

## An examination on mistakes of case suffixes' usage in written expression of foreigners learning Turkish

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### Abstract

While improving a learner's language skills during native language and foreign language teaching, the learner should also be taught language rules. Language rules can be taught via grammar topics. One of the grammar topics is case suffixes. Not using any or none of these affixations causes a break in the semantic connection between words and a disruption in sentence structure. Case suffixes are topics to be emphasised on and require attention and elaboration while teaching foreigners Turkish because of their effect on spoken and written expressions with their semantic connection providing function. The aim of the study is to examine the mistakes done by foreigners learning Turkish in case suffixes (nominative, locative, ablative, dative and accusative). The study is qualitative. The data were collected via document review and the data resource was selected via the purposeful sampling method. The data resource for the study consists of written expression papers of a total of 69 learners. As a result of examining the papers, it was determined that there were mistakes with regard to case suffixes in the written expressions of the learners from each level, and most mistakes were done in the accusative case and fewer mistakes were done in the ablative case.

Keywords: Case suffixes, foreigners learning Turkish, teaching Turkish to foreigners.

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## 1. Introduction

Along with improving learners' reading, writing, speaking and listening skills, learners should also be taught language rules during both native language and foreign language teaching. This situation is generally valid in teaching Turkish as a native language and also specially in teaching foreigners Turkish. Language rules can be taught via grammar topics. One of the grammar topics is case suffixes.

Linguists (Ergin , 1992; Koc, 1992; Hengirmen, 1999; Gulsevin, 1997; Korkmaz, 2003) have made different nomenclatures and classifications. They determined five, six or eight case suffixes. As for this study, five case suffixes, such as nominative, dative, accusative, locative and ablative, were acknowledged. When case suffixes are examined in terms of the function that a noun takes on within a sentence, it is seen that a noun with case suffixes has the function of a definite object, an indirect object or an adverbial object. A noun takes the function of an indefinite object in case it has no suffixes, namely when it is nominative.

Case suffixes are affixions serving to form sentences and function as semantic connections between noun and noun, and noun and verb, briefly between words. They substitute for the cases that nouns become, in order to make a semantic connection between nouns and verbs (Korkmaz, 2003). That any or none of the case suffixes are used causes the semantic connections between words to be lost and thus causes a disruption in sentence structure. Therefore, an apprehension of case suffixes is vital in order to form a structurally correct sentence and to communicate with people properly (Yılmaz & Temiz, 2015). Case suffixes for the learner being able to comprehend the connection between noun and noun/verb become an important source for reading comprehension and expression. Besides forming semantic connections, they suggest the semantic difference between words and sentences. With this aspect, they can be said to have a meaning distinguishing feature. Within this context, case suffixes, with their function to connect semantically and to distinguish meaning, are a topic to labour the point and require attention and elaboration in both spoken and written expressions in teaching Turkish as both a native language and a foreign/second language. Whereas, in the studies in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners, it has been concluded that learners make mistakes while using case suffixes, one of the most mistaken grammar topics among learners is case suffixes (Acik, 2008; Ak Basogul & Can, 2014; Akkaya & Erol, 2019; Altas Ozkan, 1992; 1994; Barcin, 2019; Boylu, 2014; Candas Karababa, 2009; Cangal & Basar, 2018; Duman, 2013; Guven, 2007; Islioglu, 2014; Msakhuradze, 2019; Polat, 2018; Sakalli, 2016; Yagci, 2017; Yagmur Sahin, 2013; Yildirim, 2011; Yılmaz Atagul & Yahsi Cevher, 2015). In brief, along with Altas Ozkan's (1992) postgraduate thesis, which is the first study in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners, the studies executed afterwards agree with the conclusion that learners have difficulty in learning case suffixes. For these reasons, detecting the way foreigners learning Turkish use case suffixes in their written expressions and the mistakes they make have been aimed at in this study. The study is thought to contribute to make the process of teaching case suffixes efficient and to create solutions for the difficulties faced during this process. Moreover, the detection of mistakes by determining the situation, discussion of the problems by revealing them and creation of solution offers can be said to be necessary for also teaching Turkish effectively, as in teaching all languages. Accordingly, the aim of the study is to examine the mistakes of case suffixes (nominative, locative, ablative, dative and accusative) in the written expressions of foreigners learning Turkish. In accordance

with this aim, learners' written expressions were examined and the questions below were searched for answers:

