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Analysis of the most common errors in written assignments of secondary school students whose L1 is B/C/S

Analiza najčešćih grešaka u pismenim sastavima učenika srednje škole kojima je maternji jezik BHS

Master's thesis

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Abstract

The main goal of this paper was to determine types and sources of errors that are most often found in written assignments of EFL secondary school students whose L1 is BCS. The corpus of the paper consists of 36 written assignments produced by 36 seniors of the Grammar School ''Ivan Goran Kovačić'' Kiseljak. Special attention during analysis was paid to errors that emerge due to negative transfer of the BCS (hereinafter: the Croatian language). The analysis was focused mainly on morphological and syntactic levels, but it also includes vocabulary and collocations analysis.

The analysis findings have revealed that most of the errors are caused by the negative L1 transfer as well as that the most common errors detected in the written assignments are interference errors.

Key words: second language acquisition, negative transfer (interference), error, mistake

Apstrakt

Glavni cilj ovog rada je bio utvrditi vrste i uzroke grešaka koje se najčešće pojavljuju u pismenim sastavima učenika srednje škole koji uče engleski kao strani, a kojima je maternji jezik B/H/S. Korpus uključuje 36 pismenih sastava maturanata srednje škole – gimnazije "Ivan Goran Kovačić" iz Kiseljaka. Prilikom analize posebna pažnja se obratila na greške koje su posljedica negativnog transfera iz maternjeg jezika. Analiza se bazira na morfološkom i sintaktičkom nivou, ali uključuje i analizu leksike i kolokacija.

Rezultati analize su pokazali da je većina grešaka proizašla iz negativnog transfera maternjeg jezika kao i da je to najčešći izvor grešaka u pisanju.

Ključne riječi: učenje stranog jezika, negativni transfer, materijalna greška, slučajna greška

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1. Introduction

As well known, fields of interest in second language acquisition have been constantly changing during history. In the 1960s, the focus of many researchers was shifted from the teaching process to the learning process (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). Scholars also became more interested in learning foreign languages, therefore the need to discover more about second language acquisition also increased. The research emphasis in modern times is focused on language teaching. In other words, it is supposed that if teaching methods were made more efficient, the process of learning would accordingly be more effective (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014). There are many different definitions about what language acquisition is today. Ellis (2003) defines second language acquisition as ''the study of the ways in which people learn a language other than their mother tongue, inside or outside of the classroom''. (p. 3)

The process of learning a second language inevitably includes making errors and mistakes. They are often considered to be the same, but it is important to clarify that errors occur because of lack of knowledge while mistakes show lapses in performance (Ellis, 2003). Learners are aware of mistakes and are capable of correcting them on their own, but they are not aware of errors until someone shows them (Ellis, 2003). Source of errors is lack of knowledge while mistakes are happening because of poor performance of the learned knowledge. Learners are also aware of their mistakes and are usually capable of correcting them on their own, while they are not aware of errors until someone else points them out (Ellis, 2003). In order to distinguish between errors and mistakes, it is necessary to check the consistency of learners' performance over a longer period of time, but the clear distinction is never possible (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

The research in the field of second language acquisition shows the importance of understanding learners' errors (Krashen, 1982; James, 2013). James makes language errors a subject of his book defining error ''as an unsuccessful bit of language'' (2003, p. 1). One of the most important conclusions of the SLA research is that errors and mistakes are not necessarily negative phenomena. Mistakes and errors are inevitable parts of learning process. However, analysing learners' errors is very important for teachers and researchers since it helps them determine ways for further instructions (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

1.1. Statement of the problem

During the process of second language acquisition, the learners acquire four different skills which are listening, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is an integral part of learning English, but teaching writing in as ESL classroom is not a simple task, and there was not much interest for teaching writing in the first fields of teaching (Reid, 1993). Only in the 1960s, the researchers were discussing the ways for the development of writing skills (Reid, 1993). When the social changes in the late 1970s brought to universities of English-speaking areas the students whose L1 was not English, the researchers found them worthy of respect and started studying their errors in order to help them (Reid, 1993). There are several authors discussing different ways of teaching writing to the learners whose L1 is not English (Hyland, 2003; Reid, 1993) as well as many studies analysing the written assignments and trying to discover better ways for teaching writing (Darus, 2015; Abeywickrama, 2010; Romero & Manjarres, 2017). Writing English presents greater difficulty for non-native English speakers since they involve their L1 when producing English. They tend to directly translate from their L1 to English (Lo & Hyland, 2007). These errors should serve as indicators; they show which aspects of English the students are struggling with in their writing (Lo & Hyland, 2007).

Researchers use written assignments very often in order to determine and describe most common errors and mistakes that learners make in writing. Errors come from different sources, and negative transfer is seen as one of major causes of errors (Prvulović, 2014; Phuket & Othman, 2015).

This topic was subject of many studies considering learners with different native languages (Darus, 2015; Abeywickrama, 2010; Romero & Manjarres, 2017), but according to literature research conducted by the author of the paper there are not many studies investigating error analysis among EFL learners whose mother tongue is Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S). In order to identify the sources of the most common errors those learners make when writing in English, this study will try to determine what errors are the most frequent. The following sections provide the short description of this study.

1.2. Goal of the study

The goal of this study is to determine and analyse the most common errors that EFL secondary school students whose L1 is Croatian make when writing in English. This analysis aims to systematise the conclusions which can improve the teaching of EFL students.

1.3. Research questions

For the purpose of this research study, the following research questions have been defined:

RQ1: What are the main reasons that cause errors and mistakes in English written assignments of EFL secondary school students whose L1 is Croatian?

RQ2: What are the most common types of errors in English written assignments of EFL secondary school students whose L1 is Croatian?

1.4. Hypotheses

In accordance with the research questions that have been listed above, the following hypotheses have been defined for the purpose of this study.

H1: The main reason that causes errors and mistakes in English written assignments of EFL secondary school students whose native language is Croatian is L1 negative transfer.

H2: The most common types of errors that EFL students make in their English written assignments are interference errors.

1.5. Significance of the study

This study is expected to contribute to the existing body of research in the field of analyzing EFL learners' errors in English writing assignments in terms of better understanding the most common errors and their sources. Furthermore, the study is expected to provide sufficient data and reliable results which can be used for the purpose of proposing strategies that can be used for teaching writing and reducing errors in written assignments of secondary school students in higher grades.

1.6. Study overview

This paper is organized as follows. After Introduction, Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of theoretical background relevant to the topic of this study. Research methodology describes in detail every step of the research, including design, methods and other procedures that lead to the completion of the study. That chapter is followed by results and the discussion of the

results. At the end, a brief summary of main conclusions is given, including a short discussion on the limitations of the study and recommendations for future research.

1.7. Definition of key terms

For the purpose of this study the following key terms will be used in accordance with the definitions provided:

Second language acquisition (also *SLA*) – the process of acquiring a second or foreign language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 514).

Negative transfer (also *interference*) – the use of a native-language pattern or rule which leads to an error or inappropriate form in the target language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 322-323).

Error – the use of a linguistic item in a way which a fluent or native speaker of a language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning. Error results from incomplete knowledge (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201).

Mistake – caused by lack of attention, fatigue, carelessness, or some other aspect of performance (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201).

