Investigating the Errors of Iranian Japanese Language Learners in Using the Preposition "ni" In Writing Skills

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ABSTRACT

In the present study, based on the "Error Analysis" theory and using a fieldwork method, we evaluated and examined the most frequent errors made by Iranian learners in the use of the preposition "ni" in Japanese writing. First, the data for this research were extracted from the writings of 59 Japanese language students at the University of Tehran. The errors were then analyzed based on their origin in three categories: "interlingual," "intralingual," and "ambiguous," and based on their type in three groups: "deletion," "addition," and "substitution." After analyzing the data, the percentage and frequency of each type of error, according to the mentioned classifications, were calculated. Based on the collected data and the results of the analysis, it was found that among the fourteen identified error groups, five groups of errors produced by Iranian learners had an "interlingual" origin, five groups had an "intralingual" origin, and four groups had an "ambiguous" origin. Furthermore, the main cause of errors, based on the production process, was identified as "substitution." Except for the semantic role of "indicating time and the order of actions," where all three types of errors were observed, in other roles, only "substitution" errors occurred. The findings of this study led us to conclude that "language interference" and "intralingual" errors equally contribute to errors related to the preposition "ni."

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1. Introduction

Prepositions play a crucial role in the structure of the Japanese language as a connecting language. Their function is to establish links between different elements of speech, and they are quite frequent in Japanese sentences. It is rare to find a sentence in Japanese that is devoid of prepositions. However, prepositions have always been a challenging topic for learners when studying Japanese grammar. Among them, the preposition "ni" deserves special mention. Numerous studies have shown that Japanese language learners, regardless of their native language, often make mistakes when using it and struggle to differentiate its functions from other prepositions such as "de" and "o". In particular, the incorrect use of prepositions "ni" and "de" to indicate location has been recognized by Japanese learners (Okada & Hayashita, 2013: 1). Errors of this kind are natural and unavoidable in the process of learning foreign languages, as the second language learning process inherently involves testing and making mistakes (Kazemi, 1392). "Error diagnosis is the essential prerequisite for correction and evaluation" (Doustizadeh and Farqani Tehrani, 1390: 53). By utilizing error analysis as one of the assessment tools, in addition to identifying educational system flaws, it is possible to uncover language learners' weaknesses in various skills and enhance the quality of education (Ghayasi Zarch, Jafari, 1399: 177). In addition, educational programs and textbooks can also be reviewed and modified according to the results obtained from error analysis (Alizadeh et al., 2022). In the present study, we analyze the errors of Iranian EFL learners regarding the use of the preposition "ni" in Japanese. First, we will examine which of the most frequent errors of Iranian-Japanese students in the use of the preposition "ni" occur in the range of its uses and semantic roles. Then, in the next step, we find an answer to this question: in which of the areas of omission, addition, and substitution are the most produced by Iranian learners, and based on which source of errors have they occurred?

Concerning the questions of this research, two hypotheses can be proposed. First, due to the structural and semantic differences between Japanese and Persian languages, likely, the most common errors of Iranian Japanese language students in the use of the preposition "ni" in the semantic roles of place and time occur. Students may make a mistake in recognizing where "ni" is used to indicate the destination (meaning "to" or "at") or time (meaning "at"). The second hypothesis is related to the second question of this research. Considering that the preposition "ni" in Japanese has multiple, varied, and in some cases similar semantic roles to other prepositions, it is expected that the highest error rate is of the "substitution" type with the origin of "intralingual".

2. Literature review

2.1 Importance and application of error analysis

The theory of error analysis was first established by Corder and his colleagues in the 1960s. According to Corder, "the language learner alone cannot recognize

errors, and when they become aware of an error, they struggle to correct it and may even make other errors in the process." (Corder, 1987: 259) "Analyzing errors in the language learning process and learner planning enables faster progress towards the desired target language form." (Zia Hosseini, 1383: 71) On the other hand, analyzing these errors also allows the instructor to identify challenging content for the language learner or incomplete learning. If the teacher knows which types of errors are more likely, they can provide planned feedback tailored to those errors (Jorbanian, Madani, 1401: 287). Additionally, the teacher can determine when the language learner's performance aligns with instructional goals and when further attention is needed. Based on the feedback received, the teacher can review teaching materials or techniques employed for instruction and find solutions to address the errors.

2.2. Types of the errors

Various methods are used for error analysis. Agriculturists categorize errors into four groups based on the production process: omission, addition, misordering, and substitution (Keshavarz, 2012: 105). Omission occurs when certain linguistic elements are left out in a sentence, while addition errors occur when unnecessary elements are included. Misordering errors happen when elements within a sentence are not placed in the correct order. Substitution errors occur when an incorrect form replaces a correct one.

2.3. Origin of the errors

In another classification, errors are divided into two groups: intralingual errors and interlingual errors.