- What are the mistakes made by foreigners learning Turkish in written expression related to case suffixes?
- How are the mistakes made by foreigners learning Turkish related to case suffixes in terms of language skills levels (A2, B1 and B2)?

## 2. Method

The study is qualitative. In the study, the data were collected via document review. The data source required for document review was chosen via the purposeful sampling method. Criteria like learners should be learning in Turkish language teaching, research and application centres in A2, B1 and B2 levels and that instructors volunteering for this study to be executed within their classroom were determined. The reason why A2, B1 and B2 levels were chosen in the study is the conception that case suffixes are taught during A1 level and A1 learners' learning process is not completed and they most likely make mistakes, and C1 level learners should have mastered case suffixes that are taught during level A1 in order to reach this high level. The data source of the study includes the written expression papers of 69 foreigners who were learning Turkish. Papers of 16 learners within the A2 level (three of them learning Turkish in Hacettepe University TOMER, 13 of them learning Turkish in Gazi University TOMER), 13 learners within the B1 level (learning Turkish in Gazi University TOMER) and 40 learners within the B2 level (32 of them learning Turkish in Hacettepe University TOMER and 8 of them learning Turkish in Gazi University TOMER) were examined. The students were given three topics within each level and they were asked to choose one of these three topics and to write two or three paragraphs. The writing activity was carried out during the course hour and the researcher did not interfere with the students' writing activity. The data collected in March and April 2019 were analysed via content analysis. 'Sentence' was chosen as the contextual unit for the analysis. At first, the codes were determined, then they were categorised by classification and finally the theme was created. The data were categorised in the frame of mistakes in accusative, dative, locative and ablative cases by being coded as 'not using the suffixes, unnecessary use of the suffixes and confusing the suffixes' (using the suffixes interchangeably).

The papers of the learners were examined and coded twice at different times. These codifications were checked if they were significant and consistent together. According to Miles and Huberman's (1994) code testing, the percentage of fit between the codes is 84.65% (approximately 85%). Another researcher who has been doing a doctorate in Turkish education related to the obtained codes and who is an instructor in the same field was asked for opinions. Afterwards, an interview and discussion on the codes were made with this researcher via a face-to-face meeting. The processes of data collection, coding, categorisation and making the data ready for description were executed, respectively, for external validity. In the stage of describing the findings, the papers of the learners were coded according to their levels 'A2, B1 and B2' and by giving numbers (A2.1, A2.2, B1.1, B1.2, B2.1, B2.2 ...). For external validity, some of the findings obtained were revealed to be present in other previous researches and these similar findings are presented within the 'Findings and comments' section. The findings obtained via the qualitative data collection method and qualitative analysis were quantified with reference to Creswell's (2003) opinion: 'in qualitative researches, findings of an analysis can be quantified and quantitative analysis findings can be qualified'. In sum, the frequency and percentage values of the

findings obtained were calculated and these values are presented in tables. Finally, the findings were commented on according to the research questions.

### 3. Findings and comments

The mistakes are categorised into four titles as accusative, dative, locative and ablative cases by utilising tables.

