing errors and capitalization errors. On the other hand, the most common error of the Syrian students is about capitalization. It is also the most common error in total. This type of error is followed by typing and punctuation error, respectively.

Table 3. The distribution of spelling errors of students.

Spelling Errors	Turkish Students (N=5)		Azerbaijani Students (N=5)		Syrian Students (N=5)	
	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>		<i>f</i>	%
<i>Capital / Lowercase</i>	66	9.79	38	8.32	239	27.13
<i>Typing</i>	68	10.09	34	7.44	151	17.14
<i>Punctuation</i>	85	12.16	52	11.38	140	15.88
<i>Paragraph indentation</i>	6	0.89	7	1.53	10	1.14
<i>Margins</i>	3	0.45	0	0	0	0
Total	225	33.38	131	28.67	540	61.29

*Punctuation mark errors:* The most common type of error that Turkish students made regarding the use of spelling rules is related to the use of punctuation marks. The misuse of comma and full stop, overuse of punctuation marks, and misuse of apostrophe are the most frequent punctuation errors of Turkish students. Although there are a lot of similarities about the use of punctuation in English and Turkish, there are also some differences in the use of comma, full stop and apostrophe (Elkılıç, Han & Aydın, 2009; Swan & Smith, 2001).

On the other hand, it is a fact that a great number of students have made numerous errors about the use of punctuation even when they write in their mother tongue (Arıcı, 2008; Kalfa, 2000; Yıldız, 2002;).

The opinion of TR2 (2nd Turkish student) about the punctuation mark errors: “I think, punctuation is not very important in writing. The important thing is content and meaning. Also, I didn’t know that teachers pay attention to the punctuation marks in while they are assessing our papers.”

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

“I was bored. Because I didn’t like the movie.” (Unnecessary full stop).

“If he didn’t wake up early tomorrow (,) we will fail” (omission of comma).

The majority of the errors in the use of punctuation of Azerbaijani students include omission of comma and full stop and overuse of punctuation marks. In the interviews with the students, when the examples of the errors were shown to them, in most cases they could not realize their errors and it was found that they had inadequate knowledge about the use of punctuation marks.

The opinion of AZ3 (3rd Azerbaijani student) about the use of punctuation marks: “Actually, I made some punctuation errors in my native tongue, it’s not related to learning a foreign language or developing my writing skills. I know where should I use full stop but yes, I don’t know exactly the rules of comma.”

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“I have short(,\*) straight(,\*) brown haer and brown eyes. (omission).

“I came here last September(.\*) I was alone ,\* and bored. (omission + overuse)

The most frequent errors of Syrian students in the use of punctuation marks are listed as the omission of comma and full stop, overuse of punctuation marks and omission of question marks. Although it is different from the systematic in English, there are also punctuation marks in Arabic. However, in the interviews, the students stated that they don’t not pay attention to punctuation marks because they thought that punctuation marks are not as important as grammar or vocabulary in their country.

The opinion of SR1 (1st Syrian student): “Yes, we have punctuation marks but it’s not necessary in our daily life situations such as texting, tweeting or writing to your friend. Furthermore, I can sincerely say that I pay attention to them only in English.”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“Finally(,\*) I love my best friend very mach” (omission).

“Its consist of two floors(.\*) The first floor if you want to sit. (omission)

Besides, Syrian students stated that they use the “و” letter which functions as conjunction “and” in Arabic instead of comma, so they sometimes use “and” unnecessarily while writing in English, too.

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“I have black and\* straight and\* short hair and brown eyes. (omission).

*Typing errors:* The majority of Turkish students' typing errors are listed as using of one or more incorrect letters, using of one or more missing letters, using of one or more extra letters, and wrong order of letters in a word. In the analysis, it was observed that the students made most of their errors in the spelling of words which has double consonants or vowels and the ones which include the same letter consecutively.

The opinion of TR4 (4th Turkish student) about typing errors: “I made errors especially while writing long words or the words which includes two or three consonant or vawal consecutively. I feel I made error even if I write these words correctly.”

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

“We had a car but unfortunetaly\* it was broke” (substitution).

“I greduated from school two years ago” (wrong letter)

Furthermore, the fact that the spelling of words of foreign origin from English or other Latin languages in Turkish language is different but similar to the spelling in English can be considered as one of the reasons of Turkish students' typing errors.

One of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

“Never I don’t drink alcol\* or smoke” (wrong typing).

In the case of errors such as omission of letters or the wrong order of letters; the number of errors of Azerbaijani students is relatively low compared to Turkish students. The fact that x and q, which are not in Turkish alphabet, takes place in Azerbaijan Turkish is considered to be effective in the emergence of this situation.

