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Patterns of Language Errors in the Writing of Bosnian EFL Students: A Case Study

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Abstract

Linguistic errors remain a persistent challenge for B2-level EFL learners, with research showing that grammatical misapplication accounts for nearly half of the language inaccuracies. This study investigates 942 errors in argumentative essays written by Bosnian EFL learners, focusing on grammatical, lexical, and typographical challenges that impact their English writing proficiency. The data, consisting of 90 essays with a total word count of 45,786, were collected and analyzed following a structured procedure: collection, identification, description, and evaluation of learners' errors. A descriptive-qualitative error analysis approach was employed to classify errors and examine their underlying causes systematically. To ensure reliability and consistency in the analysis, three instructors independently reviewed the essays. Inter-rater reliability was achieved through collaborative discussions, where any discrepancies in error classification were resolved through consensus. Errors were categorized into grammatical (50.2%), word-choice (29.3%), and typographical (20.5%) types and further analyzed to determine their origins as intralingual or interlingual. A deeper investigation revealed that 58% of errors were intralingual, resulting from overgeneralization and rule misapplication, while the remaining 42% were interlingual, influenced by Bosnian language interference. These findings highlight the need for focused interventions, particularly in grammar and vocabulary instruction. By uncovering error patterns and their causes, the study contributes to refining pedagogical strategies that support EFL learners' writing proficiency.

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Keywords: B2-level learners, English as a Foreign Language (EFL), error analysis, Foreign Language Learning (FLL).

1. INTRODUCTION

Writing, together with reading, speaking, and listening, constitutes one of the four essential language skills. These skills are critical for communication and are the focus of language teaching and learning. Writing in a second or foreign language is considered particularly challenging because it requires not only the ability to synthesize ideas but also to use suitable terms, sentence and paragraph structure, and organization (Ghufron et al., 2016). This skill is essential for academic success, especially for non-native English-speaking students at English-speaking universities (Mallia, 2017). Good writing helps them organize their ideas clearly, meet academic writing conventions, and communicate their arguments effectively.

Al Fadda (2012) claims that writing tasks pose difficulties for both learners of a second and foreign language. The reasons for this may be limited vocabulary, language proficiency, or a poor command of grammar. Despite extensive English studies, EFL learners frequently make writing errors (Duan, 2024; Wee et al., 2010). During language acquisition, errors are thought to be important markers of language progress. Furthermore, Corder (1967) argues that errors made by ESL/EFL students provide valuable insights into language acquisition processes and learner strategies. For this reason, many studies investigate the frequency and types of errors that occur among EFL learners at different levels of English language proficiency and in the context of various native languages.

Studies across diverse linguistic contexts have identified recurring grammatical challenges. For example, researchers (Dalle et al., 2020; Muhsin, 2016; Nangle et al., 2024) highlight frequent errors in articles, parts of speech, sentence patterns, and tense. Reishaan (2013) analyzes tense-related errors among Iraqi university students, while Chen (2021) classifies errors in essays by Chinese native speakers. Similarly, Sabo (2014) examines Croatian learners' struggles with English Perfect tenses, attributing 75% of intralingual errors to rule knowledge gaps and 70% of interlingual errors to negative transfer, such as literal translation of grammatical structures. These findings show that grammatical difficulties, particularly in tense, articles, and sentence structure, are persistent and often stem from both limited rule understanding and negative transfer across diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Although substantial research exists on error analysis in EFL contexts, comprehensive studies on the diverse range of language errors made by Bosnian EFL learners remain scarce. Most existing research, such as Zubović's (2018) study on prepositional errors, focuses on isolated grammatical issues rather than broader linguistic challenges like word choice and typographical errors. Additionally, the influence of both interlingual and intralingual factors on writing errors at the B2 proficiency level has not been sufficiently examined. This study aims to bridge these gaps by categorizing errors in essays written by Bosnian students based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR, 2024). Errors are classified into grammatical, word-choice, and typographical types and are further distinguished as intralingual or interlingual. This approach seeks to determine whether these learners struggle more due to their native language influence or their stage of English proficiency.

The result of the research contributes to the understanding of the challenges encountered by Bosnian ELLs in the process of essay writing at the B2 level. They may also have pedagogical implications arising from the identified errors in the students' written works, as they will contribute to designing more effective teaching materials for this level of English language proficiency. Finally, the research will fill the identified gap in the current body of knowledge. To that end, two research questions were formulated.

1. Which type of errors occurs most frequently in the essays produced by Bosnian B2 level learners of English as a foreign language - word choice, grammar, or typography?