Interlanguage – the type of language produced by second- and foreign-language learners who are in process of learning a language (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 293).

2. Literature review

This chapter provides an overview of relevant literature on the field of second language acquisition focusing mainly on different types of errors and ways of analyzing the errors. In the first part of the chapter, main approaches to errors will be discussed as well as most common sources of errors. After that, negative influences of L1 transfer will be discussed as well as the system known as interlanguage.

2.1. Importance of learners' errors

Process of the second language acquisition is inevitably connected with making errors and mistakes (Ellis, 2003). Only when the researchers and teachers recognized the importance of the errors learners had made, they realized how helpful of an input those errors have been for them. Today, most teachers are aware that errors and mistakes are not negative phenomena, but an inevitable part of the second language acquisition process (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

2.2. Contrastive analysis

Contrastive analysis was developed during 1950s and 1960s (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). It was founded on the assumption that learners of a foreign language tend to transfer the features of their native language in the process of second language acquisition (Shaghi, 2013). Robert Lado (1957) started more serious studies of contrastive analysis by publishing his book *Linguistics across Cultures* in 1957. He claimed that learners will focus on elements that are similar to their native language and those elements will be simple for them, while those elements that are different will be difficult. Besides transferring forms, the learners are also transferring the elements of their culture to the foreign language they are learning (Lado, 1957). Contrastive analysis is the approach based on the theoretical assumptions of behaviourism – L2 acquisition is disturbed by the habits of learner's native language (Shaghi, 2013). Considering the fact, it was reasonable to focus on the differences between the native language of the learner and the target language in order to make the acquisition process as simple and efficient as possible.

The main assumptions of contrastive analysis were:

a) ''the main difficulties in learning a new language are caused by interference from the first language

b) these difficulties can be predicted by contrastive analysis

c) teaching materials can make use of contrastive analysis to reduce the effects of interference'' (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 130).

Contrastive analysis involved describing comparable features of learner's first language and the one the learner was learning, target language (James, 2013).

This approach was declined after the error analysis became more popular during 1970s since it was considered that it is not showing much improvement in the second language instruction or acquisition and the focus of attention of researches switched to error analysis and interlanguage (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). James (2013) names several reasons for discrediting contrastive analysis as an approach to learners' errors. Many of the difficulties predicted by contrastive analysis turned out to be uninformative or inaccurate, meaning that there were errors predicted that did not materialize in interlanguage and also that errors did show up where the contrastive analysis had not predicted them (James, 2013). Besides practical issues, Gast (2013) points out that ''one central point of criticism was that contrastive linguistics at that stage overemphasized the role of interference as a source of errors and was too undifferentiated with respect to various parameters of language acquisition such as the question of age, the difference between mediated and natural acquisition, between the acquisition of a second or third language, etc.'' (p. 2).

2.2.1. CAH (Contrastive analysis hypothesis)

Although the early aspirations of contrastive analysis were too ambitious, Gast (2013) argues that the 'modest' form of contrastive linguistics constitutes an important element to the research of the second language acquisition. Interference is not the only reason for learning difficulties, but the importance of the interference phenomena is best provided on the basis of contrastive analyses (Gast, 2013).

The contrastive analysis hypothesis has two versions: weak and strong (Wardhaugh, 1970). Wardhaugh (1970) argues that the strong version is unrealistic and impracticable, and it presents the idea that ''it is possible to contrast the system of one language – the grammar, phonology and lexicon – with the system of a second language in order to predict those difficulties which a speaker of the second language will have in learning the first language and to construct teaching materials to help him learn that language'' (Wardhaugh, 1970, p. 4). It is clear that linguists are not in a position to meet all the demands that this version of CAH

makes, and that is an available set of linguistic universals that deals with syntax, semantics and phonology (Wardhaugh, 1970). CAH has had problems especially in comparing phonemic systems of two languages since some languages are lacking certain phonemes. Since the linguists started having problems with the strong version of CAH, they started using the weak version of CAH (Wardhaugh, 1970). Unlike strong version, the weak version of CAH does not require the linguists to predict the difficulties nor the language points that will not create any difficulties. It uses the evidence such as faulty translations, learning difficulties or residual foreign accents in order to explain similarities and differences between the systems (Wardhaugh, 1970).

Although the contrastive analysis has gone through criticism, its importance cannot be denied (Gast, 2013). Gast (2013) claims that contrastive linguistics can be helpful not only to linguists but also to advanced learners, who can profit from comparing their native language with the one they are learning.

2.3. Error analysis

Theoretical approach to the error analysis appears during 1960s as an alternative to contrastive analysis (James, 2013). Unlike the contrastive analysis, this approach focuses on target language and the *interlanguage* (learner's version of the target language) without mentioning the learner's native language. The proponents of error analysis claimed that it was possible to fully describe learners' errors in terms of the target language (James, 2013). The primary goal of error analysis was to determine types, sources and other important factors that influence emergence of errors in the process of not only second or foreign language acquisition but also the acquisition of native language (Ellis, 2003). By following the development of certain learners over some time we can learn a lot about the way they developed their language skills and if they have made any progress (Ellis, 2003).

According to Ellis (2003), error analysis includes several phases. The first step is to identify errors. First of all, there is the need to distinguish errors from mistakes, which is another reason to follow learners' progress over time. The teacher who knows well their students will decide more easily whether they have made an error or a mistake, although a clear distinction is never possible. It is also difficult to identify errors if we are not sure about what the learner wanted to say; learners often use forms that are not preferred in target-language but are not completely ungrammatical (Ellis, 2003). Second step according to Ellis is to describe errors. He proposes that all errors should be described and classified into

grammatical categories. Ellis (2003) claims that ''classifying errors in these ways can help us to diagnose learners' learning problems at any one stage of their development and, also, to plot how changes in error patterns occur over time'' (p. 18).

Gast (2013) points out that contrastive analysis and error analysis are often seen as being complementary. There are certain differences between the native language of a learner and the target language that cannot be directly observable, therefore the identification of learning difficulties cannot rely only on error analysis (Gast, 2013).

2.4. Sources of errors

Researchers have different ways of distinguishing between types of errors. They usually make difference between performance and competence errors (Touchie, 1986) where performance errors describe the errors that learners make when they are tired or hurried and competence errors are more serious. Competence errors are sign of inadequate learning. They are also distinguished as *errors* (competence) and *mistakes* (performance). Touchie (1986) also mentions other researchers who have tried to identify the major sources of errors in second language learning. As the major sources, the researchers mention errors caused by the native language of learners, also known as *interference* or *negative transfer* (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). During the forties and the fifties, the view that the native language plays the mostly negative role in SLA was emphasized by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957). Later, the researchers have tried to focus on the difficulties caused by the second language itself (Jordens, 1977; Kellerman, 1979) but the interference continued to be acknowledged as an important factor in SLA. In order to systematize and organize the errors learners make when learning second language, Selinker (as cited in Richards, 1994) introduces the term *interlanguage* that is used to describe the speech output in a learner's second language.