#### 3.1. Mistakes made in the accusative case suffix

The types and distribution of the mistakes (frequency and percentage) made in the accusative case suffix are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Distribution of the mistakes made in the accusative case suffix (frequency and percentage)

Type of Mistake	f	%
Not using the accusative case suffix	76	76
Unnecessary use of the accusative case suffix	20	20
Using the dative case suffix instead of the accusative	1	1
Using the locative case suffix instead of the accusative	1	1
Using the conjunction 'with' instead of the accusative case suffix	1	1
Using the accusative case suffix instead of the derivational affix (-lı, -li suffix in Turkish and 'with' in English)	1	1
Total	100	100

As seen in Table 1, the frequency of mistakes made in the accusative case suffix is 100. When the types of mistakes are examined, it is understood that most mistakes were made in the category 'not using the accusative case suffix when necessary'. It was determined that the accusative case suffix was not used 76 times when necessary. Unnecessary use of the accusative case suffix (f = 20) is another mistake type. Twenty words that should have been nominative were added the accusative case suffix. The frequency of using the dative and locative case suffixes and the conjunction 'with' instead of the accusative case suffix, other types of mistakes, was 1, respectively. The accusative case suffix instead of the derivational affix (-lı in Turkish, but 'with' in English) was added to one word.

#### 3.2. Mistakes made in the dative case suffix

The types and distributions of the mistakes (frequency and percentage) made in the dative case suffix are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Distribution of the mistakes made in the dative case suffix (frequency and percentage)

Type of Mistake	f	%
Not using the dative case suffix	14	31.11
Unnecessary use of the dative case suffix	5	11.11
Using the accusative case suffix instead of the dative case suffix	16	35.55
Using the locative case suffix instead of the dative case suffix	7	15.55
Confusing the dative case suffix and the conjunction 'with'	3	6.66

As seen in Table 2, the frequency of the mistakes made in the dative case suffix is 45. It was determined that most of the mistakes among all were made in the category using the accusative case suffix instead of the dative case suffix. For 16 words, the accusative case suffix was used, although it was necessary to use the dative case suffix. Not using the dative case suffix ( $f = 14$ ) is another mistake type. It was determined that the case suffix was not used in 14 words where it is necessary. The learners used the dative case suffix in five words that should have been in the nominative case. Using the locative case suffix instead of the dative case suffix ( $f = 7$ ) was one of the mistakes. Confusing the dative case suffix with the conjunction 'with' ( $f = 3$ ) in written expression papers is still a significant finding, even though it is few in number.

### 3.3. Mistakes made in the locative case suffix

In Table 3, the types and distribution of the mistakes (frequency and percentage) made in the locative case suffix are presented.

Table 3. Distribution of the mistakes made in the locative case suffix (frequency and percentage)

Type of Mistake	f	%
Not using the locative case suffix	19	55.88
Unnecessary use of the locative case suffix	4	11.76
Using the ablative case suffix instead of the locative case suffix	6	17.64
Using the accusative case suffix instead of the locative case suffix	3	8.82
Using the dative case suffix instead of the locative case suffix	3	8.82
Total	100	100

According to Table 3, the frequency of the mistakes made in the locative case suffix is 34. Most mistakes ( $f = 19$ ) were made in the category of not using the locative case suffix even when necessary. Another type of mistake is that the learners used the locative case suffix in four words which should have been nominative. Using the ablative case suffix instead of the locative case suffix ( $f = 6$ ) was one

of the mistakes made. The frequency of using the accusative and dative case suffixes instead of the locative case suffix is 3.

### 3.4. Mistakes made in the ablative case suffix

The types and distributions of the mistakes (frequency and percentage) made in the ablative case suffix are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Distribution of the mistakes made in the ablative case suffix (frequency and percentage)

Type of Mistake	f	%
Not using the ablative case suffix	2	66.66
Using the locative case suffix instead of the ablative case suffix	1	33.33
Total	100	100

According to Table 4, the frequency of the mistakes made in the ablative case suffix is 3. It was determined that the affixion was not added to two words, while it was required to be used. To one word, the locative case suffix was added instead of the ablative case suffix.

