Lexical Errors and Linguistic Calques as Lexical Transfer in EFL Writing: A Case Study

Yabancı Dil Olarak İngilizcenin Öğreniminde Sözcüksel Aktarım Olarak Sözcüksel Hatalar ve Dilsel Öyküntüler: Durum Çalışması

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Abstract

The issue of lexical transfer has always been the topic of interest in the studies of Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Thus far, studies have adopted various taxonomies of lexical errors such as formal, semantic, conceptual etc. In this study, Carrió-Pastor's categorization which is based on James' (1998) classification was used. This includes a) formal errors, b) wrong word formation, c) lexical distortions, d) incorrect use of hyponyms, e) collocation errors and f) wrong lexical choice. The subjects of the present study are 45 Turkish learners of English studying at the faculty of education. Seven of the subjects were male (15%) and 38 were female (84%). The data was collected from 297 authentic papers which were submitted for the course Advanced Reading and Writing I. The data collection period lasted for 14 weeks and the data set was comprised of compare-and-contrast, descriptive, explanatory, advantage-disadvantage, balanced-opinion, process, problem-solution and cause-and-effect essays. The papers were analyzed by the author to determine the category of lexical errors. The results show that calques are the most common type of errors the participants made.

Keywords: Lexical error, transfer, calque, writing, second language acquisition.

Öz

Sözcüksel aktarım konusu ikinci Dil Edinimi çalışmalarında her zaman ilgi odağı olmuştur. Şu ana kadar yapılan çalışmalar sözcüksel hata ile ilgili biçimsel, anlambilimsel, kavramsal, vb. çeşitli sınıflandırmalar benimsemişlerdir. Bu çalışmada Carrió-Pastor'ün (2004) James'in (2004) çalışmasını temel aldığı sınıflandırması kullanılmıştır. Bu sınıflandırma a) biçimsel hatalar, b) hatalı sözcük oluşturma, c) sözcüksel bozulma, d) alt anlamlıların yanlış kullanımı, e) eşdizimsel hataları ve f) hatalı sözcük seçimini içerir. Çalışmanın katılımcıları eğitim fakültesinde öğrenim görmekte olan 45 İngilizce öğrenen Türkçe anadil konuşucusundan oluşmaktadır. Katılımcılardan 7'si (%15) erkek, 38'i (%84) kadındır. Veriler İleri Okuma Yazma I dersi için yazılan 297 özgün kompozisyondan toplanmıştır. Veri toplama süreci 14 hafta sürmüştür ve veri seti kıyaslama-ve-karşılaştırma, betimsel, açıklayıcı, fayda-zarar, dengeli-düşünce, süreç, sorun-çözüm ve neden-sonuç kompozisyonlarından oluşmaktadır. Sözcüksel hataların kategorisini belirlemek için kompozisyonlar yazar tarafından analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, katılımcıların en fazla öyküntülerde hata yaptıklarını göstermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Sözcüksel hata, aktarım, öyküntü, yazma, ikinci dil edinimi.

1. Introduction

Lexical error has been an object of research in second language acquisition studies. The increase in lexicon studies has been observed with the assumption that there is not a crystal-clear distinction between the grammatical rules and the lexicon of a language. Moreover, as the lexis has been of interest for both micro- and macro fields of linguistics, it is essential for understanding underlying language mechanisms.

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Agustin-Llach (2011:73) defines lexical error as the "deviation in form and/ or meaning of target language lexical word". As of the 1980s, as a result of the influence of cognitivism, the concepts of lexical error started to be defined as lexical transfer. It has described lexical transfer as "an active cognitive process which the learner consciously and selectively uses in order to overcome learning or communication problems in the L2" (Meriläinen, 2010:12). The relevant studies explored the relationship between L1 and L2 in detail. Data from these studies suggest that "L1 directly and indirectly influences L2 acquisition. Indirect influence, in turn, reflects underlying organization principles of the language and the learner's metalinguistic awareness of that knowledge" (Isurin, 2005:1116).

