

Error Analysis in Academic Writing. A Case Study of BA Students Enrolled in a Norwegian Didactics Course

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Abstract

This article investigates different types of language errors performed in a written summative exam by ten BA students enrolled in an elective Norwegian Didactics course in Romania. The corpus comprising the students' exam papers was analysed qualitatively to identify various types of errors. The theoretical model suggested by Gass & Selinker (2008) was used to discuss issues of error analysis. A survey was then conducted to receive student feedback on the reported errors in the texts. Findings indicate that students make both inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors and that error analysis can be helpful when designing L2 Norwegian instructional materials.

Keywords: *error analysis, foreign language teaching, language transfer, language distance, writing skills, Norwegian, Romanian.*

Introduction

Writing is a complex process that requires the foreign language learner to consider various aspects of writing, including the organizing of ideas, the choice of appropriate register and style, the layout of the text. In addition, the learner must assure that syntax, punctuation, spelling, vocabulary, and grammar conform to established standards. Writing is also a time-consuming task because it involves brainstorming, researching, organizing ideas, editing, drafting and proofreading the text. Despite the time required to produce a quality written product, in formal educational environments, good academic writing skills are a useful investment as almost all summative assessments involve writing to at least some degree.

The purpose of the paper is to investigate language errors performed by Romanian BA students in a summative exam paper delivered in written form. These students have studied Norwegian for five semesters. Focus is also placed on their level of awareness concerning the errors they make in their Norwegian-language writing. The originality of this paper resides in its focus on investigating L1 Romanian students' writing skills in Norwegian at BA level. It is the first study that aims to investigate Romanian students' error awareness in L2 Norwegian in order to identify areas of language knowledge that might pose difficulties to students. The educational implications that derive from error analysis are discussed and remedial actions are suggested.

Taxonomy of Errors

Previous research on second language acquisition (Corder, 1967; Krashen, 1981) emphasizes the role that the mother tongue (L1) plays in acquiring another language. Contrastive Analysis (CA) (Gass & Selinker, 2008) was developed to analyse the extent to which the interplay between different language systems affects language learning. A strong version of CA focused on predicting students' errors on account of their mother tongue. However, further research concluded that there is no direct correlation between learners' L2 errors and the interferences of one's L1. A weaker version of CA focused on explaining and analysing errors made by students. This version is more descriptive and took the name Error Analysis (EA) (Gass & Selinker, 2008). It acknowledges that errors are likely to occur as they are an inherent aspect of learning a new language.

The literature identifies several EA models. Corder (1967) acknowledges the potential of analysing language errors and defines a three-step strategy focusing on data collection, description of errors and their explanation. Gass and Selinker (2008) suggest a six-step strategy that incorporates both a qualitative and a quantitative analysis of language errors: collecting data, identifying errors, classifying and quantifying them, analysing the potential sources of errors and offering remedial actions.

By conducting an error analysis on writing samples in Norwegian as a foreign language, one can receive valuable information to further understand the difficulties faced by students in the process of learning the language. From a didactic point of view, understanding students' errors lends itself to providing differentiated teaching practices. Knowledge gained through error analysis can pave the way for adapting teaching practices, resources, curriculum and syllabus design. Furthermore, EA is a tool that can influence one's teaching methodology to address students' gaps in knowledge.

The classification of errors represents the second stage in various EA models. This identification of language errors offers information on the process of learning a language. Thus, the cause of errors can be according to Richards (1974) subject to:

- a) *Inter-lingual errors*: errors are caused by mother tongue interference.
- b) *Intra-lingual/developmental errors*: errors that occur in the learning process at a stage when learners do not master well the target language, they try to generalize some rules and apply them incorrectly.

Within EA models, the term 'error' is preferred to 'mistake' as the latter is often perceived to be a simple slip that can be self-corrected and not evidence of a gap in knowledge.