The mistakes made by the learners in each case suffix were collected under the types 'not using a case suffix', 'unnecessary use of the case suffix' and 'confusing the case suffixes (using a case suffix instead of the other)'. Within this direction, the distribution of the mistakes made in the case suffixes in terms of types is presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Distribution of the mistakes in the case suffixes in terms of types (frequency and percentage)

Type of Mistake	f	%
Not using the case suffix	111	62.22
Unnecessary use of the case suffix	29	16.66
Confusing the case suffixes	38	21.11
Total	100	100

As seen in Table 5, most of the mistakes are in the category of 'not using the case suffix' ( $f = 111$ ) and fewer mistakes are in the category of 'unnecessary use of the case suffixes' ( $f = 29$ ). The frequency of 'confusing the case suffixes' is 38. These findings may suggest that learners do not know how and with which verb to use the case suffixes. The learners may have preferred not to use the case suffixes with the idea of 'making a mistake'. In the studies executed by Yılmaz Atagul and Yahsi Cevher (2015) and Msakhuradze (2019), it has been stated that learners have made the most mistakes by not using case suffixes. In a study executed by Sakalli (2016), it has been understood that learners either did not use the case suffixes or used them wrongly or unnecessarily. In their studies, Altas Ozkan (1992) and Kara (2010) have determined the mistakes as not using the case suffixes, confusing the case suffixes and unnecessary use of them. According to their studies, fewer mistakes are made when confusing the case suffixes.

The second question of the study is how the mistakes are in terms of the levels (A2, B1 and B2). In Figure 1, the frequency of the mistakes in the case suffixes is presented according to the levels.

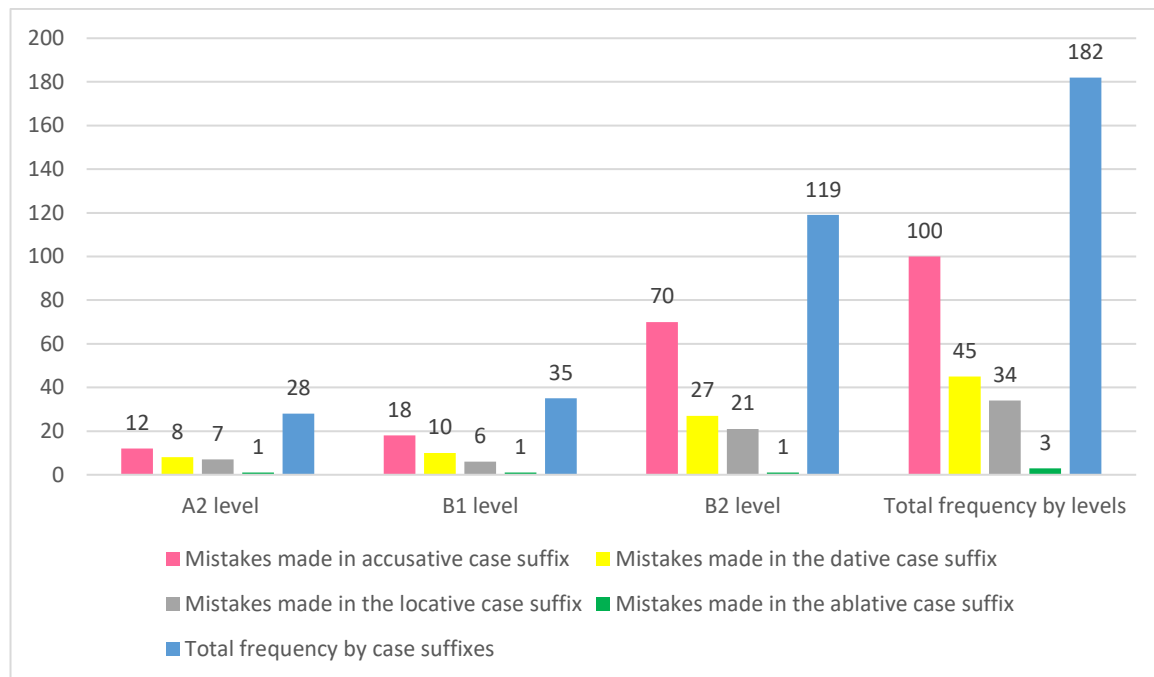


Figure 1. The frequency of the mistakes in the case suffixes according to the levels

