

A INFLUÊNCIA DO ESPANHOL NA APRENDIZAGEM DO INGLÊS EM ESTUDANTES DE EDUCAÇÃO SECUNDÁRIA

LA INFLUENCIA DEL ESPAÑOL EN EL APRENDIZAJE DE INGLÉS EN ESTUDIANTES DE EDUCACIÓN SECUNDARIA

THE INFLUENCE OF THE SPANISH LANGUAGE IN THE LEARNING OF ENGLISH FOR SECONDARY EDUCATION STUDENTS

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RESUMO: Este trabalho se centra na influência linguística que existe no ensino e aprendizagem das línguas estrangeiras. Nele se trata o efeito que a língua materna (L1) tem na L2. As línguas que foram propostas são o espanhol como língua materna e o inglês como L2. Depois de uma investigação sobre alguns dos fenômenos linguísticos que apareceram, devido à influência, se realizou um questionário para levar a cabo uma análise de erros. Graças aos erros encontrados, se pretendeu que o estudante e o professor tenham consciência sobre tal fenômeno e entender que existe uma transferência negativa que deve ser solucionada. Com isso, só se foram obtidos e analisados algumas mostras léxico-morfológicas e erros gramaticais como uma primeira aproximação sobre o assunto. Os resultados obtidos mostram que a influência e transferência são aspetos de grande importância na aprendizagem de segundas línguas e, já seja positivo o negativo, o professor deve ter em conta a forma de se beneficiar ou fazer frente.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Influência linguística. Transferência linguística. Análise de erros. Comparação linguística. Inglês como língua estrangeira (EFL).

RESUMEN: Este trabajo se centra en la influencia lingüística que existe en la enseñanza y aprendizaje de las lenguas extranjeras. En él se trata el efecto que la lengua materna (L1) tiene sobre la L2. Los idiomas que hemos propuesto son el español como lengua materna y el inglés como L2. Después de una investigación sobre algunos de los fenómenos lingüísticos que aparecen debido a la influencia, se ha realizado un cuestionario con el que se ha llevado a cabo un análisis de errores. Gracias a los errores encontrados, se pretende que el estudiante y el profesor se den cuenta de dicho fenómeno y entender que existe una transferencia negativa que debe ser resuelta. Con ello, solo se han obtenido y analizado muestras léxico-morfológicas y errores gramaticales como una primera aproximación sobre el asunto. Los resultados obtenidos nos muestran que la influencia y transferencia son dos aspectos de gran importancia en el aprendizaje de segundas lenguas y, ya sea positivo o negativo, el docente debe tener en cuenta la forma de beneficiarse o hacerle frente.

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PALABRAS CLAVE: *Influencia lingüística. Transferencia lingüística. Análisis de errores. Comparación lingüística. Inglés como lengua extranjera (EFL).*

ABSTRACT: *This dissertation concentrates on the linguistic influences that exist in the teaching, learning and acquisition of second languages. It gives an account about the effect that the native tongue (L1) has on the L2. The languages we have used for this purpose are Spanish as the mother tongue and English as the L2. After an investigation about some of the linguistic phenomenon that appear in this influence, a questionnaire aimed to get an error analysis takes place. Those errors have been treated to make the reader realise and understand that a negative transfer exists and it must be solved. Only lexico-morphological and grammatical samples and errors have been dealt with as a first approximation about the matter. The obtained outcomes show that influence and transference are two aspects of high importance in the learning of second languages and, either positive or negative, the teacher must be aware of how to benefit or cope with them.*

KEYWORDS: *Language influence. Linguistic transference. Error analysis. Cross-linguistic studies. English as a second language (EFL).*

Introduction

In this research we have tried to analyse one of the most important factors within the learning and acquisition of foreign and modern languages: the influence of the mother tongue or L1 when acquiring any L2. For this paper, we have focused our attention on Spanish as the L1 and English as the foreign language to learn.