Language interference between one's L1 and other known foreign languages could be subject to conscious or unconscious processes. On the one hand, interference can be an unconscious strategy due to the gap in learners' knowledge of the foreign language. The lack of knowledge forces the speaker to find quick solutions to replace elements of lexis or grammar with similar elements in their L1 or in other foreign languages in order to keep written or spoken

communication afloat. On the other hand, considering a micro-sociolinguistic perspective on learning (Tarone, 1982), interference might represent a conscious, deliberate strategy as learners might want to retain features of their social and ethnic community because they do not like to distance themselves too much from their L1 and L1 culture.

A considerable amount of research has been conducted on L1 interference within foreign language writing contexts in the formal educational context. Kazazoğlu (2020) examined L1 negative interference errors of Turkish and Arabic learners in the context of learning English as a foreign language. The grammar errors of Turkish students are comprised of article issues, and preposition and tense errors, while Arabic-speaking students make errors in capitalization, punctuation, and tenses/articles (Kazazoğlu, 2020, p. 1168). Language interferences in writing skills performed in English by learners who have French and Spanish L1 learners have been investigated by Paquot (2015). The data collected indicate “strong and positive monotonic correlations [...] between the frequency of a lexical bundle in the EFL learners’ written productions and the frequency of its equivalent form in the learners’ first language” (Paquot, 2015, p. 13). In addition, Liu (2011) analysed the negative transfer of Chinese as L1 to college students’ English writing skills in terms of lexis, sentence structure, and discourse.

In a similar vein, this current research paper investigates different types of language errors performed in a written summative exam by BA students enrolled in an elective Norwegian Didactics course. They have Romanian or Hungarian as their L1 language and Norwegian as their second, third, or fourth foreign language. This study aims to gain an understanding of students’ inter-language and intra-language errors exhibited in a written context.

Perspectives on Language Transfer

Linguistic differences between the mother tongue (L1) and the other second (L2) or other foreign languages (FL) can influence, in a positive or a negative way the acquisition process (Ortega, 2009; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Errors made by learners reflect how languages are learnt and understood. The phenomenon of language transfer has been extensively dealt with in the literature over the past seven decades, with a focus being placed on second language acquisition (Agustín Llach, 2011; Ellis, 1997). The behaviourist theory prevailing in the 1950s and 1960s considered that “learning habits and knowledge gained in L1 would be transferred later in mastering the target language” (Benson, 2002, p. 68). Another reference point in the timeline was the influence of Chomsky’s universal grammar theory (1970s), which regarded language transfer as trivial and reduced it to a developmental error, with no solid interdependence between the mastering of L1 and of a L2 (Benson, 2002). The current view on language transfer acknowledges the complexity of the phenomenon by favouring “the introduction of multidisciplinary perspectives into the field of SLA (second language acquisition) research” (Yi, 2012, p. 2372).

Language transfer, referred to as “the influence resulting from the similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired” (Odlin, 1989, p. 27) is a ubiquitous topic in the field of the didactics of a foreign language. Interferences may occur at different levels: phonological, lexical,

syntactical, and semantic (Jabbari & Samavarchi, 2011), pragmatic level, morphological level, or punctuation. It is often the case for learners of a foreign language to assume that a word has the same meaning in the foreign language as it has in L1, to apply L1 syntax to a foreign language, to use an inappropriate register in a communicative context or to find difficult to handle “semantic ambiguity across languages” (Degani & Tokowicz, 2010, p. 1266).

In the literature, no consensus is indicated regarding the time frame in which language transfer occurs in relation to learners’ language competence. On the one hand, many studies indicate that students with low competence tended to transfer more elements of their L1 in comparison to more advanced students (Celaya & Torras, 2001; Olsen, 1999). On the other hand, we have the perspective that language transfer occurs after learners have reached a certain level of development in the target language (Ellis, 1997).

Equally important to mention is the point of view offered by language transfer. It can be regarded as a positive transfer when structures from L1 are used appropriately in the foreign language. In this case, learners search for common features between their L1 or other foreign languages that they know and the target language they intend to acquire to facilitate the learning process (Ringbom & Jarvis, 2009). However, when lexical and grammatical errors occur due to knowledge of L1 or of other foreign languages, the concept used is that of negative transfer.