According to Figure 1, the frequencies of the mistakes are as follows: in level A2, 12 (42.85%) were made in the accusative case suffix, 8 (28.57%) in the dative case suffix, 7 (25%) in the locative case suffix and 1 (3.57%) in the ablative case suffix. In level B1, 18 (51.42%) were made in the accusative case suffix, 10 (28.57%) in the dative case suffix, 6 (17.14%) in the locative case suffix and 1 (2.85%) in the ablative case suffix. Lastly, in level B2, 70 (58.82%) were made in the accusative case suffix, 27 (22.68%) in the dative case suffix, 21 (17.64%) in the locative case suffix and 1 (0.84%) in the ablative case suffix. That the frequency of the ablative case suffix is 1 in each level creates a problem in evaluating and comparing with the other affixions and levels. As can be seen, most mistakes were carried out in the accusative case suffix. While the frequency of the mistakes is the most in the accusative case suffix, it decreases from the dative case suffix to the locative case suffix. Fewer mistakes were carried out in the ablative case suffix.

Nouns are attached to transitive verbs by taking affixes and they are affected when these verbs become true. According to Gronbech (2011), the accusative case is utilised in situations when an object is considered important. Also, in this aspect, it changes and in a limited situation in terms of its function according to the word it is attached to and in a limited situation, and so it differs from other case suffixes. Due to this feature, it differs from other case suffixes and this causes the accusative case suffix to be the one in which learners make the most mistakes. This situation requires instructors to emphasise on this case suffix more during teaching. That learners make fewer mistakes in the locative and the ablative case suffixes compared to the accusative and the dative case suffixes may result from, especially for English speakers, the existence of 'at, in, on and from' prepositions and that same prepositions (me, you, her/his, us and them) are used for the dative and accusative case suffixes in English. Learners may look for a semantic similarity between their native language, foreign language and the target language, Turkish, and fit them in their cognitive schemes.



In the other studies executed in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners, it has been determined that the case suffix in which learners make the most mistakes is the accusative case suffix, and generally fewer mistakes are made in the ablative case suffix (Altas Ozkan, 1992; Guven, 2007; Candas Karababa, 2009; Msakhuradze, 2019). In the studies of Akdogan (1993), Guler and Eyup (2016) and Polat (2018), it has been determined that the main case suffix in which learners have made the most mistakes and have had difficulty in is the accusative case suffix, followed by the dative case suffix. In her study, wherein she has examines the mistakes that learners make in their written expressions, Yagmur Sahin (2013) has detected that learners make fewer mistakes in the locative and the ablative case suffixes.

When examining the frequencies of the mistakes by levels, it can be seen in the learners' papers that most of the mistakes were made by level B2 learners and fewer mistakes were made by level A2 learners. The total frequency of mistakes is 119 in level B2, 35 in level B1 and 28 in level A2. The frequency of mistakes had increased incrementally from level A2 to level B2. A similar result exists in Msakhuradze's (2019) research that has been executed on the Georgian learners. Msakhuradze discovered that as the Georgian learners progressed in terms of their levels, the percentage of making mistakes did not decrease. Although the expectation is that as the level advances (from A2 to B2), there is a decrease in the frequency of mistakes. This situation can be interpreted as the learners' learning mistakes in the case suffixes, which are taught in level A1, increase as their level advances; the unsolved learning problems of basic levels may be harder to solve in the intermediate and advanced levels because the content becomes difficult as the topics proceed from concrete sentences to abstract sentences. However, level B2 learners may have more mistakes since they write more than level A2 learners. In sum, the mentioned level learners have been determined to make mistakes. Similarly, one of the results of the study executed by Okatan (2012) was that foreigners learning Turkish use the case suffixes wrongly.