1. Interlingual errors: These errors arise from language interference and are influenced by the learner's native language. In fact, "interlingual error refers to the inappropriate application of rules from the native language in the target language" (Kordar, 1987: 132). The learner, to comprehend and produce the second language, relies on their native language, which results in the transfer of linguistic elements from the native language to the second language.

2. Intralinguistic errors: These errors are caused by the complexity of the target language, and as a result, incomplete or incorrect learning from the target language occurs. "These errors occur at a stage when the learners are beginning to learn parts of the new system, and the language transfer or generalization of the target language takes place more often at this stage" (Brown, 2000: 244).

In addition to dividing errors into interlingual and intralinguistic errors (Corder, 1981), he has also introduced ambiguous errors.

3. Ambiguous errors: From a translator's perspective, ambiguous errors are a product of both the source and target language systems. This means that such errors exist in both interlingual and intralingual contexts, and it is not possible to distinguish their origin.

2.4. Relevant Articles and Research on Japanese Language Learners' Errors

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Several studies have been conducted in the field of analyzing the errors of Japanese language learners with the use of the preposition "ni". Kubota conducted a longitudinal study on 2 beginner English native speakers and examined the use and separation of prepositions "ni" and "de". Based on its results, both learners were confused in choosing between the prepositions "ni" and "de" and as a result of this lack of recognition, they showed a tendency to overgeneralize "ni" (Kubota, 1994: 72-85). In two separate studies, Fukuma conducted a longitudinal study on the essays of 19 novice EFL learners of different nationalities (Fukuma, 1996: 61-74) and Iwasaki studied 31 native English speakers through research interviews, both of which showed similar results to Kubota's (Iwasaki, 2001: 61-66). Yagi has studied native Thai and Malay learners (Yagi, 1996: 65-81). The common point in the results of all these studies is that the highest number of errors occurred in most of the EFL learners in choosing between "ni" representing "place of presence" and "de" indicating "place of action".

Sakuda, in a research study, examined 60 intermediate-level language learners of Korean, Chinese, and other nationalities using a multiple-choice preposition test. The study found that regardless of their native language when faced with choosing between the prepositions "ni" and "de," learners tended to use "ni" with locative adverbs such as "in front of," "between," "behind," etc., and used "de" with place or building names like "Tokyo," "university," "restaurant," etc. Sakuda refers to this language learner

strategy as the "Strategy of unit formation" and believes that excessive use of this strategy can lead to errors (Sakuda, 2001: 17-22). However, some research suggests that the "unit formation strategy" does not necessarily apply to all Japanese language learners. In the case of Korean language learners, the transfer from their mother tongue is more effective than this strategy (Hasuike, 2004: 52-61). In another study, he studied a group of native speakers of English, Chinese, and Korean, and based on the results of repeated and excessive use of the letter "ni" by Korean language learners has been observed, according to him, this has occurred with the origin of interlinguas and interference of the mother tongue (Hasuike, 2007: In another study, Hasuike points out that the transfer from the mother tongue is not necessarily negative, and in some cases, positive transmission has been observed due to the similarities between the Korean and Japanese languages (Hasuike, 2012: 59-78).

2.5. Semantic Roles and Uses of the Preposition "ni"

The preposition "ni" has a wide variety of semantic roles with many uses (Ito & Fumitake, 2022: 117). Among the classifications presented, it can be said that the most comprehensive and detailed of them are the classification (Sakuma, 1979) and (National Institute for Japanese Language and Linguistics, 1971), for which 24 semantic roles, 10 main semantic roles, and 22 sub-roles have been presented, respectively. However, fewer of these roles are mentioned in educational resources for foreign language learners. In this study, after examining the educational resource used for

teaching Japanese language students at the University of Tehran, i.e., the 6-level set of "manabō nihongo", the semantic roles of the preposition "ni" were classified as Table 1.

Table 1 Semantic Roles of the Preposition "ni" in the Educational Resource "Manabō Nihongo"