2.4.1. Intralingual errors

According to the Richards & Schmidt ''an intralingual error is one which results from faulty or partial learning of the target language rather than from language transfer. Intralingual errors may be caused by the influence of one target language item upon another'' (2010, p. 294). Intralingual errors are classified as *overgeneralizations* (errors caused by extension of target language rules to inappropriate contexts), *simplifications* (errors resulting from learners producing simpler linguistic rules than those found in the target language), *developmental errors* (those reflecting natural stages of development), *communication-based errors* (errors

resulting from strategies of communication), *induced errors* (those resulting from transfer of training), *errors of avoidance* (resulting from failure to use certain target language structures because they were thought to be too difficult), or *errors of overproduction* (structures being used too frequently). (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, pp. 201-202)

Figure 1

A diagram showing the classification of intralingual errors. Adapted from ''Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics'' by Jack C. Richards and Richard Schmidt, 2010.
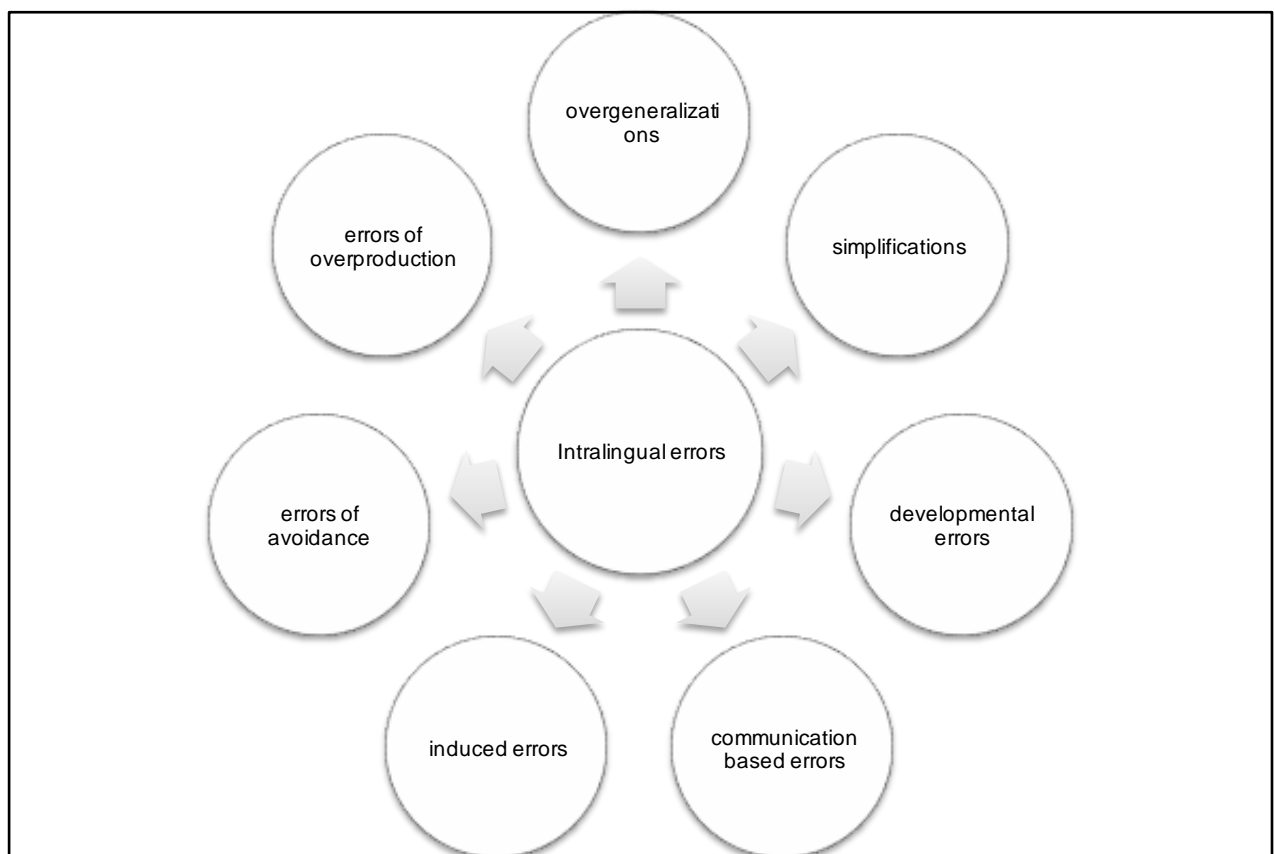
2.4.2. Interlingual errors

Interlingual errors are defined as those emerging from language transfer, meaning that learner's native language is the cause for making these errors (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Sometimes the interlingual errors are referred to as interference or transfer errors (Touchie, 1986). Researchers as Richards (1971) have recognized the importance of first language interference in error analysis. It is already mentioned that before error analysis approach, interference errors were considered to be the main source of errors in learner's language. They

still cause many problems for those acquiring second and foreign languages. By describing errors it is possible to understand them better and to work on their decrease. Krashen (1982) gives results of several studies and emphasizes three situations when L1 interference causes errors. His first result shows that first language influence is the strongest when it comes to complex word orders and word-for-word translations of phrases (Krashen, 1982). This seems to happen very often, even with different first languages. Second conclusion shows that when it comes to morphology, most errors are not caused by L1 interference. He also argues that inflectional morphology is generally not transferable in second language performance (Krashen, 1982) Final conclusions show that the influence of L1 is stronger in environments where there is less target language input and communication in general. That was especially the case with children, when they were getting input only from the teacher and not from their peers (Krashen, 1982).

2.5. L1 transfer

The terms *first language, native language* and *L1* are used synonymously. Those are the terms which specify the language which is acquired by a person in early childhood because it is spoken by other family members and most often by other people living nearby (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Learning of first language is a long process, although it goes naturally so people usually do not see anything unusual about it (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). First language also largely influences the acquisition of a second or foreign language. There are many ways in which L1 influences the acquisition of L2 (Ellis, 2003). Learner's native language is very often seen as a source of errors, but its influence can also be positive. The transfer is considered positive if learner's L1 facilitates learning of certain L2 structures. This usually happens if there are similarities in language constructions between those two linguistic systems (Ellis, 2003).

2.5.1. Negative transfer

Although the L1 often helps in acquiring certain second language structures, there are much more examples of negative transfer (interference) and different ways in which L1 negatively influences second language acquisition (Ellis, 2003). In his research, Richards (1971) finds several examples of errors caused by interference in his learners whose native languages were Czech and French. He has found the instances of interference at the levels of pronunciation, morphology, syntax, vocabulary and meaning (Richards, 1971). There are many different reasons why certain learners transfer features of their native language on the

foreign language they are learning. It depends on the age, level of proficiency of the learners as well as other factors (Ellis, 2003). L1 transfer results in avoidance or overuse of some forms, but the role of consciousness is also important to consider. Learners often have the ″feeling″ that they can transfer certain forms while the same ″feeling″ tells them that other forms cannot be transferred (Ellis, 2003). Negative transfer is especially common when learners need to use forms in L2 that do not exist in their native language.