2. Can the errors that occur in the essays produced by Bosnian B2 level learners of English as a foreign language be predominantly ascribed to L1 interference and be regarded as interlingual errors, or are they predominantly intralingual errors?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The interlanguage hypothesis from second language acquisition (SLA) provides a useful lens for examining errors made by Bosnian EFL learners. This theory suggests that learners develop a unique linguistic system that is intermediate between their native language and the target language. By analyzing errors in their essays, we can gain insights into the nature of this interlanguage system. This research, grounded in the theoretical framework of applied linguistics, seeks to enhance our understanding of writing-related issues and improve teaching practices for Bosnian learners of English. Such an approach aligns with Davies' (2007) definition of applied linguistics as "... a research and development activity that sets out to make use of theoretical insights and collect empirical data which can be of use in dealing with institutional language problems" (p. 68). More specifically, this study falls within the framework of error analysis, as defined by Richards and Schmidt (2010).

2.1 Error and Error Analysis

In this study, errors are defined as "the use of a linguistic item (e.g., a word, a grammatical item) in a way which a fluent or native speaker of the language regards as showing faulty or incomplete learning" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201). Error analysis, in turn, is "the study and analysis of the errors made by second language learners ... to obtain information on common difficulties in language learning" (Richards & Schmidt, 2010, p. 201). It examines distinctions in language usage between second-language learners and native speakers (Allen & Corder, 1974) and involves identifying linguistic categories affected and determining whether errors hinder effective communication.

Richards and Schmidt (2010) distinguish between interlingual and intralingual errors. Interlingual errors, also called interference errors, occur when students mistakenly apply grammatical standards from their first language (L1) to the target language. These errors reflect the direct influence of the native language on second-language production. In contrast, intralingual errors result from inaccuracies within the target language itself rather than interference from L1. Richards and Schmidt (2010) describe intralingual errors as those arising "from faulty or partial learning of the target language" (p. 294). Such errors may stem from an inadequate understanding of language rules and constraints. Unlike interlingual errors, intralingual errors are not influenced by native language interference but are instead shaped by inherent aspects of the target language itself.

2.2 Factors Contributing to Errors in Language Learning

Language learning is a complex process influenced by multiple factors, many of which contribute to learner errors. One key factor is a limited understanding of grammar rules and structures, which can lead to errors in sentence formation and usage (Krashen, 1982). Additionally, lack of exposure and practice limit learners' opportunities to use the language in real-life situations, making it difficult to develop fluency (Seraj et al., 2021). Insufficient vocabulary is another major contributor, as it affects both language production and comprehension (DeKeyser, 2005). Moreover, social and cultural barriers can hinder learners who are not immersed in the target language's culture, leading to difficulties in using the language appropriately across diverse contexts.

The role of teaching methods is also significant. Ineffective or outdated instructional approaches that fail to address learner's individual needs and learning styles can result in persistent errors (Chang-Bacon & Pedersen, 2023; Seraj et al., 2021). Additionally, a lack of

effective feedback—insufficient, unclear, or incorrect—can prevent learners from recognizing and correcting their mistakes (Ekanayaka & Ellis, 2020; Lesmana & Ariffin, 2020; Shin, 2024). Learner errors may also be attributed to different language backgrounds and interferences, as described by Richards and Schmidt (2010), which may reflect on the learner's grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation in the language of instruction (Daukšaitė, 2019; Heydari & Bagheri, 2012). Finally, negative attitudes and lack of motivation in learning may contribute to the learners' failure to put in the necessary effort to fully engage with the language, which can result in more errors.

2.3 Classification of Errors

Dulay et al. (1982) classified error types into four taxonomies. Accordingly, the first taxonomy involves linguistic categories, such as morphology; the second encompasses the structure of English clauses, the use of conjunctions, complimentary sentences, and emotional predicates; the third type underscores comparative taxonomy, including intralingual and interlingual errors; and the fourth is the taxonomy of communication, which involves the use of suitable speech acts. In relation to these taxonomies, research has shown that poor word choice and sentence construction are some of the most common problems in students' written expression (Deiparine et al., 2024; Lukančič, 2023; Ruan, 2024). Bram (2012) indicates that the difficulties EFL learners display in the composition of written texts involve determining suitable verb forms, the use of appropriate articles and prepositions, proper punctuation, discerning countable and uncountable nouns, ensuring subject-verb agreement, and managing spelling. Additionally, other researchers (Arellano-Tamayo & Quibol-Catabay, 2019; Catabay, 2023; Chen, 2021; Daukšaitė, 2019; Enesi & Trifoni, 2023; Lin, 2024) distinguished between a number of categories of writing difficulties, such as collocations, tenses, word choice and usage, definite articles, syntax issues, relative clauses, punctuation and capitalization, ambiguity, redundancy, spelling mistakes, run-on sentences, sentence fragments, and sentence-level problems. All of the aforementioned errors may be organized into three main categories: word-choice errors, typographical errors, and grammatical errors, each with their subcategories.