	Uses	Example	English translation
1	**Indicator of changes result**	ri san wa 22sai **ni** narimashita.	Mr.Li **is now** 21 years old.
		en o doru **ni** kaete moraemasuka.	Is it possible for you to convert yen **to** dollars for me?
2	**Indicator of the timing of the action, sequence**	gogo yoji **ni** kaigi ga arimasu.	We have a meeting **at** 4 p.m.
		bangohan no mae **ni** ofuro ni hairimasu.	I take a bath before dinner.
3	**Indicator of a destination, place, or time of a situation or condition**	Lale hoteru **ni** tomatta koto ga arimasuka.	Have you ever stayed **at** the Laleh Hotel?
		ano resutoran **ni** hairimashō.	Let's go **to** that restaurant.
		kono densha **ni** norimashō.	Let's get **on** this train.
		asoko no isu **ni** suwarimasenka	Is it possible to sit **on** that seat?
4	**Indicator of the presence of living beings, the existence of material and abstract things**	teburu no ue **ni** aru keiki o moraemasuka.	Can you give me that cake **on** the table?
		hashi o wataru to migi **ni** sūpā ga arimasu.	When you cross the bridge, there is a supermarket **on** your right.
		anata wa doko **ni** sundeimasuka.	Where do you live (**in**)?
		imōto wa Osaka **ni** imasu.	My younger sister is **in** Osaka.
5	**Indicator of Target Topic**	ningen kankei **ni** nayamu.	I have problems **in** human relationships.
		yamada sano teian **ni** sansei suru.	I agree **with** Mr./Mrs. Yamada's suggestion.
6	**Indicator of Beneficiary or Recipient**	Hana san **ni** eigo o oshiete agemashita.	I taught English **to** Ms. Hannah.
		neko **ni** esa o yarimashita.	I fed (gave food **to**) the cat.
7	**Indicator of Destination**	ashita byōin **ni** ikimasu.	I will go **to** the hospital tomorrow.
		raishū tomodachi wa nihon kara iran **ni** kimasu.	My friend will be coming **to** Iran from Japan next week.

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8	**Indicator of the Opponent**	kino tomodachi **ni** aimashita.	I met (**with**) my friend yesterday.
		watashi wa kazoku **ni** tomodachi o shokai shimashita.	I introduced my friend **to** my family.
9	**Objective indicator**	ryōko **ni** iku toki nani ga irmasuka.	What is needed when going **on** a trip?
		watashi wa nihon e benkyō **ni** ikimasu.	I'm going to Japan **to** study.
10	**Indicator of the subject or the giver (of a favor, etc.)**	kanojo **ni** ryōri o tsukutte hoshi.	I want her to cook for me.
		boku wa okāsan **ni** mai tsuki 1-man en wo moratte imasu.	I receive 10,000 yen **from** my mother every month.
11	**Subject indicator in causal sentences**	musume **ni** kaji o saseta.	I made my daughter **to** do household chores.
12	**Subject indicator in passive sentences**	sensei **ni** shikararemashita.	The teacher scolded me.

As shown in the table, the equivalent of the preposition "ni" in Persian, there are 7 prepositions which are translated as "to, from, in, on, with, for" and the preposition "ra" in particular, in addition, in some cases, in the Persian equivalent of Japanese sentences, a sentence without the need for a preposition. This means that the preposition "ni" appears in different forms in Persian. These conditions can be seen in use section No. 3 in the above table. Another point about the above table is that the preposition "ni" in Japanese sentences is a final preposition in its Persian translations, except for case 11, which is equivalent to the Japanese causal sentence, and the object with "ra", which is the direct object façade, is used in the latter form, in the rest of the cases, the Persian equivalent of the preposition form has appeared.

3. Research Methodology

The statistical sample of the present study was 59 students in the 5th and 6th semesters of the Department of Japanese Language and Literature at the University of Tehran. The studies conducted in this study have been done regardless of the two variables of age and gender. The data collection tool of this study was 236 texts and essays written by language learners on different topics that were collected during 3 semesters. After a comprehensive review of the data, in the first stage, the frequency of use and the frequency of errors related to each of the semantic roles of the preposition "ni" were determined. In the next stage, the most frequent errors were extracted and classified according to their frequency. Then, in terms of the error production process, differentiation, and accurate description were performed for each of them, and finally, the

source of each error was identified. The error process of "ordering" was not used in this research due to its lack of relevance. It should be noted that in this study, only the examination and analysis of language learners' errors related to the twelve semantic roles of the preposition "ni" were considered. This selection was based on the functional roles found in the instructional resources used for University of Tehran students. Therefore, the present study is limited to analyzing only these twelve semantic roles of the preposition "ni."

4. Research Findings

Out of 236 collected texts, 986 sentences containing errors in the usage of the preposition "ni" were identified. Initially, the frequency and percentage of each semantic role's usage in the experimental writings were determined, and then the frequency and percentage of errors in each of these usages were calculated.

Table 2 The frequency of usage and error rate for the preposition "ni" by semantic roles

	Semantic role	Frequency	Frequency percentage	Frequency of errors	Frequency of errors percentage
1	**Indicator of changes result**	70	6/3	18	83/1
2	**Indicator of the timing of the action, sequence**	460	71/23	305	96/30
3	**Indicator of a destination, place, or time of a situation or condition**	236	2/12	108	98/10
4	**Indicator of the presence of living beings, the existence of material and abstract things**	321	5/16	196	99/19
5	**Indicator of Target Topic**	128	6/6	76	73/7
6	**Indicator of Beneficiary or Recipient**	69	56/3	19	93/1
7	**Indicator of Destination**	130	7/6	23	33/2
8	**Indicator of the Opponent**	211	88/10	104	67/10
9	**Objective indicator**	144	4/7	88	93/8
10	**Indicator of the subject or the giver (of a favor, etc.)**	100	15/5	21	13/2
11	**Subject indicator in causal sentences**	41	11/2	15	52/1
12	**Subject indicator in passive sentences**	30	55/1	13	32/1
Total		1940	100%	986	100%

Based on the above table, the semantic role "indicator of time and order of action" has been the most commonly used, while the 331

semantic role "indicator of the agent in passive ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~tences" has been used ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~uage learners.