2.5.2. Interlanguage

Interlanguage is a term that is very often heard in the environments dealing with second language acquisition. It is a type of language that is produced by learners of a second or foreign language while they are in the process of learning it (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). According to the *interlanguage hypothesis* (Richards & Schmidt, 2010), language learners possess a grammar system that is different from both their native language and the target language they are learning. During the process of learning, learners are exposed to different input, which leads them to borrow patterns from their native language or extend patterns from the target language by analogy (Richards & Schmidt, 2010). Many researchers have recognized this phase of using the so-called *interlanguage* (Richards, 1974; Gass & Selinker, 1994; Corder, 1981). Different authors use different names for this specific linguistic system, and there are reasons for that. The term *interlanguage* was first introduced by Selinker (1994) and it is most often used term to describe this linguistic system. William Nemser (1994) uses the term *approximative systems* to describe this linguistic system. He makes difference between the *target language*, *source language* and *approximative systems* in order to clarify how and why do these systems emerge. Finally, Corder (1994) uses the term *idiosyncratic dialects* since he thinks the learner's language is actually a dialect (as cited in Richards, 1994). For better understanding of the differences between these terms and their definitions given by authors, it is necessary to give some further explanations and important aspects of their interpretations.

Selinker (1994) builds his theory of *interlanguage* on the latent psychological structure. He claims that it is very important to study psycholinguistic processes and how they influence the establishment of the knowledge and the interlanguage itself. In order to gather the data on target language acquisition and the errors that learners make in the process of acquisition it is necessary to observe three sets of utterances: utterances in the learner's native language produced by the learner; IL utterances produced by the learner; and TL utterances produced

by native speakers of that TL (Selinker, 1994). He also suggests there are five processes that are central to second language acquisition, which need to be taken into consideration during analyses of the utterances produced by learners. Selinker's (1994) method has many requests in order to be completed, for example, experimental conditions need to be the same in testing all three types of utterances that are mentioned above. It is already well known that studies on second language acquisition are usually qualitative, meaning descriptive. People are influenced by many factors so there can't be any warranty that the conditions were the same all three times when the participants were tested.

Nemser (1994) refers to this linguistic system as *approximative systems*. Since there is familiarity with the terms *target* and *source language*, we will only pay attention to Nemser's definition of *approximative systems*.

> An *approximative* system is the deviant linguistic system actually employed by the learner attempting to utilize the target language. Such approximative systems vary in character in accordance with proficiency level; variation is also introduced by learning experience (including exposure to a target language script system), communication function, personal learning characteristics, etc (as cited in Richards, 1994, p.55).

Nemser (1994) gives many reasons why should we examine learner's language more, and one of them is directly connected to the goal of this paper. Specialists of the contrastive analysis recognized the importance of changes in learner's language before there was any empirical research on this subject. Therefore, investigation of approximative systems proved useful for teachers and planning of pedagogic strategy.

Corder (1994) suggests several classes of *idiosyncratic dialects*, and one of them is interesting for this study, that of the learners of a second language. He accepts the term *interlanguage* proposed by Selinker. Besides learner's language, he proposes other classes of dialects. He claims a dialect to be any two languages that share some rules of grammar. This way, a dialect is also a language of poems or infants learning their mother tongue (as cited in Richards, 1994). This study is interested only in learner's language, or interlanguage, but it is important to note that error analysis is not only applicable to second language acquisition but to other classes as well.

The word *interlanguage* will be used in continuation to refer to the linguistic system discussed above. Besides different theories, all these authors agree that interlanguage has its grammar and can be described in terms of a set of rules. Attempts to explain and describe interlanguage also showed that sentences produced by learners should not be called

ungrammatical (Richards, 1994). They might not always be grammatical in terms of target language grammar, but they are grammatical in terms of learner's language. Interlanguage changes over time which is positive since it means that learners develop their interlanguage over time (Richards, 1994). They construct many different interlanguages as their language skills progress more and more. In ideal cases their interlanguage eventually becomes the target language. However, that process lasts long for all the learners, and by recognizing the phases of learner's interlanguage, teachers and researchers can greatly improve the instruction learners receive (Richards, 1994).

2.6. Previous research on errors in written assignments of EFL learners

In the past decades a lot of research has been done on error analyzing and finding solutions to learners' errors (Abeywickrama, 2010; Darus, 2009; Carević, 2010). Different studies were performed on different native languages of learners, but conclusions are similar. Errors are very important and worth paying attention to, in order to get an insight into how the language is being acquired by a learner (Darus, 2009). The study by Abeywickrama (2010) finds that L1 interference was not the main cause of errors in learners whose native language is Sinhala, but that these errors only comprise twenty percent of errors made by learners. L1 interference is mostly shown through direct translations from their native language, as well as ignoring certain verbs that are not found in Sinhala (Abeywickrama, 2010). Besides errors caused by interference, these learners have made many developmental errors, mostly overgeneralization in the use of Past Simple suffix –ed and spelling errors (Abeywickrama, 2010).

In her research, Prvulović (2014) finds that most errors were caused by the negative transfer. Prvulović (2014) has analyzed the most common errors of learners whose native language is Serbian, and found that the most frequent errors were in the use of the determiners. It is easy to conclude that was caused by negative transfer, since their native language does not have determiners at all. The learners have made four types of mistakes considering the use of determiners: leaving out the determiner, using the determiners where not necessary, using the wrong determiner and using the determiner instead of a possessive adjective (Prvulović, 2014). The author argues that all the participants have made errors connected to the use of the determiners. Considering the syntax, the author again finds examples of errors caused by negative transfer, such as: leaving out the subject or both subject and predicate, etc (Prvulović, 2014). Some of the spelling errors were also caused by negative

transfer, since the phonetic system of learners' native language differs from the one of the target language (Prvulović, 2014).

Another study on errors that learners make in writing English was performed with learners of university level whose native language is Thai (Phuket & Othman, 2015). The study shows that interference errors are usually seen in literal translations of Thai words, as well as in wrong use of verb tenses, since Thai language does not have inflected forms of past tense. Use of prepositions also showed the influence of their native language, where the learners omitted certain prepositions if they are not usually used in Thai in certain context (Phuket & Othman, 2015). Considering the intralingual errors, the most common ones were overgeneralization, the errors in word choice and spelling, which shows that these errors can be the sign of learners' progress in the process of language learning. Authors (Phuket & Othman, 2015) implicate that there should be more attention paid on interference errors learners make since the participants had many difficulties in writing even though they have been learning English since the primary school.

2.6.1. Levels of analyzing errors

Errors influence second language acquisition on the following levels: phonological, morphological, syntactical and orthographical level (Lado, 1957). Therefore, most authors mentioned analyze the errors regarding these domains. However, phonological errors cannot be taken into account when one is analyzing written assignments since phonology deals with pronunciation.

Morphological errors are mostly intralingual, as seen in Abeywickrama (2010). The participants of this study made errors of overgeneralization like using Past Simple suffix on irregular verb (Abeywickrama, 2010). Richards (1971) bring the example of omitting plural -*s* in learners whose native language is French since plurals are not pronounced in French. Such errors are seen as a process of construction of an interlanguage and learners who have different native languages go through this process in different ways (Larsen-Freeman & Long, 2014).

Regarding the syntactical level, Richards (1971) also mentions examples where learners whose native language is French transfer certain structures that are ungrammatical in English. The study by Abeywickrama (2010) shows that learners sometimes use word order of their native language in writing sentences in English. Since Sinhala has different negative markers

that do not have a specific place in a sentence, the learners tend to transfer Sinhala word order into English.