The studies on lexical errors thus far adopted certain taxonomies. Agustin-Llach (2011:89) asserts that criteria used for the lexical analysis can be categorized into a) form vs. content oriented, b) descriptive, c) etiologic, d) origin of influence, e) linguistic, f) word-class, g) product oriented and h) process oriented research. The first of these categories comprises of form vs. content oriented studies. According to Agustin-Llach (2011:8), "a new lexical item is incorporated into the L2 lexicon by establishing relations of various kinds to already existent words". These relations are explained by the associative networks which are established between the existed knowledge in other words L1, and already recognized knowledge which is L1 in this context. The examples of the lexical errors investigated in the form vs. content category are a) formal errors which derive from the confusion of two similar words, b) wrong word formation, c) lexical distortions, d) use of base words instead of superonym, e) collocational errors and f) wrong lexical choice because of semantic relatedness (Hemchua and Schmitt, 2006; Carrió Pastor, 2004; James, 1998; Zimmermann, 1987). The descriptive criteria investigate the surface forms. The account mainly focuses on the causes of errors. Approximations, hybrids or blends, field errors, sense relation errors, stylistic errors and connotative errors are the common topics of research (Djokic, 1999; Hyltenstam, 1988; Zimmermann, 1986a). Etiologic or psycholinguistic criterion, on the contrary, emphasizes the causes of the lexical errors. The mental processes which result in lexical errors are examined on the basis of psycholinguistic accounts such as overgeneralization. Wrong choice of individual words and combinations, spelling and derivational errors, semantic infelicity, transfer, borrowing, wrong derivation and conceptual confusions are the types of errors (Zimmermann,1986b; Warren, 1982; Duskova,1969).

The other criteria of investigation are based on the origin of influence. James (1998:188-190) asserts that errors are grouped into "mother tongue influence (interlingual or interference errors), target language difficulty (intralingual or developmental errors) and teaching-induced errors". To exemplify, transfer and borrowings are called L1 derived errors and overgeneralization and confusion errors are thought as L2 derived errors (Agustin-Llach, 2011:89). Linguistic or grammatical criteria mainly investigate the level (morphology, syntax, etc.) where lexical error occurs. Stylistic, syntactic, semantic, system idiosyncratic and order errors are explored according to this perspective. Similar to the previously introduced linguistic criteria, the errors are grouped into grammatical classes. Being one of the researchers adopting the criteria, Lennon (1991) classifies errors into the categories of noun, verb, adjective and adverb. There are also product- and process-oriented foci in lexical error studies. Product-oriented studies generally take the lexical errors as an end-result; consequently, the mental processes that cause the production of errors are ignored (Engber, 1995; Hyltenstam, 1988; Lennon, 1991; Zimmermann, 1986a). On the other hand, process-oriented criteria mostly investigate the mental processes such as overgeneralization and transfer. The causes and sources of lexical transfer are examined thoroughly (Lennon,1996; Ringbom, 1983; Warren, 1982).

Being one of the categories under wrong word formation group, which is proposed by Carrió Pastor (2004), linguistic calques will be investigated in the current research. In the field of second language acquisition, various definitions of linguistic calques are found. According to Sewell (2001: 608), linguistic calques are 'the very close, but not necessarily word-for-word, translation into a target language (TL) using TL forms, of forms in a source language'. On the other hand, it is also argued that not only the words, but also the semantic properties are transferred in the occurrence of linguistic calques. Being one of the approaches to linguistic calque, Ringbom (2001:65) defines it as "the transfer of semantic patterns of the L1 into target language words". In the samples given below, linguistic calques are shown.

1) I want to pass a very good time with you

(Agustin-Llach, 2011:150)

2) My uncle never married: he remained a youngman all his life

(Ringbom, 2001:65)

3) My table study is blue and big

(Agustin-Llach, 2011:124)

4) The doctor inspect me and said me I must be operations

(Altunkaya, 1999:42)

As can be seen in sentence (1), the learner has transferred the Spanish verb *pasar* and used it as the English verb *to pass*. The error arouses from the incorrect use of t*o pass time with somebody* instead of *to spend time with somebody*.

Similarly, in sentence (2) the learner used the *youngman* to refer the *ungkarl*, which means *bachelor* in Swedish. In sentence (3) the *table study* is directly translated from Spanish *mesa de studio*, which means *desk* in English. The direct translation from L1 has been observed in linguistic calques in these sentences. In similar vein, *to be operation* in sentence (4) is the linguistic calque of *to undergo an operation or surgery* and translated incorrectly from Turkish.

The underlying cause of linguistic calques, according to Ringbom (2001:64), is "the awareness of existing TL units but not of relevant semantic/collocational restrictions". Agustin-Llach (2011) conducted a study to examine the lexical error production at two different measuring times. A total of 283 L2 Spanish learners of L2 English participated in the study in which data was collected with a two-year-interval. The results showed that linguistic calques increase as proficiency increases. Agustin-Llach (2011:151) claims that "T1 is too low to allow them to resort to calques (also coinages) because these imply transfer of semantic features, semantic extension and overgeneralization". In the study it is also suggested that there is a positive correlation between the production of calques and receptive word knowledge. According to Agustin-Llach (2011), the number of calques will increase as the number of words that a speaker learns, respectively.