A significant avenue of enquiry in language teaching resides in the pedagogical implications that language transfer brings. Learners of a foreign language are expected to make mistakes as these are a “natural and valuable part of the language learning process” (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 156). Moreover, errors and the willingness to make errors are part of the learning process. Therefore, awareness of the positive and negative language transfer practices performed by learners in the classroom can offer a teacher the opportunity to facilitate the students’ learning process.

Contextualization for Teaching Norwegian Didactics at BA level

It is of paramount importance for both teachers and pre-service teachers to understand the particularities and the challenges of learning a foreign language. The didactic implications extend in various directions. The process of learning a foreign language is shaped by many variables such as learners’ age, attitudes towards learning, motivation, preferred learning styles, aptitude, or personality (Harmer, 2007; Lightbown & Spada, 2013). Students who enrol in the BA Norwegian Language and Literature programme at Babes-Bolyai University (BBU) in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, are already adult learners who bring in the classroom their diverse expectations and various levels of language competence in at least one or more foreign languages.

Norwegian, as a foreign language, has been taught in the Department of Scandinavian Languages and Literature within the Faculty of Letters of Cluj-Napoca since 1991. It is the only accredited programme at a national level that offers Norwegian both as a minor and a major specialization within a bachelor programme. Because Norwegian “is not commonly spoken or understood outside Scandinavia” (Iglund & Ongstad, 2002, p. 452), it is often perceived as a small language community on grounds related to the number of inhabitants who speak Norwegian. Still,

it has gradually become more visible in the Romanian academic arena. The number of students enrolling for this BA programme has steadily increased in the last years due to its singularity and to the good job opportunities and internationalization practices offered to students (Tomescu Baciu et al., 2019, p. 266).

The Didactics of Norwegian is an elective course offered to BA students enrolled in the pre-service teacher training programme. It aims to familiarize students with the theoretical and practical implications that emerge from teaching Norwegian as a foreign language. The topics tackled include areas such as: teacher roles, leadership styles, professional characteristics, learners' characteristics, class management, feedback and error correction, ICT tools and digital technology, teaching grammar, vocabulary, and receptive/productive skills, evaluating and creating teaching resources, lesson planning, intercultural communicative competence, and differentiated teaching. The language of instruction is Norwegian. The course in Norwegian Didactics has a duration of four hours on a weekly basis and is comprised of a lecture (2h) and a seminar (2h). The duration of the course is 14 weeks and students are assigned five transferable credits if they pass the exam. The students who participated in this research have Norwegian as a minor specialization. They began the study of Norwegian with no prior knowledge and have been studying the language for five semesters up to this current research. The targeted language level to be reached before the graduation of bachelor students is the B1-B2 level.

Language distance. Similarities and differences between Romanian and Norwegian

This research paper does not intend to predict student errors on account of their mother tongue. Still, when analysing errors made by respondents in their exam papers, a comparative perspective focusing on the similarities and differences between the Romanian language system and the Norwegian one could be useful for argumentation.

Research in foreign language acquisition contexts has concluded that language distance can be a factor that influences the learning of another foreign language (Llama, Cardoso & Collins, 2010, p. 39). Therefore, this research paper focuses on two languages that belong to the Indo-European languages but are part of different branches: Romanian (Romance languages) and Norwegian (North Germanic languages). In addition, the concept of language distance raises some didactic implications when teaching and learning a foreign language. Language distance factors refer to the linguistic similarities and differences that occur between two languages (Gamallo et al., 2017, p. 2), namely one's L1 or other known languages, and a foreign language intended to be acquired. In other words, if languages have few points in common, then the language distance between them is considered high, thus leading to a longer learning process. Research on this aspect concluded that correlated with learners' age and language proficiency "language distance has a significant impact on non-native language processing" (Zawiszewski et al., 2011, p. 400). Still, not all linguistic differences (syntax, vocabulary, etc.) "have the same impact in non-native language processing" (Zawiszewski et al., 2011, p. 410).