Orthographic errors were very frequent in the study by Prvulović (2014) since there are certain letters used in learners' native language that are not present in target language and there is also the rule in their native language to write the way you speak. That caused interference problems (Prvulović, 2014). Lado (1957) mentions two causes for the orthographic interference. In case that the same symbol represents two different sounds in two languages, the student will transfer the native language symbolization into the foreign language. Another possibility for the interference in spelling is connected to the fact that one symbol can represent different sound if found in another word (Lado, 1957).

3. Research methodology

This chapter contains information as to the research design, data collection methods and the instruments used, the participants of the study as well as data analysis procedure.

3.1. Research design

This research paper has been designed as a case study. As such, it has both elements of a quantitative and a qualitative study. This paper is qualitative because it focuses on descriptive and explorative elements (Mackey & Gass, 2005). On the other side, the paper has elements of quantitative research because the data were analyzed statistically. Nowadays, second language researchers usually combine both approaches since they are seen as complementary means of investigating complex phenomena in second language acquisition (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

For the purpose of this study, quantitative data were collected through the written assignments of the students where their errors were presented statistically. The students of the school where the research has been conducted write the descriptive assignments in order to get their grades for the writing part of their syllabus. They do not write essays but they express their opinions, views, assignments which do not follow any particular essay structure but are rather focused on the sentence than composition structure – creative writing. Written tests are used to check grammar and in order to check writing skills, they write two written assignments in one school year. They practice writing through different tasks in their lessons; almost each unit has one to two tasks that include writing dialogues, short reports or notices, etc. Another way to prepare students for written assignment is to revise the vocabulary and certain structures from the lessons that have been done with the students during the semester since the vocabulary and structures learnt can be useful for the written assignment. Students do that by using their Students' books but also vocabularies where they can find the words that are either unknown or less familiar to them. They learn about different parts of speech, as well as that there are words that can belong to more than one part of speech. They practice how to use them in sentences. Most common way of preparing for written assignments is giving several topics in advance to students as well as some advice so they can prepare themselves for the written assignment. In that way, they have enough time at home to prepare themselves better for writing assignment. The teacher instructs them how to prepare. They can use vocabularies to prepare these topics, but they can also use the previous topics and texts they have read during regular classes in order to check their sentences. The teacher also gives

instructions and revises the basics of sentence structures. Usually the teacher gives five topics to students one week before the class when they will write it and then he chooses three for the written assignment. The students choose one of those three topics to write the assignment. They cannot use the dictionaries during the class since they have had the topics for preparation. Though this method is questionable regarding the thorough preparation of all the students, it is still widely used in this school.

Qualitative data were collected through the interview with the English teacher of participants.

3.2. Data collection methods

3.2.1. Corpus

The corpus of this consists of 36 written assignments of fourth grade secondary school students whose L1 is Croatian. The data were processed in order to identify the most common errors. The most frequent errors have been determined and classified into groups. Errors were counted and sorted into different groups according to the sources that caused them: orthographic, morphological and syntactical errors. The comparison has also been made between the number of errors in an assignment and the total number of words used.

3.2.2. Interview

Qualitative data were gathered by using interview. Mackey and Gass (2005) mention three types of interviews, and for this research semi-structured interview is used. Semi-structured interviews are generally recommended for small-scale researches like this one. Sometimes, discussions arise from a question, which can also be positive and provide new ideas for future research (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The interview was held with the English teacher of the secondary school who is also the teacher of the participants. It was conducted in Croatian, since it is the first language of both the interviewer and the respondent and this way was more comfortable. The teacher was asked about the use of L1 in his English classes, as well as other questions that were helpful in addressing the research questions. The purpose of the interview was to answer research questions that cannot be answered from the corpus itself. The purpose of the interview was also to understand and offer some solutions to the problems arising in class other than L1 usage. The interview questions are as follows:

1. Do you use L1 in your English classroom?

2. How often do you use L1 in your English classroom?

3. Which units (vocabulary or grammar) do you usually teach in L1? Why?

4. If you use L1 in teaching grammar units, how do you explain certain rules?

5. Do you use contrastive examples that illustrate the contrastive differences between L1 and English when explaining grammar rules?

6. How do you prepare your students for written assignments in English?

7. In your opinion, what is the key reason causing errors in written assignments produced by EFL students? Do you think L1 has a significant impact on errors in writing?

The interview questions were developed from research questions. The interview was used as a means of getting an insight into the classroom and also to find the answers to the research questions. The interview was held before the analysis process and was specially focused on the use of L1 in his English classroom as well as on the ways of preparation for the written assignments. The data gathered during the interview are presented in the next chapter. The interview was not recorded, but the author only used it to get a better perception of the methods used in this class as well as of the ways of teaching writing skills to EFL students.

3.3. Research site

The research was conducted at the secondary school ''Ivan Goran Kovačić'' in Kiseljak. The researcher contacted the principal of the school in order to present the research idea and obtain permission. After the permission was granted, the researcher was advised to contact the English teacher of the school in order to agree on the details of the study. The teacher welcomed the research idea and allowed me to analyse students' written assignments if they agreed. Before they started writing they were not familiar with the fact their assignments would be used for the purpose of this research, but the assignment was part of their regular classes. It was agreed with the teacher that the students will not be aware that their assignments will be analyzed as part of the research since that is advised (Mackey & Gass, 2005) in order to get more realistic results. After they finished, the teacher asked them if they would agree to have their written assignments examined and the students agreed.

3.4. Participants and corpus of the study

All the participants of the study were secondary school students when the research was conducted (2015/2016). There were 36 of them, 10 male and 26 female. They live in the Central Bosnia area and their first language is Croatian. Although all the participants have been learning English formally since primary school, their levels of English differ. Since this is secondary school and not an extracurricular course, the level of English proficiency was not determined for participants. They did not take any placement test before the research since English was part of their regular classes and the written assignments they wrote are part of the regular English course.

3.4.1. Corpus of the study

The corpus of this study comprises 36 written assignments in the English language. The participants wrote the assignment as part of their regular classes at school and they all had the same topic, *Freedom*. The assignments were not graded by the teacher but served as the preparation for their regular written assignment. It is usual to prepare students for the written assignments by giving them topics related to the units that have been part of their regular classes during the semester. The teacher formulates the topic for the preparation class as well as several topics for the class where the students write the assignments that will be graded.

The instructions students received before they started writing were as follows:

- Use English
- Word count: 100-250 words
- Time limit: one period (45 minutes)

3.5. Analysis procedure

There were 36 assignments in total that were analyzed for the purpose of this study. After collecting them, I coded all the assignments using numbers 1-36. After that, I counted words in each assignment. Although the instructions for participants were that they write between 100 and 250 words, there were some assignments that exceeded given word count. There were also assignments that contained less than 100 words. After counting the words, I defined the criteria for the classification of errors. Errors were analyzed on following levels: morphological, syntactic and orthographic level. These levels of analysis serve to recognize the source of errors made by EFL students in writing English. Morphological level of analysis shows how certain parts of speech were used in sentences. Morphosyntactic and syntactic

levels of analysis show the errors made in sentence constructions. The choice of vocabulary and collocations is also analysed since it is very important for secondary school students to know when and how to use certain vocabulary.