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“Final(l)y, I failed and turned back to my hometown.” (omission).

“She loves me but she is a jealuos person. (wrong order of letters)

The most common errors made by Syrian students are listed as adding one or more extra letters to the word, omission of one or more letters, writing letters in the wrong order, and using a wrong letter.

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“Realy, It’s very funy\*” (double consonant).

“His jop\* is maneger\* and he alwyes\* besy\*” (wrong letter, missing letter, extra letter)

The data obtained from the interviews revealed that even though students knew the correct pronunciation of the words they have experienced problems while writing. The main reason for this situation is that the Arabic and the Latin alphabet are completely different. Also, the confusion arising from the different pronunciation of the letters in different situations and the complexity of writing some voices which are not found in Arabic can be other reasons of these errors.

The opinion of SR4 (4th Syrian student) about typing: “I know how to pronounce the word but I can’t choose the correct letters while when I write it. In addition, it’s difficult to write from right to left with by using a new alphabet.”

*Capital/lowercase errors:* The majority of the errors made by Turkish students in the use of capital/lowercase letters are listed as using capital letters for pronouns in sentences, using lowercase for writing of the names of days, months or titles.

Some of the examples made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“I go to school everyday but i\* am feel free on saturday\* and sunday\*. (capitalization).

“MY BEATÍFUL LÍFE” (errors in title).

Although Turkish and Azerbaijani students obey the capitalization / lower case rules in most of the situations; they have problems with the rules which are peculiar to English language. They made also some errors especially writing the minor words such as pronouns, prepositions or articles while writing the title.

The opinion of TR5 (5th Turkish student) about capital/lowercase errors: “In Turkish, I only use capital letter at the beginning of the sentence or for the names of people but in English we need to use capital letter for different kinds of words such as months, days etc. What a confusing system!”

Some of the examples made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“Our bus stoped in the middle of the road and i\* felt bad (capitalization).

“I didn’t find anywhere but then He\* came class” (capitalization)

The lack of capital and lowercase difference in Arabic can be considered the main reason of the capitalization errors that Syrian students made. Most of the students write nearly all of the subject pronouns by using a capital letter because of the overgeneralization of using capital letter for the subject pronoun “I”. Other errors that they made are using lowercase letters while writing the days, months and titles.

The opinion of SR5 (5th Syrian student) about capital/lowercase errors: “I recognized the capitalization rule for the first time while I’m learning Turkish but the rules are different in English. Now, I made some errors also in Turkish.”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“He Was\* angry because He\* didn’t like to going with my friends.” (capitalization).

“ I LikE\* WINTER\*” (capitalization)

## Results in terms of Lexical Errors

When Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students' lexical errors are examined, it was seen that using incorrect words and unnecessary words are the most common ones. On the other hand, while wrong word form is the third common one for Turkish and Azerbaijani students; omission of words is the third common error type for Syrian students.

Table 4. The distribution of lexical errors of students.

Lexical Errors	Turkish Students (N=5)		Azerbaijani Students (N=5)		Syrian Students (N=5)	
	<i>F</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
<i>Wrong word</i>	69	10.24	45	9.85	32	3,63
<i>Unnecessary word</i>	23	3.41	24	5.25	16	1.82
<i>Missing word</i>	10	1.48	7	1.53	8	0.91
<i>Wrong word form</i>	17	2.52	19	4.16	7	0,79
Total	119	17.66	95	20.79	63	7.15

*Wrong word errors:* When Turkish and Azerbaijani students' errors related to the use of wrong words are examined, it was seen that most of the errors are related to the collocations referring to a group of two or more words that usually go together.

The opinion of TR5 (5th Turkish student) about wrong word error: “I know the meaning of the verbs, adjectives or nouns but even if their meanings are correct, there are some words that can be used only some words (collocations) just like in Turkish and it’s not easy to remember them.”

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

“My brother entered\* (got/started/found) this job\* last year but now he is unemployed.” (misuse)

Another factor that causes the wrong word errors may be homonymic words. The opinion of AZ4 (4th Azerbaijani student) about wrong word errors: “The pronunciations of some words are almost the same or very similar but there are minimal differences between the spelling of them. They confused me and I write some words incorrectly.”

Some of the examples made by Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“I can go to the cinema or go to bitch\*.” (misuse)

“I don’t use everything\* without permission” (misuse)

Translating Turkish idiomatic expressions into English directly, the words used in wrong contexts or with wrong collocations, using near-synonymous words incorrectly are among the reasons leading to such errors.