In trying to understand the challenges of learning Norwegian as a foreign language, this paper reports on some of the similarities and differences between Romanian and Norwegian. Reference is also made to other foreign languages known by respondents in an attempt to provide

a perspective on their extended language competence even though a thorough analysis of these languages or of cross-linguistic transfer is not part of the current paper.

Similarities between Romanian and Norwegian

Considering the nominal inflection, nouns in Norwegian have three grammatical genders: masculine, feminine, and neuter (Holmberg & Rikkhoff, 1998, p. 77). However, many feminine nouns can use either the feminine or the masculine form. The Romanian language also has three grammatical genders. Still, students might have difficulty with this nominal inflection since the grammatical genders of many nouns do not correspond in the two languages.

(1) Norwegian	Romanian
(m) <i>en bil</i> [a car]	(f) <i>o mașină</i> [a car]
(f) <i>ei klokke</i> [a clock]	(m) <i>un ceas</i> [a clock]
(n) <i>et hus</i> [a house]	(f) <i>o casă</i> [a house]

The definite article attached to the end of the noun (suffixal) (Holmberg & Rikkhoff, 1998, p. 77) is similar in Norwegian and Romanian.

(2) Norwegian	Romanian
(m) <i>en baker</i> [a baker] – <i>bakeren</i> [the baker]	(m) <i>un brutar</i> [a baker] – <i>brutarul</i> [the baker]

There is number and gender concord between attributive adjectives and nouns (Holmberg & Rikkhoff, 1998, p. 77) in both languages. In Romanian, in the masculine and the neuter form.

(3) Norwegian	Romanian
(m) <i>en pen gutt</i> [a nice boy]	(m) <i>un băiat drăguț</i> [a nice boy]
(f) <i>ei pen bok</i> [a nice book]	(f) <i>o carte drăguță</i> [a nice book]
(n) <i>et pent skap</i> [a nice cupboard]	(f) <i>un dulap drăguț</i> [a nice cupboard]

Subject inversion is needed in wh questions in both Norwegian and Romanian (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 49)

(4) Norwegian	Romanian
<i>Når kommer du?</i> [When do you come?]	<i>Când vii?</i> [When do you come?]

Polar questions (yes/no) are formed by fronting the finite verb (main or auxiliary) (Holmberg & Rikkhoff, 1998, p. 78) both in Norwegian and in Romanian.

(5) Norwegian	Romanian
<i>Går han til biblioteket?</i> [Does he go to the library?]	<i>Merge el la bibliotecă?</i> [Does he go to the library?]

Numerals precede the noun (Holmberg & Rikkhoff, 1998, p. 78) both in Norwegian and Romanian.

(6) Norwegian	Romanian
<i>fire biler</i> [four cars]	<i>patru autoturisme</i> [four cars]

Prenominal possessive pronouns and postnominal possessive pronouns (Holmberg & Rikshoff, 1998, p. 78) are similar to Norwegian and Romanian. Still, in Romanian, prenominal possessive pronouns are not often encountered.

(7) Norwegian

familien *min* [my family]

min familie [my family]

Romanian

familia *mea* [my family]

a mea familie [my family]

Considering word order type, Norwegian is a SVO language (Holmberg & Rikshoff, 1998, p. 78), but also OVS is encountered. The same case is with Romanian, which is both a SVO and OVS language (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 49)

(8) Norwegian

Eplet står på bordet. [The apple is on the table]

(SVO)

På bordet står eplet. [The apple is on the table]

(OVS)

‘on’, ‘the table’, ‘is’, ‘the apple’

Romanian

Mărul se află pe masă. [The apple is on the table]

(SVO)

Pe masă se află mărul. [The apple is on the table]

(OVS)

‘on’, ‘the table’, ‘is’, ‘the apple’

Differences between Romanian and Norwegian

There is no subject-verb agreement in Norwegian (Holmberg & Rikshoff, 1998, p. 76), but there is one in Romanian.