Word-choice errors, also known as vocabulary or semantic errors, occur when incorrect or inappropriate words are used in a sentence (Wang, 2013). Those are mistakes made when selecting or using vocabulary items. For example, using 'effect' instead of 'affect' or choosing a word with a similar sound but a different meaning, like 'their' instead of 'there', would be considered word-choice errors. The frequency of lexical word-choice errors among EFL learners has been a topic of previous studies, which attempted to determine the prevalence, patterns, or awareness of word-choice errors made by EFL learners (Catabay, 2023; Fauzan et al., 2020; Kahlaoui, 2018). These errors can occur due to a variety of reasons, including limited vocabulary knowledge, learner's L1 interference, lack of exposure to authentic linguistic input, lack of awareness of appropriate word usage, or misunderstanding of the nuances of words. Typically, word-choice errors are classified into the following categories:

- **Incorrect lexical selections**
They involve choosing the wrong word or phrase to convey a particular meaning within the defined context. For instance, a learner might use 'big' instead of 'large' or 'happy' instead of 'glad', resulting in a loss of precision or accuracy in communication.
- **Semantic errors**
They occur when learners use words that have similar meanings but are not appropriate in a specific context. For instance, using 'cheap' instead of 'inexpensive' might convey a different connotation than intended. Learners may struggle with understanding the subtle differences in meaning between words or phrases that are similar but not interchangeable, which can result in lexical word-choice errors. As a result, they may use words incorrectly or imprecisely.
- **Collocation errors**
They happen when learners use words together inappropriately, often resulting in unconventional word combinations that native speakers would not typically use, leading to

awkward or unclear expressions. Some of these errors may be classified into grammatical errors, as they may involve the use of incorrect prepositions or adverbs with lexical words.

- Register inappropriateness
They involve using vocabulary that is not suitable for the intended audience, context, or level of formality. For example, using slang or informal language in a formal essay or business setting would be considered a lexical word-choice error. Additionally, a learner might use a word that they believe follows a certain pattern but actually does not fit the context correctly.
- L1 interferences
They occur when learners transfer word structure or vocabulary from their native language into English, often leading to lexical word-choice errors. These errors arise when learners select words based on their native language's grammar or vocabulary rules rather than English conventions.

Typographical errors are mistakes made in typing or writing. These errors can include incorrect spelling, punctuation, or formatting (Al Zoubi, 2018; Hussain et al., 2021). Some common typographical errors include misspelled words, misplaced or missing punctuation marks, and formatting inconsistencies. English spelling rules are complex and inconsistent, often leading to typographical errors, even for native speakers. Common issues include silent letters, irregular spellings, homophones, and words with multiple acceptable spellings. Additionally, the historical development of English has resulted in words with diverse linguistic roots, further complicating spelling. These challenges can be particularly pronounced for EFL learners due to the language's idiosyncrasies.

Grammatical errors include any incorrect usage of a word representing a deviation from established grammatical rules or mistakes in the structure and arrangement of words, phrases, and clauses within a sentence (Istifci, 2018). These errors can occur for various reasons, such as lack of knowledge of grammar rules, confusion between similar grammatical structures, or influence from the learner's native language. Within this category, examples include those related to subject-verb agreement, incorrect verb tense usage, misplaced modifiers, and incomplete sentences, as follows:

- Subject-verb agreement errors
They occur when the subject of a sentence does not agree with the corresponding verb in number (e.g., 'The dogs barks' instead of 'The dogs bark').
- Verb tense errors
They involve using incorrect tense or failing to maintain consistent tense throughout a sentence or paragraph. (e.g., 'She will go to the store yesterday' instead of 'She went to the store yesterday').
- Sentence fragments
They happen when a sentence is missing a complete thought (subject or verb) and, as such, is regarded as an incomplete sentence (e.g., 'Walking to the park' instead of 'I enjoy walking to the park').
- Run-on sentences or fused sentences
They occur when multiple independent clauses are incorrectly joined together using inappropriate punctuation or conjunctions (e.g., 'I like pizza, I don't like pasta,' instead of 'I like pizza. I don't like pasta').
- Misplaced modifiers
They occur when a word, phrase, or clause is improperly positioned in a sentence, resulting in ambiguity or illogical meaning (e.g., 'I only ate pizza' instead of 'I ate only pizza').
- Pronoun-antecedent agreement errors
They arise when a pronoun disagrees with its antecedent in number, gender or person (e.g., 'Each student must complete their homework' instead of 'Each student must complete his or her homework').
- Coordination errors
They involve failing to maintain or coordinate parallel structure within a sentence or between elements in a series (e.g., 'He likes skiing, hiking, and to drive cars' instead of 'He likes skiing, hiking, and driving cars').