The data obtained from the interviews with Syrian students about the reasons of writing errors related to the use of wrong words revealed that lack of knowledge about the meaning of the words, similar words and carelessness may play important roles in the occurrence of these errors.

The opinion of SR5 (5th Syrian student) about wrong word errors: “I think, learning new words is the easiest and amusing thing in learning a foreign language but sometimes I forget the order of letters and sometimes I write one or more letters wrongly. I need to study more!”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“She is quiet\* (quite) tall and fat.” (similar word)

“She is more richer then\* (than) other students” (similar word)

*Overuse of word errors:* Using the same verb twice or using different verbs unnecessarily are two most common errors that Turkish and Syrian students made in their papers. Some of the examples made by Turkish and Azerbaijani students in their papers:

“I like playing basketball games\*, playing\* football and talking with my friends.” (repetition).  
 “You don’t need to pay money for have\* a concert” (unnecessary word).

Syrian students’ unnecessary word errors are listed as using the minor words unnecessarily, using similar words together, using irrelevant words and using the same words twice in the same sentence. In the interviews, they stated that they use these words consciously in order to strengthen the meaning of the words.

The opinion of SR4 (4th Syrian student) about unnecessary words: “When I don’t use prepositions or articles, my teacher says it’s an error; when I use them he says it’s an error! I don’t know how to use minor words when and where.”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“He doesn’t like hate\* going to this cafe”. “There are four chairs in\* down stairs.”

*Wrong word form errors:* Using verbs instead of nouns or using nouns instead of verbs are two common errors of Turkish and Azerbaijani students in the context of using of wrong word form. The opinion of TR3 (3rd Turkish student) about wrong word form errors: “Actually, I’m not good at knowing the difference between adjectives, adverbs or prepositions even in Turkish because I graduated from the science-maths department from high school, so my errors are not surprising for me.”

Some of the examples made by Turkish students in their papers:

“The film was bored\* (boring) and we escaped from the cinema” (wrong word form). “Turkey has (been) independence\* (independent) since 1923.” (wrong word form).

It was considered that this finding was arisen from the students’ competency level in terms of vocabulary and lack of lexical knowledge. Also, it was inferred from the interview data that most of the students were not aware of their errors and they were not sure about the right form of a word that they use in the sentences.

*Omission of word errors:* Although the number of them is very limited, the third common error of Syrian students is missing words. When the interview data and errors detected in their papers are examined, it can be said that students made these errors mostly because of some affective variables such as stress, excitement, anxiety or other factors such as limited time for writing, forgetfulness while revising the sentences.

The opinion of SR2 (2nd Syrian student) about the omission of words: “The words that I forgot to write actually the ones that I know their meanings but I don’t know why didn’t I write them...”

Some of the examples made by Syrian students in their papers:

“I like doing homework and (playing) football with my Syrian friends.” (omission)  
 “He doesn’t (have) a pet but he loves them. (omission)

## Conclusion

This study aims to explore the writing errors made by students who have different mother tongues and cultural backgrounds by analyzing their papers in terms of grammatical, lexical and spelling errors. The findings revealed that Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students have some differences in terms of both the number and the types of writing errors. On the other hand, Turkish and Azerbaijani students have also a lot of similarities but they differ from Syrian students in almost all types of errors.

Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students from which research data are collected, are representative of the cultures which are close to each other geographically and have some common or similar characteristics of lifestyles, behaviors, traditions and customs. In particular, Turkey and Azerbaijan share a very close and deep-rooted cultural unity especially in the context of common geography, history, language and literature (Adıgüzel, 2012). Accordingly, while Azerbaijani and Turkish languages that are two important representatives of Oğuz language family, which is a common branch of Turkic language family, Arabic is a member of Semitic language family and it has a totally different language system. In this respect Turkish and Azerbaijani languages show a great deal of similarities in a lot of respects such as the elements of sentences (Demirdağ, 2014), vocabulary

knowledge (Ayaz, 2011; Barış, 2016; Uğurlu, 2012;), syntax (Akalm, 2009) and linguistics (Hacıyeva, 2008). Although the findings of the study revealed that the writing errors made by the Turkish and Azerbaijani students differed considerably in terms of the frequency of the differences, the results of these two groups were very close to each other in terms of the distribution of the error types. The similarity of the problems experienced in the process of developing writing skills by language learners who have common or similar mother tongue and culture is considered to be a striking result.