When the studies on L1 Turkish speakers are taken into consideration, it is seen that the existing literature on lexical errors is extensive and focuses on semantic/pragmatic errors (Şahin, 1993), interlingual errors (Kırkgöz, 2010; Kirmizi, 2017), preposition errors (Özışık, 2014; Atmaca, 2016), verb errors (Can,2017; Tokdemir Demirel, 2017), pronunciation errors (Demirezen, 2008; Geylanioğlu & Dikilitaş, 2012), grammatical errors (Yüksel, 2007; Köroğlu, 2014) and developmental errors (Özcan, 2012). It is clear that the literature on L1 Turkish EFL leaners has adopted various taxonomies and most of them have not discussed the linguistic calques in detail.

Thus far, the taxonomies of lexical errors and the studies on Turkish EFL learners have been introduced and the linguistic calques have been exemplified. The next chapter describes the procedures and methods used in this investigation.

2. The Present Study

2.1. Aim

The objective of this study was to investigate in which categories the participants make lexical errors most and the role of linguistic calques in these categories. The research questions of the current study are:
- Is there any pattern in the production of lexical errors? Do the participants make more lexical errors in certain categories?
- What are the rates of linguistic calques when compared to other categories of lexical errors?

2.2. Data Collection

The current study is based on student compositions written for the first year course of *Advanced Reading and Writing I*. The data collection period lasted for 14 weeks. The students were informed about the type of essay each week and then introduced the topic of the essay for the following week. The types of the essays that the students were required to write were compare-and-contrast essay, descriptive essay, explanatory essay, advantage-disadvantage essay, balanced-opinion essay, process essay, problem-solution essay and cause-and-effect essay. When it was required, short interviews with the participants were held after the submission of the essays in order to clarify the intended meaning or uses.

2.3. The Participants

The participants of the study were 45 L1 Turkish speakers of L2 English. All of the participants were aged between 18 and 25. Of the 45 participants, 38 were female and 7 were male. The English proficiency level of the participants is upper-intermediate. Nine of the participants were directly enrolled to the department while 36 participants studied at preparatory school one year or half semester. The participants took part in the research voluntarily and it was free from coercion.

2.4. Data Analysis

As the form vs. content oriented focus was adopted for the current research, the lexical errors were categorized according to a) formal errors (confusion of two similar words), b) wrong word formation, c) lexical distortions, d) use of base words (instead of superonym), e) collocational errors and f) wrong lexical choice (semantic relatedness). In order to detect lexical errors, 297 papers with minimum length of 300 words were analyzed by the researcher.

According to the analysis, 61 lexical errors have been found. Other types of errors (spelling, punctuation, etc.) were ignored and retained in the sample sentences.

3. Results

Being one of the form vs. content oriented criteria, Carrió Pastor's (2004) categorization of lexical errors was adopted for analysis. In the criteria, wrong word formation and lexical distortions are grouped into more precise categories. The wrong word formation category includes word invention, borrowing from the L1, relexification or adaptation of an L1 word into the grammatical conventions and linguistic calque. On the other hand, lexical distortions are exemplified as omission, addition, wrong ordering and wrong choice of two similar words.

Turning now to the experimental evidence on lexical transfer, it is seen that lexical errors of the participants vary according to the type of the error. The first of these categories includes the formal errors as confusion of two words. Table 1 presents the results obtained from EFL compositions of the participants.

Table 1
The formal errors as confusion of two words

	n	%
The formal errors as confusion of two words	7	11,4

As can be seen above, the number of lexical error resulting from the confusion of two words is 7 (11,4%). The sentences 1 and 2 exemplify the confusion of two semantically different words. The participants intended to mean *bilingual* instead of *bilabial* in 1 and *lose* instead of *loose* in 2.

 1) Being *bilabial* is a difficult thing.
 2) They would have *loose* one year.

The next category investigated the wrong word formation as a result of word invention, borrowing from L1, relexification or adaptation of an L1 word into the grammatical conventions and linguistic calque. The distribution of errors is given in Table 2.