(1) Norwegian

Jeg *snakker* norsk [I speak Norwegian]

Du *snakker* norsk [You speak Norwegian]

Romanian

Eu *vorbesc* norvegiană. [I speak Norwegian]

Tu *vorbești* norvegiană. [You speak Norwegian]

In Romanian, adjectives usually follow the noun (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 49). In Norwegian, they are placed in front of the noun.

(2) Norwegian

En *stor* bygning. [A tall building]

Romanian

O clădire *înaltă*. [A tall building]

In the case of yes/no questions, a common strategy in Romanian is to use intonation. (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 56)

(3) Romanian

El merge la bibliotecă? [Does he go to the library?]

Negation is expressed by inserting a negative marker immediately before the verbal group (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 61) in Norwegian and before the verbal group in Romanian.

(4) Norwegian

Han drikker ikke kaffe. [He doesn't drink coffee]

‘he’, ‘drinks’, ‘not’, ‘coffee’

Romanian

El nu bea cafea. [He doesn't drink coffee]

‘he’, ‘not’, ‘drinks’, ‘coffee’

The demonstrative determiner may precede or follow the head noun in Romanian (Arnaiz, 1998, p. 63) but not in Norwegian.

(5) Norwegian
denne gutten [this boy]
'this' 'a boy'

Romanian
acest băiat [this boy]
'this', 'a boy'
băiatul acesta [this car]
'the boy', 'this'

The anticipatory "it" as a preparatory subject is not needed in Romanian, but it is compulsory in Norwegian.

(6) Norwegian
Det regner. [It rains]
'it', 'rains'

Romanian
Plouă [It rains]
'rains'

The examples indicated above do not present in a comprehensive catalogue of the differences and similarities between Norwegian and Romanian. They provide just a narrow understanding of the possible developmental errors that students might make as an outcome of overapplying a rule from Romanian into Norwegian. An in-depth analysis of the differences and similarities between Norwegian and Romanian would need to tackle thoroughly topics such as morphology, phonetics, syntax, or punctuation.

In light of the similarities and differences presented, the paper aims to discuss positive and negative language transfer practices performed by respondents in their written exam papers. Special attention is focused on the gender and plural forms of nouns, word order, use of negation, syntax, and the wrong use of words.

Almost all the respondents to this current research (twenty respondents out of twenty-one) reported that they have language competence in English in addition to their mother tongue. Some characteristics of English refer to: adjectives do not agree with the gender of their head nouns; adjectives are placed before the noun; common nouns do not have gender; verbs are marked for person or plurality; English favours existential constructions <There is an apple on the table>; in a narrative clause the negation usually comes after the verb <I don't speak>; there is no inversion. A more comprehensive description can be found in the literature (see, for example, Siewierska, 1998). This current research does not tackle an extended cross-linguistic influence because the researcher has language competence only in Romanian, English, and Norwegian.

Methodology

Research design

Method

In this study, a mixed method approach was used to provide a better understanding of the data collected that was analysed both qualitatively and quantitatively.

The Theoretical Framework

The study used the six-step model proposed by Gass and Selinker (2008) to assess errors encountered in respondents' written exam papers.

Participants

BA students enrolled in the Norwegian Language and Literature bachelor programme and who took the written exam in Norwegian Didactics were asked to take part in the research on a voluntary basis. Ten students gave their consent to allow the researcher to identify errors in their exam papers errors. Words and sentences could be selected for research purposes without disclosing their names. Twenty-two valid responses were collected anonymously, on a voluntary basis, by using a Google Forms questionnaire.

Data collection

Research Instrument

This current research is a two-fold analysis. On the one hand we have a corpus comprising BA students' exam papers. Because the researcher has language competence only in Romanian, English, and Norwegian, the exam papers of respondents who were enrolled in these specializations were taken into consideration. On the other hand, the other research method used is the survey. Its aim is to offer further evidence regarding respondents' opinions on the errors they usually make.

Respondents filled in an online Google Forms questionnaire that comprises a mix of three open-ended items (1) foreign languages spoken; 2) mother tongue; 3) opinions about making errors in Norwegian) and ten multiple choice items (Likert scale). The multiple choice items required respondents to indicate frequency (always, frequently, occasionally, rarely, very rarely, never) of making the following errors when writing in Norwegian: subject-verb agreement, gender, punctuation mistakes, wrong verb tens, wrong word order, wrong word usage, adding something that is not necessary, leaving something out, applying rules from L1, coherence, style and register, use of connectors.