23%

62%

15%

- addition
- deletion
- substitution
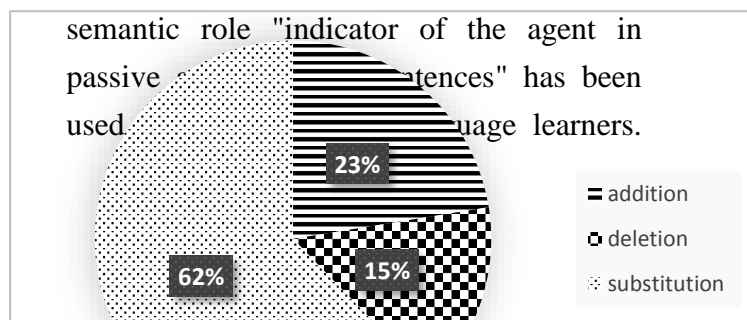
Additionally, the semantic role "indicator of time and order of action" has the highest accuracy rate at 96.30%, while the semantic role "indicator of the agent in passive sentences" has the lowest accuracy rate at 32.1%. The most frequent errors occur in the semantic roles of "indicator of time and order of action" (96.30%), "indicator of the presence of living beings, material and abstract things" (99.19%), "indicator of destination, location, or time of a situation or state" (98.10%), "indicator of the opposite party" (67.10%), "indicator of purpose" (93.8%), and "indicator of the subject under consideration" (73.7%). We will now proceed to examine the origin and type of errors in each of these semantic roles.

4.1. Errors related to the semantic role indicating the time and order of the action

In the context of this semantic role, all three types of errors, namely "addition," "deletion," and "substitution," have occurred.

Chart 1　Error Rate by Production Process

4. 1. 1 Preposition substitution

In this semantic role, except for a few scattered cases in which other letters were

used as substitutes, it can be said that due to incomplete knowledge of the grammatical rules of the target language regarding the use of prepositions, the preposition "de" was widely used as a substitute for "ni", which we will describe some examples of them below.

a. tanjōbi **de** takusan purezento o moraimashita

I received many gifts on my birthday.

b. nihonjin wa haru **de** hanami o shimasu.

Japanese people go to see cherry blossoms in spring.

c. bangohan no mae **de**, ofuro ni hairimasu.

I take a shower before dinner

d. watashi wa mai asa 7 ji **de** okimasu.

I wake up every day at 7 in the morning.

In the above examples, the preposition "de" has been mistakenly used. An exact equivalence of Japanese and Persian prepositions is not possible, but in many cases, "ni" and "de" can be roughly understood as "in" in Persian. However, these two appear in different semantic roles. Generally, "ni" is used to indicate "location, time, destination, or recipient," and its close equivalents in Persian are "be" (to), "dar" (in), "be suye" (towards), and "baraye" (for). On the other hand, "de" is used to indicate "location, means, method, or cause," and its close equivalents are "dar" (in), "ba" (with), and "be vasileye" (by means of). Specifically, names of time (such as hours, days, months, weeks, etc.) that refer to a specific time often require the preposition "ni" to specify the speaker's intended time. However, in Persian, this distinction does not exist, and the

preposition "dar" is used alongside names of time and place. It seems that language learners have been influenced by their native language and have used the preposition "de" alongside names of time; therefore, this error can be considered interlingual.

4.1.2. Adding prepositions

a. shōrai **ni** nihon no daigaku de benkyō suru tsumori desu.

I intend to study at Japanese universities in the future.

b. saikin **ni** eigo o benkyō shi hajimeta.

I have recently started learning English.

The prepositions "ni" have been mistakenly added to sentences in the sample errors of a and b. This error occurred because the language proficiency of the Japanese learner in the area of prepositions and grammatical rules is not complete. In Japanese, words like "shōrai" (future), "saikin" (recently), "ima" (now), and "itsumo" (always) are adverbs and usually have complete meaning and function in a sentence without the need for a preposition. On the other hand, time nouns (such as hours, days, months, and weeks) that refer to specific times often require the preposition "ni" to specify the exact time. This difference between time adverbs and time nouns can be confusing for learners.