3.6. Delimitation of the study

The field of language acquisition research deals with many different aspects and all of them are connected in many ways. It is very difficult to separate certain parts of language, and people who conduct studies on English language acquisition know how difficult it is to decide which area to choose. Since this paper deals with the most common errors, there were many other areas connected to this one but it was impossible to mention them. It is very important for the reader to understand complexity of the research topics in order to understand this paper. Therefore, I will mention some research topics that are not addressed in this paper due to limited space, time, as well as resources but are very important to think about.

Sequence of acquisition is very individual for learners. In Ellis (2003) we see different stages in acquiring certain forms. It seems that learners sometimes use correct forms without knowing they were correct, after that they learn certain rules which they overgeneralize, and finally they acquire the correct form. Learners' way to acquisition is most often long and complex, which gives us many different research ideas and topics.

Variability according to different contexts is another important part of language acquisition process. We see that learners do not behave like native speakers in different situations so we study situational contexts. There are also, sociolinguistic, psycholinguistic contexts, etc. (Ellis, 2003).

Therefore, this study focuses only on the types of errors mentioned. Any further discussion would be desirable, but it should be conducted in different conditions and it would demand more resources and time.

3.7. Limitations of the study

There were two main limitations affecting this study.

Use of the intact classes as participants for the study is seen as the main limitation. This study is limited to research at one secondary school and only one class. In order to create a more general research that would provide findings relevant to the wider population of language learners and researchers, one should use random sampling for choosing the participants as well as larger number of participants.

Regarding the interview that provided certain insight into teaching strategies and the use of L1 in an English classroom, it was very subjective. Ways of teaching English were not measured by any appropriate techniques. In order to make an accurate research about teaching techniques in English classes, there should be more participants and teachers as well as more different schools involved. This type of research would include a more specific methodology that would be focused only on that research.

4. Results and Discussion

This chapter provides an overview of quantitative and qualitative data results as well as discussion.

4.1. Quantitative data analysis

This chapter gives an overview of the quantitative data collected during a research process. 36 written assignments were collected which have been analysed in accordance with the following criteria:

a) a word count criterion

b) an orthographic criterion

c) a morphological criterion

d) a syntactic criterion

According to the first criterion of the analysis, it is visible that not all the participants have accomplished the given task to write between 100 and 250 words. This is indicated by the information given in the table 1.

Table 1

Word count

	Number of assignments
Corpus total	36
Under 100 words	5
100 – 250 words	28
Over 250 words	3

As it is visible from the Table 1, not all the participants have accomplished the task of writing between 100 and 250 words. There are three assignments that exceeded the limit of 250 words, and there are five assignments that had less than 100 words. Most of the assignments did accomplish the given word count, 28 of them. However, all the written assignments have been analyzed and the errors made have been described in accordance with the abovementioned criteria. The assignments have been analyzed by following the distinction between the errors and mistakes. According to Ellis (2003), errors show gaps in learner's knowledge; the learner does not know what is correct. Unlike them, mistakes show occasional lapses in performance, not knowledge (Ellis, 2003).

4.1.1. Orthographic level of analysis

This section discusses the most common orthographic errors made by the participants. Orthographic errors represent errors in spelling words and phrases. The analysis showed that the orthographic errors arise from the fact that English language has different system of pronouncing certain phonemes than participants' native language (Richards, 1971). This is visible from the number and type of errors participants made in writing.

Table 2

Most common orthographic errors

Correct spelling (English)	Participant's error	Number
before	beafore	8
believe	bealive	8
weird	wierd	4
little	litlle	5
progress	progres	8
freedom	freedoom	4
control	controle	5
mind	minde	5
because	becaus	3
people	peopl	3
trust	trast	1
nobody	nobady	3
think	thing	1
wanted	wonted	3

Table 2 shows the examples of the most common orthographic errors made by the participants and short explanations of errors presented. The errors include misplacement of certain letters in words, as well as adding extra letter to the words – 20 errors (*before – beafore*; believe – bealive*; weird – wierd**). There have been 17 errors related to the incorrect use of double letters (*little – litlle*; freedom – freedoom*; progress – progress**). Omission or adding of the final –e is also very common – 16 errors (*because – becaus*; control – controle**). The participants have also made errors in writing due to similar pronunciation of different phonemes – 8 errors (*think – thing*; nobody – nobady**). The most

common mistakes according to the table are related to the misplacement and adding extra letters to the words.

4.1.2. Sources of orthographic errors

Orthographic errors were very common, and each assignment had at least one orthographic error. Both English and Croatian are alphabetic languages, meaning that graphemes represent phonemes or individual sounds. They share a writing system and script too; both languages use the alphabet and the Roman script. They differ in their orthographies. Many English letters can correspond to more than one sound and many sounds can be represented by more than one letter (Miller, 2019). Therefore, the participants sometimes tend to transfer the orthography from their native language into English (Richards, 1971). There are several examples for this in Table 2; some of the examples are visible in the use of silent letters since the participants do not write the letters they do not pronounce. They rather write the words as they hear them. Another example of interlingual errors is spelling of certain sounds they do not have in their L1: the sounds /ð/ (*this, other*) and /θ/ (*thing, path*). In some words, it is very difficult to distinguish between the sounds /t/ and /d/ which also presents a source of errors in writing. It is visible from the examples that some orthographic errors are sign of L1 transfer while others are caused by overgeneralization which means there are both interlingual and intralingual orthographic errors.

Intralingual errors include overgeneralization of some rules, such as the misplacement of two letters in a word. According to the type of misplacement, we can conclude that the participants have previously acquired that *ea* and *ie* are pronounced /i:/ in some words (*ceiling, field)* and they have used that knowledge in other words that have the same sound (*bealive*, wierd*)*. One of the most difficult things to acquire considering orthography for the participants appears to be the double letters (*litlle*, freedoom*)* since they often misplace the double letters. Errors that include the final –*e* in certain words are another example of overgeneralization. Errors of such kind are caused by the rule that there is a silent –*e* in words ending in a vowel and a consonant in some words such as *because*. In other cases there is no silent –*e*, but it was found in some assignments that were corpus of this paper (*controle**). It is an example of overgeneralization (Richards, 1971).

4.1.3. Morphologic level of analysis

This section discusses the most common morphological errors made by the participants. The analysis is based on the description and analysis of certain structures of language morphemes and other linguistic units, such as the use of articles and prepositions or affixes. Lieber (2009) explains that ''morphology is the study of word formation, including the ways new words are coined in the languages of the world, and the way forms of words are varied depending on how they're used in sentences''. (p. 2). While native speakers have intuitive knowledge of how to form new words, the learners of a foreign language have to acquire that knowledge (Lieber, 2009).

Table 3

Most common morphological errors

Correct form (English)	Student's error	Number
related to	related with	5
take it from us	take it of us	3
in different ways	on different ways	4
freedom of speech	freedom for speech	8
many teenagers	many of teenagers	3
enjoying life	enjoying in life	2
animals	an animals	4
an offence	a offence	6
parents	a parents	6
in the 21st century	in 21st century	2
can't go	can't going	4
to choose	to chose	5
women	womens	9
men	mans	9
lives	lifes	8

Table 3 shows the examples of the most common morphological errors made by the participants. The most common errors on this level of analysis include the errors concerning the use of prepositions – 25 errors (*related to – related with*; many teenagers – many of teenagers**) and articles – 18 errors (*parents – a parents*; an offence – a offence**). There

were also errors concerning the use of the irregular plural – 26 errors. The participants were using the rule for the irregular plural of adding the suffix *–s* with nouns that have irregular plurals (*men – mans**). There are also errors arriving from the wrong use of the infinitive form of verb after modal verb or infinitive marker *to* – 9 errors (*can't go – can't going*; to choose – to chose**).