Timeline

The research was carried out in February 2019.

Research Questions

The following research questions are addressed in the study:

- 1) What types of errors are present in students' final exam papers?
- 2) What types of errors do students assume to make?

Data analysis and results

The error analysis conducted on the ten final exam papers has rendered examples of both inter-language and intra-language errors. As inter-language is concerned, the influence of Romanian as a mother language was visible in the words coined ("å eksplisere" from the Romanian verb "a explica", "cardinal punkter" from the Romanian "puncte cardinale"; "kasetofon" for the Romanian word "casetofon", indicating a cassette recorder; "inteligent" written as in Romanian, with a single <l> "intelligent"; "de kan dedukt" from the Romanian "a deduce"; "etterpå jeg skriver" lack of inversion in Norwegian as in Romanian this is not commonly used; "karacter" from the Romanian word "caracter", even if the meaning is different in Norwegian focusing on grades or marks and not character traits; "etaper" given a plural form from the Romanian "etape"; incorrect grammatical gender "en rom" instead of "et rom" because in Romanian the word has a feminine gender, "en skuespill" instead of "ett skuespill" because in Romanian the word has a feminine gender, "en andre eksempel" because in Romanian the word has a feminine gender).

Intra-language errors, also known as developmental errors, were identified: gender of nouns "dette ide" even if the noun does not have a neutral gender neither in Norwegian nor in Romanian; modal verb + short infinitive "elevene kan bruker", "skal læreren sier"; the concord between the noun and the verb "så lære de å", "metoden hjelp elevene"; concord between nouns and adjectives "presentere dette regler", "elevene er aktiv", "digitale ferdigheter er viktig", "kontinuarlige evalueringen", double determination "det viktigste ideer", wrong word "hvor han bor og liv".

Negative transfer of English to Norwegian was identified in the following contexts: spelling mistakes ("god job"), word replacement ("en *large* rom"), punctuation ("etterpå,"), use of words in English ("scoring system" without offering a correspondent term in Norwegian), verb markedness for person or plurality ("vi se" instead of "vi ser", "de arbeide" instead of "de arbeider"), wrong word ("kartoner" from the English word "cartoons"; "civilization" with English spelling, "preparere en leksjon" from the English "prepare").

Further on, the paper focuses on the data gathered from the Google Forms questionnaire. The two open questions related to respondents' profile (competence in foreign languages and mother tongue) indicate that they are multilingual and able to speak two or three foreign languages (e.g., English, French, German, Italian, Japanese, etc.) in addition to Norwegian. Moreover, twenty-one respondents have Romanian as L1 and one respondent has Hungarian as L1.

Seventeen responses were provided to the open question related to respondents' perspectives about the errors they usually make. On a general note, respondents report that errors are part of the learning process. Four examples of word for word transcripts are indicated below:

[It is good to make errors as long as one learns something from that]

[I would not be able to improve if I didn't make errors]

[I think errors help me learn better, so they can be useful]

[That is inevitable because a new language can be hard to learn]

The quantitative analysis of the ten multiple choice items indicates that eight respondents occasionally make errors in terms of gender agreement, while nine rarely make this error. An incorrect word order in Norwegian is occasionally performed by seven respondents and rarely performed by eight respondents. In terms of applying rules for L1, respondents' answers are distributed almost evenly (six indicate that they occasionally apply rules from their L1 into Norwegian, six rarely do that, and six very rarely do that). Still, four respondents reported that they make errors very frequently as an outcome of applying in Norwegian rules from their L1.