In Persian, there is no clear difference between temporal adverbs and temporal nouns, and the use of prepositions is the same for both types of words. The temporal structure is directly determined by the use of special prepositions such as "in". For example, "in the future", or "next week", Persian speakers may directly translate the

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temporal structure of the Persian language into Japanese, which can lead to the incorrect use of prepositions and sentence structure. For example, "in the future" may be translated as "shōrai ni," while the correct form is "shōrai." Understanding the difference between time adverbs and temporal nouns in Japanese helps to correctly understand whether or not to use prepositions. Based on the above explanations, this error is categorized in the group of errors of ambiguous origin.

4.1.3. **Removing the preposition**

a. ano hi asa 6 ji (ni) sanpo ni dekakemashita.

That day, I went for a walk at 6 in the morning.

b. dekireba maishū kinyōbi (ni) nihono eiga o mimasu.

If possible, I watch Japanese films on Fridays.

c. watashi wa 12 gatsu 26 nichi (ni) inaka e karu tsumori desu.

I am planning to return to our city on March 17.

d. maiban neru mae (ni) shawā o abite ha o migakimasu.

I am planning to return to our city on March 17.

Based on the examples above, it is evident that in all Japanese sentences produced by the learner, after the time expressions "6 ji" (6 o'clock), "kinyōbi" (Fridays), "12 gatsu 26 nichi" (26th of December), and "mae" (before), the preposition "ni" has been omitted. Considering the translations of these sentences, it becomes clear that the equivalent preposition in Persian has not

been used, and the learner has deleted the preposition "ni" by referring to their native language. Since the origin of this error lies in the structural differences between Persian and Japanese, it falls into the category of interlanguage errors.

4. 2. Errors related to semantic role indicate the presence of organisms, the existence of material and abstract things

Concerning this semantic role, all errors have occurred in the form of substitution. Except for sporadic instances where additional diacritics were used, the most frequent error was the substitution of "de" instead of "ni."

4.2.1. **Substitution of "de" for "ni"**

About the semantic role of "indicator of the presence and existence of living beings and material and abstract things," Sakuda believes that Japanese language learners, regardless of their native language, tend to use the preposition "de" instead of "ni" in situations where referring to the "name of a region or neighborhood" or a "building or structure" (Sakuda, 2001: 52-61). This means that learners, regardless of their native language, according to his interpretation of the "unit formation strategy," use the combination of "name of region or building + de." Analysis of errors related to this semantic role also confirms Sakuda's observations regarding Persian speakers. In the writings of Persian speakers, this role was used 321 times, and in all cases, the error of substituting "de" occurred. In addition to the cases mentioned by Sakuda, Persian speakers have also used "de" with Japanese locational

adverbs and directions that are typically accompanied by "ni." For instance:

a. michi o wataru to, migi de ginkō ga arimasu.

If you cross the street, the bank is on your right.

b. nihon de yon shurui no kekkonshiki ga arimasu.

There are 4 types of marriage ceremonies in Japan.

c. kurasu de chūgoku jin no gakusei ga 3 nin imasu.

There are three Chinese students in the class.

d. keikaku de ikutsuka no mondai ga arimashita.

There are a few drawbacks to the plan.

In the Persian translation of all the above sentences, the preposition "dar" has been used consistently. "dar" has meanings such as "inside," "access," "limited spatial cluster," "limited temporal cluster," and "size cluster" (Rasekh-Mehmand and Zarabi, 2013: 95-111). This means that in Persian, the preposition "dar" is used to indicate spatial capacity. It appears that language learners have considered the preposition "de" as the equivalent of "در" in Persian and have used it based on their native language. Additionally, similar uses of the prepositions "ni" and "de" can also be another factor in errors occurring. Another semantic role of "de" is as an indicator of a specific domain or range. This semantic role signifies a limited and specific space that encompasses the entire movement (Teramura, 1982). However, in the case of "ni," with its semantic role indicating the presence of living beings, the existence of material and abstract things, "ni" denotes

presence or stability in a particular location and, like "de," does not encompass a spatial boundary for doing things or taking actions (Morita, 1989). From Morita's perspective, "de" conveys the meaning of "within a boundary" or "within those limits" in various contexts such as quantity, time, verb tense, behavior, location, individuals, and objects. In this sense, "de" does not merely refer to a specific place but rather signifies the concept of spatial "limit" and "boundary" that encompasses the entire movement. This boundary includes the origin, path, and destination of the movement. Based on the mentioned error examples, it appears that the language learner has been unaware of this difference and has consistently used the preposition "de" instead of "ni." Therefore, it can be said that besides the negative influence of their native language, the structural complexities of the target language and the learner's unfamiliarity with the meanings of Japanese prepositions have led to such an error. Consequently, this mistake falls into the category of ambiguous errors.