- Double negatives
They appear when two negative words are used in the same sentence, which can indicate a positive meaning instead (e.g., 'I don't want no trouble' instead of 'I don't want any trouble').
- Dangling modifiers
They involve an illogical modifier of any word or phrase in a sentence, often resulting in awkward or nonsensical constructions (e.g., 'While jogging, the keys fell out of his pocket' instead of 'While jogging, he dropped the keys from his pocket').
- Articles errors
They involve incorrect or missing use of articles ('a', 'an', and 'the') in a sentence (e.g., 'I am student' instead of 'I am a student').

Previous research studies (Daukšaitė, 2019; Enesi & Trifoni, 2023; Hussain et al., 2021; Kahlaoui, 2018; Lukančič, 2023; Nangle et al., 2024; Sönmez & Griffiths, 2015) have been undertaken in the context of errors, however, involving other languages than Bosnian. For instance, Kahlaoui (2018) investigated the writing obstacles encountered by Saudi Arabian EFL learners across varying proficiency levels. Additionally, Sönmez and Griffiths (2015) focused on scrutinizing grammatical errors in the written works of 30 freshman students enrolled in the Department of English at a Turkish university. However, there is a lack of studies specifically addressing the outlined area of inquiry. Drawing on Fitrawati and Safitri (2021), the present research centers on the errors in B2-level English language learners' essays with the primary objective of classifying them into word choice errors, typographical errors, and grammatical errors and identifying the most frequent ones. Additionally, errors will be classified into interlingual and intralingual errors.

3. METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopted a descriptive-qualitative approach (Heigham & Croker, 2009) to systematically analyze error patterns in the writing of Bosnian EFL B2-level students. Through a qualitative analysis, this research identifies recurring linguistic errors. It sought to contextualize them within interlingual (native language interference) and intralingual (within-language developmental) influences, offering a nuanced view of the specific challenges these learners face.

A predefined coding scheme was developed to ensure a rigorous and consistent analysis based on categories identified in prior research (Al Zoubi, 2018; Gibriel, 2020). The primary instructor initially coded and categorized each essay manually. In instances where error categorization was ambiguous, consultations with additional instructors provided clarity and strengthened inter-rater reliability. Spreadsheet software was then used to organize and quantify the categorized errors, identifying prominent error types and enabling subsequent qualitative analysis of the patterns.

3.2 Participants

A total of 90 Bosnian B2 level EFL students majoring in English at the public University of Zenica, Bosnia and Herzegovina, were involved in the study. Even though specific demographic details of the participants were not a primary focus of this study, an identical demonstration of their subjective characteristics was ensured for balanced perspectives and insights into the phenomenon in question (e.g., males = 45; females = 45) and age (20-year-old students). More importantly, the proficiency level of B2 level students, as delineated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), signifies an independent user who "can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options" (CEFR, 2024, para. 4). Further, in terms of grammar and vocabulary, B2 level students are described as demonstrating good control of grammatical structures and a broad vocabulary. Regarding accuracy, they

occasionally make errors; however, the errors do not impede understanding. Finally, concerning independence, they can effectively self-correct and monitor their language use (CEFR, 2024).

3.3 Data Collection and Analysis

This research applied the process of error analysis proposed by Corder (1967) and Ellis (1994), that is, (i) collection, (ii) identification, (iii) description, and (iv) evaluation of learner’s errors. Therefore, the written essays were collected, and the errors were explored based on the aforementioned procedure. The corpus analyzed consisted of 90 student argumentative essays with a total word count of 45,786. More specifically, NVivo was used to comprehensively examine, categorize, and identify different types of writing errors and common error patterns. The errors of each essay were categorized based on the adapted classification applied by Gibriel (2020), that is, word-choice errors, typographical errors, and grammatical errors. Besides, specific subcategories were created for each aforementioned error type, allowing for more wide-ranging insights into certain error patterns as well as the rate of their recurrence. The errors were further categorized into interlingual and intralingual, similar to Sabo’s (2014) and Raissah and Aziz’s (2020) studies, to evaluate which ones dominate in the writing assignments of Bosnian ELLs at the B2 level (Figure 1). Overall, the analysis indicated the frequency of each error type (Table 1) and the context in which specific errors occurred, providing deeper insights into the underlying causes of the identified writing errors among Bosnian EFL students (Table 2).