4.1.4. Sources of morphological errors

Morphological errors were not as common as orthographic errors. However, the errors concerning the wrong use of prepositions and articles were very common – total of 43 errors. They were often repeated multiple times in one assignment, which shows the lack of knowledge when it comes to prepositions and article use. Prepositions are seen as very problematic to learners of English whose L1 is Croatian. Strong impact of their L1 is noticeable in such examples, which is visible in the assignments analysed for this purpose. They transfer the rules for the use of prepositions in writing English. Therefore, we can conclude that the errors in using prepositions are most often caused by L1 negative transfer. Another reason for transferring L1 into the preposition use is that the learners do not learn prepositions along with verbs but they learn the general meaning of those prepositions, i.e. prepositions of place, time, movement, etc. Therefore, they translate them and use them according to their meaning instead of pairing them with verbs (*related with*, enjoying in life**).

The participants have made a large number of errors regarding articles, too. Most errors are related to the indefinite article *a/an* and its use in accordance with the first letter of the word following the article (*a offence**). It is grammatically correct to use the indefinite article *a* before a consonant and *an* before a vowel in English (Fromkin, 2013). They also used the indefinite article in front of plural nouns (*a parents*, an animals**). The articles in this form are completely new to Croatian speaking learners when they start learning English, and all the errors concerning articles are intralingual errors, mostly caused by overgeneralization. The use of articles proves to be very difficult to EFL learners due to many rules for the use of articles. First of all, they need to learn the difference between the definite and indefinite articles and after that, all the uses for the definite article (Thomas, 1989).

Next section shows the errors in the use of verb after the modal verb or after *to*. There is an example of the use of *–ing* form after the modal verb. Another example of errors is the use of past form of the verb after the infinitive marker *to*. Sources for both these errors come from

the fact that there is no word in Croatian language that would complement the infinitive marker *to* that comes before the verb in English, but infinitive is recognized by suffixes *–ti* or *–ći* (Težak & Babić, 2000). There isn't word or suffix that would complement the suffix *–ing* either. Therefore, the learners do not know the meaning or the use of these grammatical units and use them even when not needed. These are errors caused by overgeneralization.

Other errors include those regarding irregular plural forms. These errors show a clear example of overgeneralization. Several studies on SLA showed that overgeneralization mostly affects younger students (Ellis, 2003; Gass & Selinker, 2001; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). However, there are several examples of overgeneralization found in the assignments of the participants. Students used the suffix *–s* to form plural as it is the case with most of the words in English (*womens*, mans*, lifes**). The concerning fact is that the words used in the assignments are very common irregular plurals.

4.1.5. Syntactic level of analysis

This section discusses the errors concerning the syntax as well as vocabulary and collocations that the participants used in writing the assignments. The errors are presented systematically, paying attention to the use of tenses, correct use of vocabulary items and collocations in sentences.

Table 4

Most common syntactic and vocabulary errors

Correct form (English)	Participant's error	Number
If we **were free**, we wouldn't be afraid of anything, and **nobody could** stop the evil.	If we **will free**, and we wouldn't be afraid of anything, evil **nobody can** stop.	1
I decided **not to look.**	I decided **to don't look.**	6
The country **is also struggling.**	The country **also struggling.**	2

Where **does** our freedom **go**?	Where **goes** our freedom?	5
They become obsessed with many things **that** aren't important.	They become obsessed with many things **what** didn't important.	2
In my opinion, people wouldn't **know how to** act if they were completely free.	In my opinion, people wouldn't **know act** if they were completely free.	1
They **can't go** out with friends, they **can't train** and that is not good.	They **can't going** with friends, they **can't training** and that is not good.	4
Some **people use** freedom in wrong ways.	Some **people using** freedom in wrong ways.	6
Everybody has freedom.	**Everybody have** a freedom.	4
I feel sad about **people who don't** have freedom in their lives.	I feel sad about **people who doesn't** have freedom in their life.	3
That is a **term that** is open to interpretation.	That is a **term who** is open to interpretation.	3
The **man** is free when **he** feels safe.	The **man** is free when **it** feels safe.	1

Table 4 shows the examples of the most common syntactic errors made by the participants. The most common errors on this level of analysis include the errors concerning subject verb agreement (*everybody have*, people who doesn't**) as well as the sequence of tenses (*If we will free, and we wouldn't be afraid of anything, evil nobody can stop.**) Errors were also made in the use of verb tenses, which appears to be the most common problem. Participants often cannot use the correct form of a verb in a certain verb tense or after a modal verb (*They can't going*, Some people using**). Participants were also making errors by ascribing gender qualities to things and abstract nouns (*a term who**).

4.1.6. Sources of syntactic errors

Errors on the syntactic level were not as common as orthographic errors, which is actually positive since not many learners made such errors. They are presented and classified in the Table 4. Most common source for making these errors appears to be the fact that participants often translate the sentences they want to write from their L1. As Dagut (1986) claims, there is never a complete separation between a learner and his L1. There is always a previous experience of learning L1, when learning a foreign language. This is visible in the syntactic errors of participants' written assignments. Large number of syntactic errors is a consequence of L1 transfer since the participants translated directly the sentences from their L1 (*Where goes our freedom?*; In my opinion, people wouldn't know act...**). Instead of using the correct forms, the participants only translated word by word from Croatian. If we translate back the abovementioned sentences, we will get perfectly correct sentences in Croatian.

Another type of errors caused by L1 transfer appears to be giving qualities of animate nouns to abstract nouns (*a term who**). Inanimate things in English cannot use the conjunction *who* but *that or* which. In Croatian, on the other side, gender qualities are ascribed to all nouns, to non living things only as a grammatical category (Težak & Babić, 2000). Number of these errors is not large, but it is concerning since the participants were high school students at the time the research was conducted and they had previous knowledge. All of these errors are considered to be interlingual since they are caused by their L1.

There are also syntactic errors that are not caused by negative transfer but are consequence of learners' development of the new language system. Those errors include the misuse of the suffix *–ing* as well as errors in the use and formation of verb tenses and are part of participants' interlanguages (James, 2013). These errors concern parts of English language that are very different from learners' L1. They are not certain how to use some structures; either they haven't learned them well enough or they are having problems with choosing the correct structures. These errors are not interlingual but rather developmental errors, errors that are result of acquisition process (Ellis, 2003).

4.1.7. Interlingual vs. intralingual errors

After analysing all three levels of errors, it is clear that the sources the errors emerge from are different. Many errors are caused by the development of learners' vocabulary and writing skills. Some of these examples include the overgeneralization of certain rules or the use of

verb tenses in wrong ways. However, there is a large number of errors that emerge from the transfer of their native language. Although the native language transfer can be positive and beneficial during the process of language acquisition (Dagut, 1986), in the majority of the abovementioned examples it is a negative phenomenon. Native language is seen as a source of errors on all three levels of the analysis. It caused errors on the orthographic level because of different orthographic systems of the two languages (Miller, 2019). On the morphologic level, the participants used prepositions according to their meaning; they were translating them into their L1. On the syntactic level, they were translating whole sentences literally in order to convey the meaning they wanted to.