The reasons for the mistakes made by learners can be classified as follows:

- they are affected negatively by their native language or the other languages they know,
- there is a difference between their native language's alphabets and the Turkish alphabet,
- there is a difference between their native language's syntax and Turkish language syntax,
- some case suffixes are not present in their native language,
- their vocabulary is deficient,
- learning mistakes related to the topic, i.e., the mistakes they make due to their individual features,
- the mistakes they make since they do not know the meaning of the verb and which case suffix is used with which verb. For sure, there may also be mistakes aside from these or the ones resulting from unknown reasons. The participants in Yildirim's (2011) research stated that they were affected negatively by their native languages; they did not know the meaning of the verb and which case suffix is used with which verb; therefore, they made mistakes in case suffixes.

One of the reasons why learners make mistakes in case suffixes is said to be the difference between their native language's syntax and Turkish language syntax, as mentioned earlier. The Turkish language's agglutinating structure can be given as an example for this matter. In languages such as Arabic, Persian, Albanian and Macedonian, the case suffixes are placed in front of the words not at the end (Okatan, 2012; Polat, 2018). In Persian, the cases are practiced with prefixes (prepositions), except the accusative case; the accusative case is practiced with suffixes (Eker, 2009). Moreover, in Turkish, as it is in the other Ural-Altaic languages (except Japanese; Mongolian, Finnish, Korean) (Bozkurt, 2012), vowel harmony is



sought. Yet, that vowel harmony, especially palatal harmony, is disrupted in the other Turkish dialects (Acik, 2008) or that they become different from Turkish may cause the foreigners learning Turkish, including the ones of Turkish origin, to make mistakes in writing the affixes.

That some of the case suffixes are not present in the learners' native languages is also one of the items mentioned earlier. For instance, since there is no accusative case suffix in Georgian language (Msakhradze, 2019), the Georgians learning Turkish may make mistakes in this suffix or may not even use this suffix at all. Another item is that writing the suffixes wrongly may result from the alphabets of learners' native languages. For instance, eight vowels in the Latin alphabet correspond with three vowels (a/e, u and i) in the Arabic alphabet o and ö sounds are not present, which may cause the learners to confuse a with e, ı with i and u with ü and not use the vowels ı and ü. The learners of Turkish origin read and write the consonant c as s, the vowel e as ye and the vowel ě, which is not present in Turkish, as yo; the pronunciations of the vowels ö and ü are different in Turkish and they want to express this difference in the written language; the vowels ı and i which correspond to i in their alphabets may cause them to confuse the vowels and accordingly make mistakes. The similarities in alphabets may cause various problems as much as the differences.

A learner tends to transfer her/his native language's features to a foreign language. If linguistic features show a difference between the native language and the target language in terms of form, then a transfer from native language will cause mistakes (Wagner, 1982). The learners of Turkish origin may make mistakes in the case suffixes and writing the vowels in these suffixes because of negative transfers from their dialects and generalisations, and their use in their own dialects. For instance, they may use -gA instead of the dative case suffix; -DI and -nI instead of the accusative case suffix or -n after the third person singular possessive suffix; -An after the third person singular possessive suffix instead of the ablative case suffix. Duman (2013) reached a similar conclusion in her research which she executed with Kirghiz students.

#### **4. Discussion, conclusion and recommendation**

Most of the mistakes were made in the accusative case suffix and fewer mistakes were made in the ablative case suffix. In terms of mistake frequency, the accusative case was followed by the dative case suffix. The mistakes made in the case suffixes were grouped under three categories. They are not using the suffix, unnecessary use of the suffix and confusing the suffixes (using the suffixes interchangeably). Most of the mistakes in the accusative case suffix were in the category of not using the suffix. Most of the mistakes in the location case suffix were in the category of not using this suffix. Most of the mistakes in the dative case suffix were in the category of using the accusative case instead of the dative. Based on these findings, it can be concluded that the learners have made mistakes in these case suffixes (even though it has been determined that 10 learners did not make any mistakes while using the case suffixes). This result is the same as the results that have been obtained from the first research to the researches executed until today in the field of teaching Turkish to foreigners. Consequently, this result brings the following question to mind: what things should be done to ensure that the foreigners learning Turkish make fewer mistakes with the case suffixes and use suffixes correctly? The aim should be minimising the mistakes.