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses findings on the grammatical and lexical challenges commonly encountered by B2-level Bosnian EFL learners. It also provides an in-depth analysis of each major error category identified and facilitates a clearer exploration of interlingual and intralingual influences. After analyzing the students’ essays, a total of 942 errors were identified. As indicated in Table 1, grammatical errors were dominant (50.20%), followed by word-choice errors (29.3%) and typographical errors (20.5%). Similarly, the predominance of grammatical errors was also identified in other studies (Al Zoubi, 2018; Arellano-Tamayo & Quibol-Catabay, 2019; Gibriel, 2020), underscoring grammar as a significant obstacle for EFL learners. Although this study found word-choice errors to be more prevalent than typographical errors, previous research (Agusten Llach, 2011; Lee, 2020) emphasizes lexical or mechanical errors, such as misspellings, comma misuse, and spacing issues, as the most frequent. These differences may arise from factors such as first language influence (e.g., linguistic characteristics of Bosnian—interlingual influences), instructional approaches, and the complexity of writing tasks used in teaching English grammar and vocabulary at the B2 level.

The high proportion of grammatical errors identified in this study aligns with SLA theory, which highlights syntax and morphological challenges as significant hurdles, particularly in the context of morphological processing in beginner learners (Goad & White, 2024; Mikhaylova, 2018). However, in contrast to SLA theory, prior studies (Le Quang, 2024; Wu & Garza, 2014) suggest that limited exposure to English-speaking environments can hinder learners’ ability to adopt correct grammatical structures, leading to overgeneralizations and incomplete rule comprehension. These findings offer valuable insights into the error patterns of Bosnian EFL learners, potentially informing more targeted and effective pedagogical strategies.

Table 1. Frequency of errors in the students’ essays.

Classification	Error Type	E1	E2	E3	E4	E5	%
Word choice errors	lexical word-choice errors	39	36	41	35	29	29.3%
	functional word-choice errors	18	16	22	13	19	
	prepositions conjunctions	1	3	3	0	1	
Typographical errors	capitalization	7	3	3	5	4	20.5%
	spelling	22	18	25	13	19	
	punctuation	16	15	17	14	12	

Table 1 continued...

Grammatical errors	subject-verb agreement		21	15	18	16	14	50.20%
	syntax	word order	1	0	2	3	2	
		run-on sentences	4	2	5	2	4	
	verb-related errors		21	18	13	23	19	
	pronoun use		4	2	2	3	1	
	word formation		5	2	4	8	5	
	article		65	19	24	73	53	

There are two sub-classes of word-choice errors. In line with [Al Zoubi's \(2018\)](#) and [Daukšaitė's \(2019\)](#) findings, lexical word-choice errors emerged as the second most frequent error type (N=134) in this corpus after articles (N=234), classified as grammatical errors. While [Al Zoubi \(2018\)](#) attributed these errors to a lack of knowledge about language rules and language transfer, [Daukšaitė \(2019\)](#) emphasized the absence of contextual awareness of both native and target languages. This study identifies two sub-classes of word-choice errors: those caused by lower vocabulary proficiency, such as ‘*achieve attention’, ‘*rise creativity and activity’, ‘*amount of steps’, and ‘*arrival of endorphin’, which indicate limited understanding of English collocational norms; and those arising from direct L1 transfer, as in ‘*have a contribution’, ‘*make a break’, or ‘*make a result’. These findings align with [Selinker's \(1972\)](#) interlanguage theory, which posits that SLA learners construct a linguistic system distinct from both their L1 and L2, often incorporating L1 structures into L2 and resulting in collocational mismatches. To mitigate learners' reliance on their L1 while acquiring the target language, targeted instructional training and practice on collocational norms—such as guided writing tasks and explicit feedback on word-choice errors—are emphasized in this study.

In the category of functional word-class errors (N=96), there are errors involving prepositions and those involving conjunctions. The first group (N=88) includes the use of incorrect prepositions by analogy to the student's native language or the insertion of a preposition where one is not required, for example, ‘what they want in life *in a very young age’, ‘we have to find *on ourselves’, ‘what we are good *in’, each of us is imagining *about life in future’, ‘*in the same time’, or ‘imagining our lives *for 20 years’. The second group (N=8) involves conjunction errors, which were not numerous because students at this level of English proficiency do not use complex sentences to a large extent, and the types of conjunctions used in all of the students' papers were rather limited. The following sentence illustrates an erroneous use of the conjunction *unless*, which occurred multiple times: ‘You can never know what food is your favorite unless you *didn't try many dishes’.