4.3. Errors associated with the semantic role indicating the destination, place, or time of a situation or state

After examining the errors related to this semantic role, it was found that all the errors were substitutions. The highest frequency of errors was related to the substitution of the prepositions "de", "o", and "e" with "ni".
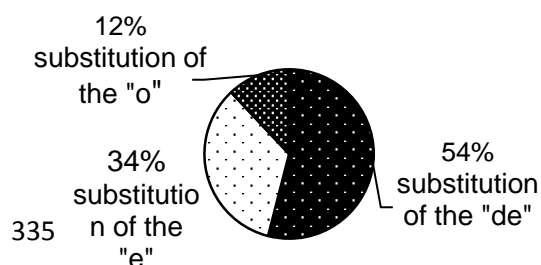

12%
substitution of the "o"

34% substitution of the "e"

54% substitution of the "de"

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Chart 2 Frequency of substitutions of the prepositions "de", "e", "o" for "ni"

4.3.1. substitution of "de" for "ni"

As evident in the mentioned chart, the preposition "de" has been used more frequently as a replacement in learners' sentences, with an error rate of 54%, surpassing other letters.

a. sono hoteru de isshukan gurai tomarimashita.

We stayed in that hotel for about a week.

b. watashino kazoku wa irano kita de sundeimasu.

My family lives in the north of Iran.

In the above sentences, the language learner has used "de" instead of the preposition "ni." Both "ni" and "de" have multiple meanings and sometimes similar roles. One of the main functions of "de" is to indicate "a place where a specific action or activity takes place." For instance, in the sentence below:

. toshokan **de** hon o yomimasu.

. I'm reading a book in the library.

The particle "de" indicates that the action of "reading a book" is taking place in the library. However, in the error examples a and b, the verbs "tomarimasu" (to stay) and "sundeimasu" (to live) are mistakenly treated as states or conditions rather than activities. Therefore, using the preposition "de" with such sentences is incorrect. It appears that

these verbs are perceived by language learners as actions, resulting in incorrect sentence construction. Learners, when they should use "ni," are influenced by the action or movement expressed by the verb and mistakenly use "de" (Suzuki, 1978: 1-14). The origin of these errors lies in intra-linguistic factors and incomplete awareness of the grammatical rules of the target language regarding the use of prepositions.

4.3.2. **substitution of "e" for "ni"**

a. okurete eki e tsukimashita.

I arrived at the train station late.

b. ano resutoran e hairimashō.

Let's go to that restaurant. (Direct translation: Let's get into that restaurant)

In the mentioned examples, the preposition "e" has been used instead of "ni." One of the uses of the preposition "ni" is to indicate a specific destination or location that a person is going to, whereas the preposition "e" is another Japanese preposition used to indicate a general direction or route, with less emphasis on the final destination. This difference is demonstrated in the following sentences.

c. kare wa Tokyo ni ikimasu.

He is going to Tokyo.

d. kare wa Tokyo e ikimasu.

He is going towards Tokyo.

In some cases, the difference between these two prepositions may be unclear for language learners and may result in the production of sentences like "a" and "b." On the other hand, both prepositions have different meanings in Japanese, whereas in Persian, a single preposition, namely "be" is used for this purpose. The lack of this semantic distinction for Persian speakers, who are not accustomed to such precise differentiation in their language, may pose a challenge. Therefore, such errors can also be attributed to ambiguous origins.

4.3.3. **substitution of "o" for "ni"**

a. tsugino densha **o** norimashō.

Let's board the next train.

b. ano kissaten **o** hairimashō.

Let's go to that coffee shop. (Direct translation: Let's enter that coffee shop)

The two sentences above are grammatically incorrect in Japanese. In Japanese, verbs in these sentences, namely "norimasu" and "hairimasu," should be used with the preposition "ni." The difference in grammatical structure between Persian and Japanese may be one of the reasons for such errors. In Persian, the preposition "ra" is commonly used to indicate the direct object, whereas in Japanese, various prepositions are used with different verbs. It appears that the language learner, due to familiarity with the structures of their native language, has mistakenly applied the same structures in Japanese. Therefore, this error can be classified as an interlanguage error.

4.4. **Errors related to the semantic role of the Opponent**

In the context of this role, errors of the "substitution" type have also occurred; the frequency of using each of these substitutions of the prepositions is shown in the chart below.
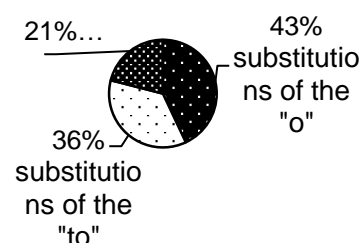

21%…

43% substitutions of the "o"

36% substitutions of the "to"

Chart 3   Frequency of substitutions of the prepositions "de", "e", "o" for "ni"

4.4.1.   **Substitutions of the "o" for "ni"**

a. neko ga watashi **o** kamitsuita.