Grammatical competence is one of the components of language ability defined in CEFR (2018) as knowledge and the ability to use it; it is also defined as knowing the grammatical resources of language and using them. With this explanation, some points such as using the grammar rules not only theoretically but also within practice and communication process, and therefore including it in the process of improving language skills (comprehension and expression skills) have been mentioned. Based

on the explanation in CEFR, the following suggestions have been improved in the direction of the study's results:

The case suffixes are verbs determining which case suffixes should be used, although they are added to nouns. Also, the case suffixes that some verbs take in are certain. These verbs should be given to learners as a list by mentioning the case suffixes they take in. Also, such a list may be included in course books or in the last section of them as a grammar support. Moreover, the frequently used verbs in Turkish should be determined and included in this list, since presenting all the verbs in Turkish is not possible.

While some verbs take in only one case suffix, others may take in more than one. The verbs such as give, take, say, write, forbid, want, wear, present, put, understand, know, see, find, agree, get ... and all the verbs with causative suffixes may be given as examples to the verbs that can take in multiple case suffixes. In this case, presenting learners a list of verbs will not solve the problem completely. In addition to the list, the learners should be taught that case suffixes may vary in accordance with verbs' meanings. That these suffixes are used, in which circumstances, for which meanings and how they create a difference in the meaning should be taught.

The studies to be realised after teaching the case suffixes should not be as mechanical grammar repeats. The verbs and suffixes should be reinforced with plenty of examples by creating sentences and should be perpetuated. The examples should start from the basics with known nouns and verbs. Then, the abstract and unknown nouns and verbs should be included. In the examples, the central meanings of nouns and verbs should be presented first and afterwards the connotations and figurative meanings of these nouns and verbs should be given. The principles from simple to complex and from easy to difficult and the learners' levels should be taken into account.

In addition to visual materials, such as posters and photographs, online applications should be utilised during activities and exercises related to case suffixes. Moreover, drama activities may be practiced with learners. So, it can be ensured that learning may be more permanent and learners have an entertaining lesson by engaging their attention to the lesson.

If there are any negative transfers that learners have made from their native language or other languages they have known, teaching should be practiced by dwelling on these. If it is possible, the negativities should be corrected by practicing individual activities or by giving the activities as homework. In order to prevent negative transfers, a comparative method should be utilised. For instance, while teaching case suffixes, the differences, such as 'While ... is read and written in Kazakh and Kirghiz, which are of Turkish dialects, like this, it is read and written in Turkish like that', should draw attention.

Without correcting the problems (confusing the accusative and the dative case suffixes comprising of one vowel and mistakes in writing them, vowel disharmonies in speaking and writing) resulting from vowel differences between Turkish and native language of learners and teaching vowel harmony and haplology, teaching case suffixes should not be realised. By keeping in mind that most mistakes were made in the accusative case suffix in this study and the previous ones, more examples should be given and more activities should be carried out related to the accusative and the dative case suffixes, which are determined to be confused with each other.

In sum, the written expressions of 69 foreigner learners from A2, B1 and B levels were analysed. In conclusion, it is determined that generally the learners from all levels make mistakes with regard to case suffixes in their written expressions. This result brings the necessity of remedying the learning mistakes

and deficiencies into the forefront. That most mistakes were made in the accusative case suffix also gives rise to thought that more care should be given while teaching this suffix. In this direction, these suffixes can be reinforced and made permanent with plenty of examples and by embodying them within sentences. Along with visual materials, online applications and drama studies can be utilised in the studies to be carried out on case suffixes.

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