In the class of typographical errors (N=193), spelling errors (N=97) were predominant, a trend similarly noted in prior studies ([Al Zoubi, 2018](#); [Catabay, 2023](#); [Duan, 2024](#); [Gibriel, 2020](#); [Raissah & Aziz, 2020](#)). Examples of spelling errors found in this study include: ‘*persue’, ‘*incomparable’, ‘*doted’, ‘*accommodation’. Although the English and Bosnian languages differ significantly in spelling, the number of spelling errors was moderately high, suggesting that students relied on familiar words in their writing. Spelling errors present challenges even for higher-proficiency learners; [Duan \(2024\)](#) attributes these errors to the complexity of the English writing system, while [Al Zoubi \(2018\)](#) links them primarily to intralingual influences, emphasizing difficulties with English spelling conventions due to insufficient exposure and practice in the target language. These findings underscore the need for targeted spelling instruction in the EFL context, such as teaching common spelling patterns, providing exposure to authentic texts, and incorporating digital tools like spell-check software. Such approaches could help Bosnian EFL learners reduce these errors and improve their written proficiency.

Regarding capitalization errors (N=22), the students applied the capitalization rules from their native language, instead of the English capitalization rules, as in ‘monday to Friday’, ‘march, chatgpt’, ‘i’. Most of the capitalization inaccuracies were, therefore, interlingual errors and a result of negative transfer. Punctuation errors (N=74) were largely related to the omission of a comma in complex sentences when dependent clauses were used and a failure to use a comma after adverb phrases at the beginning of the sentence. Grammatical errors, which were by far the most numerous (N=473), can be further subclassified into specific types, as follows:

- Subject-verb agreement errors (N=84): ‘In conclusion reading is important because it *help us gather knowledge and build our personalities’. These errors were the second most numerous in this class. Since they represent intralingual errors, the high number may indicate the difficulties students have with the form of English tenses, which should not be the case for this level of English language proficiency.
- Word order errors (N=8): ‘Everything depends on how much *will we have to work...; But can we really say that they know what *are their expectations from life and a career that they chose?’ All of the word-order errors occurred in embedded sentences.
- Run-on sentence errors (N=17). The following sentence illustrates multiple errors. However, it is predominantly used as an illustration of the run-on sentence: ‘This can cause major confusion and insecurity, *and therefore we have many undicesive young people – who even when they do make final choice – are very often not satisfied with it’.
- Verb-related errors (N=94), which can further be grouped into three subcategories.
 - Erroneous use of the passive voice: ‘students should have *been acquired B2 level’;
 - Incorrect tense use: ‘smartwatches as the most usual kinds of wearables *are coming with a leash that wraps around the user’s wrist’; The film is happening in the 1960s’;
 - Failure to apply the backshift rule: ‘we were not able to see what we *are doing’; ‘I decided that I would not rush into anything, that I *will carefully decide what I *want to study, at what college and in what city’.
- Pronoun use errors (N=12) illustrate instances where the pronoun used does not match the noun antecedent, as in the following examples: ‘When it comes to transport and transporting goods, there will be transporting vehicles which will not need a human to steer *it’; ‘Those vehicles will be automated and will do the job *itself’.
- The word formation errors (N=24) in the papers analyzed refer to the incorrect use of the negative prefix with adjectives, as in ‘*undecisive’, or instances of erroneous suffixation, as in ‘it should not be *surprised to see’.

All of these errors reflect students’ difficulties in grammar and language proficiency, which may be classified as intralingual errors. The recurrence of such errors among learners of English as a foreign language, regardless of their native language, is indicative of that difficulty (Catabay, 2023; Gibriel, 2020; Raissah & Aziz, 2020; Sabo, 2014; Wu & Garza, 2014; Xia, 2021). For instance, Xia (2021) attributes these errors to the overgeneralization of English structural rules (e.g., applying general rules to irregular forms) and the complexities of English word formation processes. Similarly, Wu and Garza (2014) indicate that a lack of exposure to targeted language affixation patterns can significantly contribute to word formation errors. Additionally, the current study’s findings suggest that learners’ challenges may also stem from inconsistencies in instructional emphasis, particularly regarding errors related to prefixes, such as ‘*undecisive’. These findings underscore the need to integrate targeted structural instruction to reduce intralingual errors and enhance learners’ word formation precision.