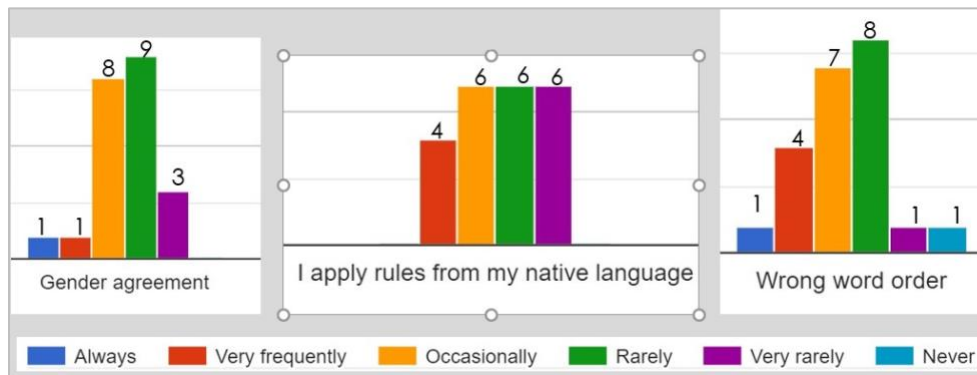


Figure 1. Respondent's opinions on the types of errors performed when writing in Norwegian

Other data gathered indicate that six respondents occasionally make subject-verb agreement errors, while fifteen rarely or very rarely make such errors. Most of the respondents (eighteen) reported that they very rarely or never make punctuation mistakes. A wrong choice of verb tense was performed occasionally by seven students, while a considerable number (fourteen) of the respondents indicate that they rarely or very rarely make this type of error. Style and register have frequently posed problems to seven respondents, while fifteen of them have occasionally or rarely experienced these issues. A quantitative investigation of the inter-language and intra-language errors performed in the exam papers was not an objective of this current paper.

Discussions

The first research question referred to the types of errors present in students' final exam papers. Findings indicate various instances of inter-language and intra-language errors performed by students. In terms of inter-language errors, students have coined new words that stem from a Romanian words, have had issues with inversion, the plural form of nouns, and the grammatical gender of nouns. As Holmberg & Rikkhoff (1998) indicated, the lack of inversion in the Romanian language system coupled with the lack of correspondence between the grammatical genders in Norwegian and Romanian can account for the errors identified in the written exam papers.

Error analysis has also identified some developmental errors in the student writing. These refer to the correct use of modal verb + short infinitive, the agreement between nouns and verbs, the agreement between nouns and adjectives or the double determination in Norwegian. According to Arnaiz (1998), the demonstrative determiner is placed before the noun in Norwegian but the difficulty for Romanian students is to put the noun in a definite form because in their mother tongue, the noun has an indefinite form (e.g., Norwegian <denne gutten>, <acest baiat>, 'this', 'a boy' instead of 'this', 'the boy'). The same case regards the double determination as in Romanian

the noun has an indefinite form and not a definite form as in Norwegian. Even if there is both in Romanian and Norwegian agreement between nouns and adjectives, students still performed errors in this area.

An important aspect to consider is that the course Norwegian Didactics incorporates specialized language from the field of education, and students thus encounter terminology from a new area of research with which they may be unfamiliar. This might pose some difficulties as students are required to communicate in written form and in a new domain. This may explain the use of incorrect words and the fact that respondents even coined some new words or assumed that words have the same meaning in both languages.

The positive effect of L1 or other foreign languages on Norwegian is evident in instances where languages share cognates (e.g., “nasjon”, “kalkulator”, “å identifisere”, “å eksplisere”, “å preparere”) which give “the learners a head start in the vocabulary” (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 241). As such, similarities between learners’ L1 and other known foreign languages can facilitate the learning of another foreign language by speeding up the acquisition process (Ellis & Shintani, 2014, p. 245). The language distance between Romanian and Norwegian is moderate and it allowed respondents to establish connections. We see this in the collected documents.