A cat bit me

b. shōgakkō no sensei **o** atta toki, namida o nagashita.

I cried when I saw my elementary school teacher.

In Japanese, verbs like "hantai suru" (to oppose), "kamitsuku" (to gasp), "butsukaru" (to collide, to bump into), "fureru" (to touch), "au" (to meet), "koi suru" (to fall in love), etc., when used as statements indicating an action performed by the subject towards "someone or the opposite party," are accompanied by the preposition "ni." However, in the above examples, due to the learner's lack of awareness, the preposition "o" has been used with the verbs "kamitsuku" and "au." On the other hand, in the Persian translation of these sentences, the preposition "ra" (equivalent to "o" in Japanese) has been used, suggesting that the learner may have replaced "o" with it based on their native language. This error could have an ambiguous origin.

4. 4. 2. Substitution of "to" for "ni"

a. mukashi, toshi ue no hito **to** hanashi kakeru toki mesen o awasenakatta.

In the past, when speaking to elders, they would not directly look into their eyes.

b. oya **to** hankō suru.

I disagree with my parents.

c. hito **to** yasashiku suru koto ha atarimae da to omou.

I think it's natural to be kind to others.

In the above examples, the preposition "to" has been used as a substitute for "ni." "To" is also one of the Japanese prepositions that have multiple semantic roles. One of its meanings is as a "marker of participation in an interaction." In this sense, if the verb in the sentence is reciprocal or mutual, the counterpart who is indispensable for the realization of that action is accompanied by the preposition "to." For instance, in the sentence below:

. Watashi wa itsuka kanojo **to** kekkon suru.

I will marry her soon.

For the verb "kekkon suru" which means "to marry", the existence of the other person, i.e., "he", is necessary, which is accompanied by the preposition "to". However, if a verb that expresses an action performed by the subject towards "an individual or the other party" appears, that "person or another party" is accompanied by the preposition "ni". Due to the similarity and proximity of these two semantic roles, it is sometimes difficult for learners to distinguish and distinguish their use and use interchangeably. Since the transfer and generalization occurred within the target language, this error is classified in the group of intralinguistic errors.

4.4.3. Substitution of "ga" for "ni"

a. watashi wa kazoku **ga** gakkō no tomodachi o shōkai shimashita.

I introduced my school friend to my family.

b. shōrai,watashi wa sabishikute binbōna hito **ga** tsukaeru tsumori desu.

I intend to serve poor and lonely individuals in the future.

In the examples above, the preposition "ga" has replaced "ni." Perhaps it can be said that the reason for such an error arises from the overlap and generalization of sentences with two subjects in Japanese. In Japanese, sentences with two subjects or entities, known as "nijūshugo," have a specific grammatical structure in which two specific subjects appear, primarily in the form of "X wa Y ga Z" (Sunaga, 2006). X and Y are respectively the first and second subjects or entities; wa and ga are the accompanying particles, and Z is the predicate of the sentence. Sonaga provides the following example for this formula.

. ano haiyu **wa** chichioya **ga** sōridaijin da.

That actor's father is the prime minister.

In such sentences, the first entity is followed by the preposition "wa" and the second entity is followed by the preposition "ga." In the error examples (a and b), the learner mistakenly chose the preposition "ga" by generalizing this structure. However, in these examples, "kazoku" and "hito" are not in the role of the second entity in the sentence, but rather in the role of "the other person or counterpart," towards whom the action is performed by the subject. Therefore, they should be accompanied by the preposition "ni." Based on this, errors of this kind fall into the category of intralinguistic errors.

4.5. Errors related to the semantic role of the Objective

All errors related to this function have also been of the substitution type, and the highest level of error is related to the use of the preposition "e" instead of "ni."
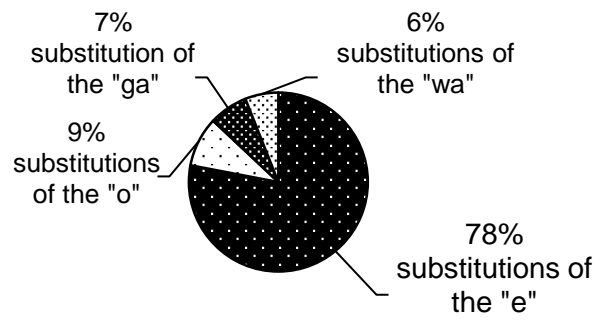

Chart 4 Frequency of substitutions of the preposition "e" and other prepositions for "ni"

4.5.1.   Substitutions of "e" for "ni"

a. ryokō **e** iku toki, nani ga irimasuka.

What things are needed when traveling?

b. kaimono **e** iku toki nuno bukoro o motte ikimasu.

When I go shopping, I bring a cloth bag (Tote bag) with me.