In reference to the definite and indefinite article, errors involve the use of an article where one is not used in English, as in ‘to know what *the life can bring us’; the use of the indefinite instead of the definite articles, as in ‘at an earlier age this might have given me *an illusion that one subject is completed with a high grade’. However, the majority of errors involve the omission of an article where one is used in English, as in ‘after *long search’, ‘in *future’. Since articles are not part of the student’s native language, these errors may also be attributed to L1 interference, which was also noted by other researchers (Dauksaitė, 2019; Enesi & Trifoni, 2023; Zheng & Park, 2013).

In reference to the definite and indefinite article, errors involve the use of an article where one is not used in English, as in ‘to know what *the life can bring us’, and the use of the indefinite instead of the definite article, as in ‘at an earlier age this might have given me *an illusion that one subject is completed with a high grade’. However, the majority of errors involve the omission of an article where one is required in English, as in ‘after *long search’, ‘in *future’. These errors may be attributed to L1 interference, as articles are not part of the student’s native language, making it challenging to grasp the correct use of English articles. Similarly, Zheng and Park

(2013), Daukšaitė (2019), and Enesi and Trifoni (2023) observed that Lithuanian, Albanian, Korean, and Chinese EFL learners, whose first languages also lack articles, face similar difficulties. Unlike Schönenberger's (2014) study, where the misuse of articles was prevalent, this study highlights the omission of articles, indicating that Bosnian learners often rely on their L1 linguistic morphology, particularly in moments of uncertainty. These findings underscore the need for targeted instruction to address this critical gap in understanding the use of articles between Bosnian and English. Once the errors were classified and their frequency of occurrence was analyzed, a more in-depth analysis was conducted to establish whether intralingual or interlingual errors dominated at this level of English language proficiency among Bosnian EFL learners. Table 2 shows their distribution and indicates that the intralingual errors are slightly more dominant.

Table 2. Distribution of the inter- and intralingual errors in the students' essays.

	Error type	Intralingual			Interlingual		
Word choice errors	lexical word-choice errors	lack of mastery of TL vocabulary	134	18%	L1 interference, due to the use of a false friend	46	12%
	functional word-choice errors	lack of mastery of collocations; lack of mastery of vocabulary	34		negative transfer	62	
Typographical errors	capitalization	non-application of rule	6	18%	transfer of the capitalization rule from the NL	16	2%
	spelling	lack of mastery of English spelling	97		--	0	
	punctuation	lack of mastery of English punctuation rules	69		negative transfer of the punctuation rules from the NL	5	
Grammatical errors	S-V agreement	failure to apply the rule of tense formation	84	22%	--	0	28%
	word order	--	0		L1, interference, negative transfer	8	
	run-on sentences	lack of mastery of the sentence structure	17		--	0	
	verb-related errors	failure to apply the passive voice formation rules	66		negative transfer of the verbal aspect expressing duration in the native language	28	
	pronoun use	lack of mastery of the English language	12		--	0	
	word formation	lack of mastery of the word formation rules	24		--	0	
	article		0		Interference of L1	234	
Total			58%	42%			

In the analyzed corpus of student essays at the B2 level, 58% of errors were intralingual, confirming the initial hypothesis. In comparison, the remaining 42% were interlingual, stemming from negative transfer of Bosnian grammatical rules or L1 interference. This finding aligns with Zheng and Park's (2013) research, which also observed that learners at this proficiency level are more prone to intralingual inaccuracies than interlingual ones. However, the slightly higher proportion of interlingual errors in this study appears to reflect the structural and formal linguistic differences between Bosnian and English. These results underscore the need for contrastive instructional approaches aimed at minimizing L1 interference while effectively addressing intralingual errors.