The second research question intended to investigate students’ error awareness. The findings gathered from the questionnaire indicate that respondents are aware that they occasionally make errors when writing in Norwegian. Of the twenty-two valid responses, eight respondents occasionally make errors in terms of gender agreement, seven respondents occasionally perform incorrect word order, six respondents occasionally make subject-verb agreement errors, seven respondents occasionally use a wrong verb tense and four respondents frequently make errors as an outcome of applying in Norwegian rules from their L1. The error analysis of the written exam papers offers evidence on these types of errors, indicating that the respondents are reflective and aware of the errors they make. As this paper did not aim to conduct a quantitative investigation of the errors performed, it is not possible to make a correlation between the feedback provided by the respondents and the errors identified by the researcher. Eighteen respondents reported that they very rarely or never make punctuation mistakes. Indeed, the error analysis of the exam papers did not indicate any punctuation mistakes. As style and register are concerned, seven respondents have had very frequently problems in this area, while fifteen of them have experienced occasionally and rarely this issue. The exam papers were written in an academic form, a formal register and the researcher did not encounter any errors in this sense. There was general consensus among respondents that errors are an integral part and a prevalent phenomenon in the process of learning a foreign language.

Pedagogical implications

The study has as a theoretical framework for errors analysis the model proposed by Gass and Selinker (2008). So far, the paper has tackled five steps of the model. The sixth step, namely offering remedial actions, can be discussed in a broader perspective offered by the pedagogical implications of error analysis.

First of all, student errors can be a great (re)source for improving teaching practice and learning strategies. Errors provide both teachers and students with valuable feedback regarding the work performed. They can help the teacher understand the difficulties faced by students in the process of learning a foreign language. Peer-feedback can be used in connection to teacher feedback so that students do not feel that the class is too much teacher-centred. Second, for the types of errors identified in the exam papers (inversion, double determination, the grammatical gender of nouns etc.) specific instructional activities are needed coupled with explicit instruction. Therefore, authentic resources are useful to encounter language in context. In addition, games, interactive activities and tasks focusing on the development of the four skills (receptive and productive skills) can represent valuable pathways for the development of language competence.

Finally, to increase students' reflective practice on the topic of errors, students should have a learning log to indicate difficult grammar structures and a timeline to achieve some personal goals they have established regarding language learning. Students could thus refer to pedagogical materials that address certain language areas that seem to be difficult to handle. Teaching practices can undergo changes and the syllabus can be adapted with much more focus being placed on providing students with positive feedback. In this current research, students are enrolled in a teacher training programme. Having the status of pre-service teachers, the students also need to be aware of various strategies for providing feedback and for offering differentiated teaching.

Limitations and further considerations

Several limitations to this research study need to be acknowledged. The first refers to the fact that students' writing skills in Norwegian were evaluated only once, in the context of a summative evaluation. A written exam can be a stressful task and students might feel the pressure to use their language competence in L1 or in other foreign languages. Therefore, to grasp the dimensions of language transfer in Norwegian and identify intra-language and inter-language errors, different written assignments need to be given to students in a context that is not part of a final exam. It would be interesting to research what types of errors and language transfer students perform in settings outside the formal educational environment.

The second limitation refers to the small number of exam papers that were analysed and to the fact that error analysis was focused only on a particular subject – Norwegian Didactics – which comprises a new metalanguage that students have encountered for only one semester. In terms of performing positive or negative language transfer this can be subject to individual variation. Thus, the data obtained cannot be generalized. The researcher has language competence in Romanian, English and Norwegian. Therefore, the papers written by respondents who had French, German, Hungarian, and other languages as their major specializations were not considered for this analysis.

Conclusions

Error analysis has a ubiquitous place in the field of didactics and of foreign language learning. Communication across two or more language systems can generate interferences, misunderstandings or generalization of grammar rules. In consequence, error analysis intends to

identify areas of language knowledge that might pose difficulties to students and offer remedial actions in terms of syllabus design or teaching practices. Teachers can point out these errors in class, by recasting and paraphrasing them, by revising grammar and making students aware of the incorrect language they use. The findings of this research paper indicate a consensus among respondents that performing errors when acquiring Norwegian as a foreign language is an integral part of the learning process. The analysis of the final exam papers indicates the use of both inter-lingual and intra-lingual errors. An explanation was provided for both categories. Furthermore, the paper offered directions related to the pedagogical implications of error analysis.

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