In sentences, such as the examples above, when motion verbs like "iku" (to go), "kuru" (to come), etc. are used, the nominalizer ("ryokō" for travel, "kaimono" for shopping) indicating the "destination of movement" is followed by the preposition "ni." However, learners mistakenly use the preposition "e" along with the nominalizer indicating the "destination of movement." The likely reason for this error is the similarity in meaning between the semantic role of "ni" and the preposition "e." One of the semantic roles of "e" is as a "direction marker." For example:

. kikai ga areba zehi uchi e irashatte kudasai.

If you have the opportunity, please do visit our home.

Since "uchi" (home) indicates "direction of movement" rather than "destination of movement," it is used with the preposition "e." Therefore, such an error is intrinsic to the language and is related to the structural complexities of the target language and the learner's lack of precise familiarity with the meanings of Japanese prepositions, which has led to an inability to use these linguistic elements appropriately in suitable contexts.

4.6. Errors related to the semantic role of the subject

In the context of this role, errors of the "substitution" type have also occurred; the frequency of using substitute letters is shown in the chart below.

Chart 5 **Frequency of substitutions of the preposition "de","o","to" for "ni"**

4.6.1. Substitutions of "e" for "ni"

a. nyūgakushiken de gōkaku shita toki, chichi ni piano o katte moratta.

When I got accepted in the entrance exam (university), my father bought me a piano.

b. nihongo no benron taikai de sanka suru tsumori desu.

I intend to participate in the Japanese language speech competition.

Used the preposition "de," which is roughly equivalent to "dar" in Persian which

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is equal to the preposition "in" in English. In Persian, "dar" is used to express participation in an event or activity, and the student may incorrectly assume that they can also use "in" in Japanese to express participation in an event. In Persian, "dar" can be used with a location, time, or situation, and the student has mistakenly applied Japanese prepositions similarly, while in Japanese, prepositions have specific semantic roles and cannot easily be substituted for one another. Generalizing the structural rules of one's native language can lead to incorrect use of Japanese prepositions; hence, the origin of this interlanguage error.

4.6.2. Substitutions of "o" for "ni"

a. watashi wa ano teian **o** sansei shita.

I agreed with that suggestion.

b. sono toki takusan no mondai **o** chokumen shita.

I faced many difficulties at that time.

In the above examples, the preposition "o" has been replaced with "ni". In these sentences, "teian" (suggestion) and "mondai" (problems) are indirect objects. In Japanese, the direct object is usually marked with the preposition "o" and the indirect object with "ni". "Ni" indicates that the verb is related to or affects the indirect object in some way. It appears that the learner has mistakenly used "o" for these words as direct objects due to incomplete knowledge of the target language's grammatical rules regarding the use and distinction of prepositions. This error falls into the category of intralingual errors.

4.6.3. Substitutions of "to" for "ni"

a. oya wa gaikoku de benkyō suru koto **to** hantai desu.

My parents are opposed to studying abroad.

b. konnan **to** tachiau toki, haha ni sōdan shimasu.

When I have a problem, I consult my mother.

In these examples, the preposition "o" has been mistakenly used in Japanese sentences. It is likely that the language learner, through literal translation, has concluded that the Japanese preposition "o" (which is roughly equivalent to the Persian preposition "ba") should be used. These errors, influenced by the native language and incomplete knowledge of the grammatical rules of the target language, fall into the category of interlanguage errors.

5. Conclusion

In this research, errors made by Iranian learners of Japanese regarding the usage of the preposition "ni" in Japanese were examined. Initially, written texts of language learners were collected. In the next stage, errors related to the preposition "ni" were extracted and analyzed. After analyzing the data, the percentage of occurrence for each type of error and their frequency were calculated based on the mentioned categories. Considering the collected data and relying on the results of statistical analyses, it was determined that out of the fourteen identified error groups, five were of "interlanguage" origin, five were of "intralingual" origin, and four were "ambiguous. "Furthermore, the main reason for errors in the production process has predominantly been of the "substitution"

type; except for the semantic role of "indicating time and order of action," where all three types of errors were observed, in other roles, only "substitution" errors occurred. The findings of this study lead us to the conclusion that both "linguistic interference" and "intra-lingual" errors play a similar role in the occurrence of errors related to the preposition "ni."

Based on the mentioned results, it is possible to identify challenges for language learners and devise solutions to address and improve them. Accordingly, to rectify these errors, it is expected that a review of how prepositions, especially the preposition "ni," are taught should be undertaken. Suitable exercises and classroom activities should be designed. Additionally, when teaching a preposition, all its meanings should be explained to students, along with providing examples for each semantic nuance. Furthermore, the differentiation of this preposition from similar ones and its distinct functions in the native language should also be explained. Moreover, evaluating the usage of these prepositions periodically by language learners can effectively identify their weaknesses and contribute to facilitating learning and preventing errors in this area.

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