Table 2
Wrong word formation errors

Wrong word formation	**n**	**%**
Word invention	6	9,8
Borrowing from L1	0	0
Relexification or adaptation of an L1 word into the grammatical conventions of the L2	3	4,9
Linguistic calque	17	27,8

It can be seen from the data in Table 2 that the number of errors arising from word invention is 6 (9,8%). The sentences 3 and 4 show that the participants have made up words that are unavailable in English such as *researchment* and *communical*, respectively. On the other hand, the examples of borrowing from Turkish have not been found in this study.

 3) A *researchment* shows that online education is more popular in the schools.
 4) For example, if student use *communical* programme, they join friends with group.

The third type of error, which is relexification or adaptation, has been identified in 3 sentences (4,9%). The sentence in 5 exemplifies the adaptation of a Turkish word into the grammatical conventions of the English. Being borrowed from English, the word *materyal* is used with the English plural suffix *–s* to express the plurality. The second example of this category, the sentence 6, differs from the first one on the basis of the meaning it denotes. The word *kours* is originally *kurs* and *course* in Turkish and English, respectively. The participant used *kours* to refer the private tutoring schools, while course is a series of lessons on a certain subject in English. It is seen that the participant adapted the word *kurs* in to the orthographic conventions of Turkish.

 5) While teaching, technology provides many documents and *materyals.*
 6) They must go to school and they go to *kours.*

Linguistic calques, as mentioned previously, are the literal translations from L1 to L2. The sentences given below exemplify the errors that result from the semantic restrictions in target language. As illustrated in sentence 7 the

participant intended to express *we may be worried* while writing *we can be stress*. The expression *being stress* in not available in English, however, the participant has translated it directly from L1 *stress olmak*. Similarly, the word *substructure* in sentence 8 is used to refer *altyapı (background)* in English. Another example for linguistic calques, the collocation "quantitative courses" is meant in sentence 9 using *numerical courses* for *sayısal dersler*. In the last sentence the lexical choice of the participant is not correct. S/he refers to the phrase *friend at court*; however used *torpedo* which means a type of military submarine.

7) Because we don't decide what we wear and *we can be stress* and sad because of this

8) The students began to learn too late in english so they understand difficulty at universities as they don't have *substructure*.

9) In turkey, this things runs like that just because the *numerical lessons* much more important than the conservatory classes or foreign language teaching.

10) Despite this, if you deserve to studying conservatory, in the future, you may come across the *torpedo*.

Lexical errors arising from lexical distortions are observed as omission, additions, wrong ordering and wrong choice of words. The errors with omission constituted the 13,1% of the errors with 8 tokens in the essays. The second type errors are addition errors where extra morphemes or letters are added to words to bear out ungrammaticality. The number of identified errors for this category is 3 (4,9%). The wrong ordering of letters in a word can be exemplified in two sentences (3,2%) in the essays. Finally, the errors of wrong lexical choice have not been identified in the current study.

Table 3
Lexical distortion errors

Lexical Distortions	n	%
Omission	8	13,1
Additions	3	4,9
Wrong ordering of letters within the words	2	3,2
Wrong choice of two similar words	0	0

Lexical distortions can be illustrated in the sentences given below. In sentence 11 the participant persistently omits the *s* in *status*. The persistent omission may evidence the transfer from L1 word *statü*. Similarly, the spelling of the *method* is distorted in sentence 12. On the contrary to the previous samples, the doubling of *l* in *easily* in sentence 13 demonstrates the other type of lexical distortion. It is seen that wrong ordering of letters is common for certain words. The errors of this category is arouse from the incorrect spelling of *psychology* as in sentence 14.

11) For instance; the students of bad *statu* can go to private school but students of bad *statu* don't go private school and both of them enter the same exam.

12) This is a effective *methot* in education

13) Police can find student with their smartphone's signal *easilly*.

14) If another candidate want to be a lawyer, *pyscological* councelor, he must join math and literature-geography exams

According to the findings of this study, there are not any samples of use of hyponyms instead of superonym. However, the results in Table 4 indicate the participants made collocational errors. Five errors, which constitutes 8,1% of the total errors, are identified in the essay. Regarding the wrong lexical choice because of lexical relatedness, it is seen that 6 errors (9,8%) were made in this category.

Table 4
Hyponym, collocation and wrong lexical choice errors

	n	%
Use of the hyponyms instead of superonym	0	0
Collocational errors	5	8,1
Wrong lexical choice because of lexical relatedness	6	9,8

As shown in sentence 15, *session* is used with verb *to happen*. However, it is *to hold* as a collocation. Similarly, the collocation *to do an exam* is mistakenly used as *to make an exam* in sentence 16.