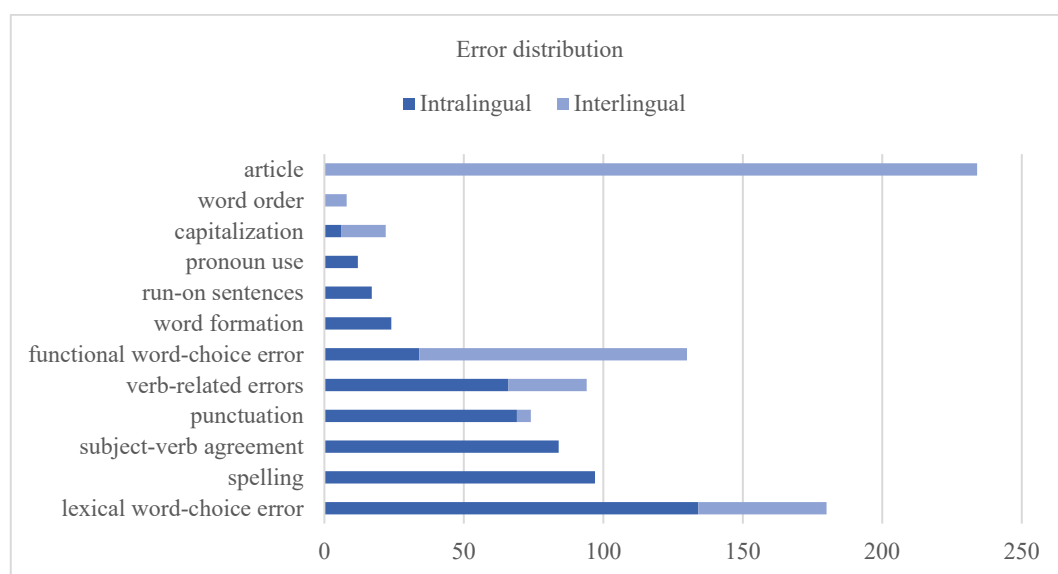


Figure 1. Distribution of intra- and interlingual errors.

Figure 1 shows that intralingual errors, such as lexical word choice (13%) and spelling errors (10%), are the most prevalent. Subject-verb agreement (9%), punctuation (7.3%), and verb-related errors (7%) also occur frequently. Errors related to the use of articles constitute 25% of all errors and 59.9% of all intralingual errors, reflecting the absence of articles in the Bosnian language, as is also the case in languages such as Chinese, Korean, and Turkish (Al Zoubi, 2018; Zheng & Park, 2013). Functional word-choice errors account for 6.6% of all errors and 26% of all intralingual errors, while verb-related errors make up 3% of all errors and 12% of all interlingual errors. These results are consistent with previous studies (Al Zoubi, 2018; Catabay, 2023; Daukšaitė, 2019; Gibriel, 2020; Raissah & Aziz, 2020; Sabo, 2014), which indicate that intralingual errors typically dominate due to learners' partial internalization of English rules. However, the persistence of interlingual errors, particularly those related to verbs, underscores the ongoing influence of native language structures on English writing. This finding is especially significant for B2-level learners, who are at a transitional stage in language acquisition.

Distinguishing between inter- and intralingual errors was occasionally challenging, which may have resulted in a small number of misclassifications. This limitation, inherent in qualitative error analysis (Al-Hamzi et al., 2023; Amirzhanova et al., 2025; Aziz et al., 2020; Bureković et al., 2025; Burhansyah, 2019; Kosasih, 2019), underscores the need for more robust classification frameworks. Despite this, the reported frequencies and percentages effectively illustrate the nature and prevalence of errors and offer valuable insight into the influence of L1 on students' writing. These findings emphasize the importance of addressing both intralingual and interlingual challenges in the classroom through targeted grammar instruction and contrastive analysis of language structures.

5. CONCLUSION

This study analyzed the predominant linguistic challenges faced by B2-level Bosnian EFL learners in essay writing. It confirmed the hypothesis that grammatical errors, particularly those related to article usage and subject-verb agreement, are most prevalent at this level. The predominance of intralingual errors, accounting for 58% of all errors, further validated the second hypothesis. The findings highlight students' limited mastery of English grammar and writing conventions. Lexical word choice errors, indicative of vocabulary limitations, were notably frequent, followed by spelling and subject-verb agreement errors. Among interlingual errors, the most significant were article and preposition misuse, attributed to interference from Bosnian language structures.

The study identified specific error subtypes, such as verb-related errors and word-formation mistakes, which reflect broader challenges in grammar and linguistic proficiency. These findings reinforce the prevalence of intralingual errors among non-native EFL learners. While the distinction between interlingual and intralingual errors posed challenges, the results provide valuable insights into the influence of L1 interference on writing performance. Such research underscores the importance of targeted linguistic support and vocabulary instruction to improve the English writing proficiency of B2-level Bosnian EFL learners.

Although the study offers a comprehensive overview of Bosnian EFL learners' writing challenges, it has limitations that future research could address. First, this study focused exclusively on B2-level learners at a single institution in Bosnia and Herzegovina, limiting the generalizability of its findings. Future research could expand the understanding of EFL writing challenges, including larger sample sizes, examining learners from different English proficiency levels, and involving multiple educational institutions—not only within Bosnia and Herzegovina but also across neighboring Balkan countries and other developing regions worldwide.

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