4.2. Qualitative data analysis

This chapter provides the analysis of the qualitative data collected for the purpose of the paper. The qualitative data include the answers from the interview with the students' English teacher. The interview with the teacher was held before the analysis of the written assignments of his students. The teacher gives us insight into his work and ways of teaching different units to high school students.

1. Do you use L1 in your English classroom?

The teacher said that he uses L1 when teaching English. The use of L1 depended on the units he taught to his students.

2. How often do you use L1 in your English classroom?

- The use of L1 depends on the type of lesson.

- Usually grammar units: e.g. the Present Perfect tense since there is no equivalent for it in Croatian language.

- To translate new words to make sure all the students understand them.

3. Which units (vocabulary or grammar) do you usually teach in L1? Why?

As he said, he usually teaches new grammar units by using L1, most often to emphasize the contrastive features of the two languages.

4. If you use L1 in teaching grammar units, how do you explain certain rules?

The teacher said that the use of L1 is mostly used when explaining verb tenses, and especially those that do not have equivalents in their L1 (e.g. the Present Perfect tense).

5. Do you use contrastive examples that illustrate the contrastive differences between L1 and English when explaining grammar rules?

The teacher said he is using the examples from their L1 to contrast the similarities and differences between their L1 and English. The students are in high school so they can understand the comparisons, and it benefits them in both ways, they are practicing their L1 and learning a new language. For example, when they are learning about comparisons of adjectives, they first revise if there are similar grammar features in their L1 and then they can compare them to English language and later practice more. If they are learning verb tenses, they can practice finding differences by translating sentences. In this way, they can note differences and pay more attention to new structures in English, especially those that do not exist in their L1.

6. How do you prepare your students for written assignments in English?

- There are certain agreements between the English teachers of the school.

- The teachers give three topics to students as a preparation, two weeks before the written assignment that will be graded.

- Another type of preparation is being done throughout the semester, by reading and writing different short texts and learning new words and phrases as well as their usage.

- By giving the topics in advance, the students usually prepare only those topics which they learn by heart and then reproduce in class.

- The students usually get good grades because of this system.

- The students do not write essays (narrative, descriptive, expository or argumentative) but only a creative assignment.

7. In your opinion, what is the key reason causing errors in written assignments produced by EFL students? Do you think L1 has a significant impact on errors in writing?

The teacher said that the children and students do not read enough to expand their vocabularies and they do not pay attention even when they do read. That is why they have

problems when writing. Of course, that makes it even more difficult to write in foreign language and that our L1 has influence.

5. Conclusion

As it is seen in the previous parts of this paper, native language of foreign language learners largely influences the process of acquisition of the target language. Although it can have some positive influence, native language is seen as one of the major obstacles that prevent a learner from a successful foreign language acquisition. The analysis was completed bearing in mind the theoretical background on language interference and both positive and negative sides of L1 influence in the process of foreign language acquisition. Besides the L1 influence, the analysis showed other sources of errors that the participants had made in writing English.

The analysis has revealed the three groups of errors: orthographic, morphological and syntactic, caused (mostly) by L1 negative transfer. Both types of errors (interlingual and intralingual) were found in the written assignments of the participants. As for orthographic level, it is notable that most errors were caused by overgeneralization, and less as a result of L1 transfer. Despite transferring the orthography of their native language and committing errors, larger number of these errors is intralingual. The situation is changing significantly when it comes to morphological level of analysis. The participants tended to translate certain phrases and even whole sentences from their L1. They showed lack of knowledge of preposition-verb agreements and translated literally from their L1. This tendency of translating leads to the fact that the most common errors on this level were caused by negative L1 transfer. The situation with the syntactic errors is similar to the previous one. The participants were literally translating the whole sentences from their L1 so the majority of errors were again caused by L1 interference. Smaller number of errors on both morphological and syntactic levels is caused by intralingual factors.

All the participants have made at least one interlingual error in their assignments. The significance of L1 negative transfer is therefore visible on all the analysis levels and makes an enormous influence on writing. Writing in a foreign language requests proper preparation and it usually takes more time to prepare students for a written assignment. However, participants of this study showed lack of knowledge on all the analysed levels: orthography, morphologic and syntactic levels.

Most of the errors analysed are caused by L1 interference, meaning by the influence of participants' native language. Smaller number of errors was caused by intralingual errors, which appear as a result of language acquisition process. Therefore, the hypotheses posed in the introductory part of the paper are tenable: majority of errors in writing of high school

students whose native language is Croatian are caused by negative L1 transfer, and most common errors in their written assignments are interference errors.

Qualitative data analysis showed the ways of teaching writing to the participants in their school. From the teacher's answers, it is seen that he is using L1 very often in class, for contrasting both similarities and differences between English and Croatian. Another practice of that school which is common is giving topics for written assignment in advance. The teacher claims the other professors of English also do this in order to make it easier for students.

Based on these findings it is possible to conclude that teaching methods deviate from the standards that are commonly accepted nowadays. Teaching writing skills requests a special methodology and the use of the mother tongue is not recommended. The findings also point out the additional problem of the urgent need to revise the existing curricula for English language in the secondary schools in order to raise awareness of the importance of teaching writing skills as well as of critical thinking.

6. Recommendations and Suggestions for Future Research

This research gave us a valuable insight in the writing skills of high school students and their tendency to use their L1 knowledge while writing in English. From the other side, it was very limited since it used a very small sample of written assignments (N=36). The participants were not randomly selected either, but they all belonged to the same class at the time of research. Since this study has revealed some important findings discussed above, the author suggests replicating it on a larger number of participants. This could show the conditions in which the students in Bosnia and Herzegovina are being taught writing skills.

Previous knowledge of the participants seems to have influence on the results as well. The participants involved in this study were not on the same level of English, some of them have learned English for seven years, and some for only three years. Also, some participants have had extracurricular classes of English as well. That gap in the knowledge between the participants is visible from the ratio between the number of words and errors in some assignments. In case of replicating the study, the author suggests that all the participants should have the same or approximate experience in English at the time of testing.

In order to establish more closely what causes the errors in learners' writing, the author suggests more time should be devoted to following the learners. If enough time could be provided, the researcher would be able to follow the learners from earlier age and to test them more often in order to establish more specifically the sources that cause the errors. One could also establish what is it that makes the learners transfer their L1 into producing written English.

There have been some faulty practices discovered during the interview with the teacher. He claims that the main cause for errors in writing is lack of reading. His students do not read books, he claims. Although we cannot know if this is true for all the participants, we are aware that younger people read books less than before. However, the new generations do read, but mostly online content. Practices in English language teaching should change according to the changes around us. The students of this age are sensitive and the teacher needs to know how to approach them. The teacher may have finished his studies long ago, but as a teacher, he has a duty to learn and improve his knowledge in the field of language acquisition but also in the field of pedagogy. In this way, he could approach his students in different, more effective ways and get better results.

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