Kesmez (2015), who examined the interference errors of Turkish students in writing activities, found out that the most common errors of Turkish students were the lexical category-including word for word translation errors, wrong use of uncountable nouns and verb errors according to the results obtained from his study. In addition, Elkılıç (2012) reported that the most common errors in the English composition of the Turkish students resulted from their mother tongue were listed as misusing the prepositions; confusing certain verbs; misusing uncountable nouns; omitting the indefinite article *a/an*; subject-verb agreement; number, quantifier and noun agreement; demonstrative adjective and noun agreement; word for word translation. On the other hand, Kırkgöz (2010), who examined the errors in a corpus of essays written by Turkish students in order to identify and classify the possible sources of their errors, reported that most of the errors resulted from interlingual errors indicating interference of the first language and she listed the errors respectively as grammar interference (pluralization and verb tense); prepositional interference (addition, omission and misusing) and lexical interference.

On the other hand, it is noteworthy that the Syrian students did not only make much many errors than Turkish and Azerbaijani students but also they differ from Turkish and Azerbaijani students in terms of proportional distribution of the types of writing errors. The characteristic features of Arabic language which is the mother tongue of Syrian students and has a completely different alphabet system from the Latin alphabet system (Cook and Bassetti, 2005); significant differences in writing order and form such as the use of adjacent and right-to-left handwriting (Kharma and Hajjaj, 1997; Smith, 2001) can be considered as the factors playing roles in the difference between the number and the distribution of the errors found when it compared to Turkish and Azerbaijani students. Apart from those, the social and psychological conditions of Syrian students because of the migration and the civil war in their country could also be another variable that may affect their academic achievement levels.

When researches which were conducted with the participants whose mother tongue is Arabic examined, some similar results were found. In a study by Hourani (2008), it was seen that the most common grammatical errors that Syrian students made when writing English were related to passivization, verb tense and form, subject-verb agreement, word order, prepositions, articles, plurality and auxiliaries. Ridha (2012), who examined the mistakes made by Iraqi students whose native language is Arabic just like the Syrians revealed that the grammatical errors and the mechanical errors were the most serious and frequent ones in the students' writing samples. Moreover, Al-Buainain (2009) examined exam scripts of first-year university students majoring in English in Qatar and found that the most common writing errors of Arab students were tenses, auxiliary verbs, misusing of articles and fragments in the structure of sentences. Finally, Ahamed (2016) investigating the writing errors of Saudi EFL university students stated that students make errors in their papers because of some factors such as mother tongue interference, besides insufficient activities and practice of basic techniques of writing and the most common errors were %52 grammatical (the wrong use of tense or verb forms, the wrong use of articles, the wrong use of prepositions etc.), %27 spelling (wrong choice of letters, missing and overuse of capital letters, insertion or omission of letters etc.) %12 punctuation and %9 lexical errors (errors of verbosity and wrong choice of words).

## **Recommendations**

In the light of the findings of this study, it has been concluded that most of the errors resulted from the mother tongue and cross-linguistic influence are frequently encountered ones in the teaching process of writing skill and the findings are very consistent with the ones in other studies. In this context, a teaching process can be realized in order to prevent these errors by taking both the cultural backgrounds and the similarities, differences between the mother tongue and target language into consideration. Besides, course contents can be enriched and differentiated by focusing on some variables such as mother tongue, cultural background etc. The findings of this study will guide the practitioners in reorganizing the learning and teaching activities to be applied in the English classes consisted of Turkish, Azerbaijani and Syrian students.

Next, decision makers, curriculum specialists and practitioners may take the findings of this research consideration into their preparations, studies and practices especially in multicultural classrooms where students

who have different cultural backgrounds and different mother tongues. Language learners' errors are valuable sources for developing teaching and learning process. Hence, particularly teachers who have responsibilities in teaching writing skills for the students who are from Turkey, Syria and Azerbaijan can revise the teaching activities and revise their strategies and feedback system in the face of the findings of this research.

Moreover, according to the findings of this research, the majority of students' errors result from the negative transference of their first language. As it can clearly be seen in their papers and interviews, this study confirmed that learners' mother tongue plays a vital role in developing writing skills in English. Some remedial studies can be done in order to rise the awareness of the students about the differences of their native language and the target language in terms of grammar, spelling and vocabulary. At the same time, writing teaching process can be supported by including authentic materials such as newspapers, magazines, websites, videos, audios etc. and effective feedback strategies, different teaching techniques methods and activities that raise students' motivation and awareness could be taken into consideration to prevent the frequently made errors.

Finally, there is not any comparative analysis study for writing errors in the literature so similar studies can be done in order to see the differences and similarities between the errors made by students whose mother tongue and cultural backgrounds are different. In addition, the same research can be conducted on different competency levels to identify the most resistant errors or to see the difference between the number and types of frequently made errors over different proficiency levels.

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