15) The sessions *happen* in different days and different hours so it doesnt overlap with the others.

16) The Higher Education Examination is *made* on March.

Overall, these results suggest that participant's lexical errors vary according to the type. Among others, linguistic calques are statistically the most common errors.

4. Discussion and Conclusion

The results of the current study showed that apart from the linguistic calques, no evidence was found for the dominance of a certain type of lexical errors. It is seen that as for formal errors, omission is the most common type of lexical error (13,1%). Other types of frequent errors are formal errors as confusion of two words (11,4%), word invention and wrong lexical choice because of lexical relatedness (9,8%) as discussed in the previous section.

As mentioned before, the existing literature on lexical errors is extensive and focuses particularly on the relationship between the proficiency level of the learners and the lexical errors. Duskova (1969) and Henning (1973) found that the type of lexical errors learners made changed on the basis their proficiency level in second language. The results show that form-based lexical errors are made by lower level of proficiency levels while higher proficiency level learners make more meaning-based errors. Bardovi-Harlig and Bofman (1989) found that there was a decrease in the lexical errors of high proficiency level learners' writings. Another line of research suggests that as the proficiency in L2 increase the number of certain types of errors tend to increase dramatically. According to the findings of Martin (1984), the errors of synonyms, style, syntax, collocation and semantics were mostly made by the advanced level learners. These results therefore need to be interpreted with caution. Taylor's (1986) explains that the errors of synonyms made by the students of the high level of proficiency are a kind of writing strategy to avoid making errors.

Turning back to linguistic calques, they are the most frequent type of errors that the participants of this study made. According to Nemser (1998:116), who investigates lexical development in three stages, calques are 'the implied results of receptive strategies of the first developmental stage in which L2 words are assimilated to L1 analogues'. Nemser's (1998) categorization shows the gradual development starting from the direct uses of L1 words in L2 to using contextual clues and general linguistic knowledge. As can be clearly seen from the account, linguistic calques tend to occur as a developmental stage in L2. Thus, it is more likely to be produced in the following stages. The influence of L1 Finnish is observable in the further stages of L2 English as in the sentence 17.

17) Horses are the most dignified *home animals*.

(Ringbom,1985:83)

The results of the present study indicate that the source of two types of lexical errors, which are linguistic calques and relexification or adaptation of an L1 word into the grammatical conventions of the L2, is the transfer from the first language. The rest of the lexical type errors are not L1 based. At this point Ringbom (2007a) makes a distinction between *system transfer* and *item transfer*. The *system transfer* takes place, according to Ringbom (2007a) when the learner assumes functional and semantic similarities between L1 and L2, although there are not any linguistically. Ringbom (2007a:56) emphasizes that the assumed similarities to be transferred "[…] must be well internalized, preferably automatized […]" and L2 proficiency play role in system transfer. Ringbom (2007b:187) exemplifies it as the transfer of "assigning different functions to different forms of a word, as in *be, am, are, is, was, were, been*" and "rules for forming compound words, word order rules". On the other hand, *item transfer* takes place when there is a formal similarity in spelling, pronunciation and the morphology of the words of L1 and L2. The transfer of sound, letter, morpheme, word, phrase, syntactic unit are considered to be the examples of *item transfer* (Ringbom, 2007b:187) Moreover, Ringbom (2006) asserts that semantic extensions and calques in the forms of hybrids and blends are also considered as *item transfer*.

The findings suggest that linguistic calques are the most common type of lexical errors. When the relationship between proficiency level and the use of linguistic calques is taken into consideration, it is seen that it is possible to observe the use of calques in the writing of upper proficiency levels. When compared to other type of lexical errors, linguistic calques are more permanent. This study was limited by the small size of sample. Further research with a larger sample could produce interesting findings that account more for the learner tendencies of lexical errors and linguistic calques.

The findings of this study have a number of practical implications. It is seen that lexical errors are generally underestimated (Agustín-Llach, 2011) or overestimated (Kivela, 2008) by the teachers. While grammatical mistakes are remedied by certain activities such as drills and revision of grammatical rules, lexical errors do not specifically attract attention in classroom environment. A lexical-error-based syllabus and immediate explanations upon the production of a lexical error have been recommended (Agustín-Llach, 2011). Using corpora as a reference resource is another way to reduce and correct lexical errors (Luo & Liao, 2015). Additionally, giving feedback such as recast and repetition are the strategies frequently used in classroom (Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Nevertheless, the best strategy to be employed depends on the dynamics of learning environment.

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