The purpose we had in mind was to look over the primary bibliography about the topic, so as to understand them and to see how teachers and experts tackled with it. After carrying our own study and results out, we checked some other factors that we could perceive by the linguistic interference and how we might solve these errors.

To prove this, we have previously taken some data from the time that I was undertaking a teacher training period in the Spanish high school “IES Ramon Muntaner” in Xirivella, from January 2016 to March in the same year, mainly with students from 2nd of ESO (around 13 years old).

The first thing that needed to be said was to underline the choice of this topic, as it was originally based on personal and academic interests. In some previous works and dissertations, I centred my attention to study the topic of the *Spanglish* in the USA, and

how those Spanish native speakers (in most of the cases), mixed both languages specially when acquiring the new language.

Objectives and Hypothesis

Learning a language can be motivating, essential, necessary, useful, stimulating and with this it should be stressed out that all the learners have different motivations, expectations and results towards it. Those factors can influence the whole acquisition process and mastering in a better or worse level.

Notwithstanding, in this essay we were mainly concerned in giving a detailed account of a factor that is unavoidable to any second language learner, and it is, the interference and influence that the mother tongue (L1) has on the learning and acquisition of the L2, mainly from Spanish as the L1 and English as the L2.

We have reflected in which ways this factor happens, especially in the Spanish students when learning English, chiefly in grammar and vocabulary, although we will show some phonetic descriptions and pragmatic issues.

We have scrutinised on the literature the factors that have interested us in a more shocking way and checked their veracity, by taking data and real examples from our students.

Another essential objective is, on the one hand, knowing to what extent this influence and interference helps the students, or if, on the other hand, turning to the L1 delays all the learning process.

The final goal in this investigation is doing an analysis of errors, and once we know all the errors, being aware of how the teacher could make profit and benefit from all those situations.

With this, a first hypothesis was to demonstrate how the learners (especially those in a Spanish setting) tend always to look for the recurrence in the L1 in front of any doubt, false friend, grammatical concept (in our case in English). In some cases, such influences or interferences will help them solving their problems by understanding certain lexicon if it bears resemblance to Spanish, but in other cases, this resemblance will complicate it.

We must be aware that errors are something to underline rather than ignoring them. As Corder said: “los errores son elementos valiosos para el alumno, el profesor, y,

especialmente, para el investigador por la información que proporcionan sobre el proceso de aprendizaje” (apud MUÑOZ, 1992, p. 31).

Theoretical background

According to Skinner, “los errores son entendidos como viejos hábitos adquiridos en el proceso del aprendizaje de la L1 y que aparecen en la L2” (apud HURTADO, 1992, p. 189). For them, errors were something to avoid, while in Chomsky errors were something natural. Notwithstanding, Skinner considered that this interference (within the behaviourism) could be negative, giving place to several mistakes: There is kids* (*hay niños*) or either positive or errorless: he is a teacher (*él es un profesor*).

With it, it had to be emphasized the history of this interference in errors, in terms of what the literature has said. The notion we were dealing with in this essay, the interference, could also have different terms. According to Ramón (2009. p. 147): “language mixing (SELINKER, 1972; KELLERMAN, 1983), linguistic interference (SCHACHTER; RUTHERFORD, 1979; RINGBOM, 1987), language transfer (LADO, 1957; SELINKER, 1972; KELLERMAN, 1983; ODLIN, 1989), the role of the mother tongue and native language influence (MASTER, 1987; MESTHRIE; DUNNE, 1990; JARVIS, 2000)”. Despite the bunch of terms that have been coined, we primarily referred to this notion with the concepts of interference and influence.

On the one hand, by interlanguage, we understand it as “la lengua empleada por el estudiante, sin ser su lengua materna ni la lengua que está aprendiendo, sino algo intermedio, es un código lingüístico que le sirve para conseguir sus objetivos comunicativos” (SANTOS, 1993, p. 126). Nevertheless, this interlanguage could be beneficial or negative, as “the most interesting phenomena in interlanguage performance are those items, rules and subsystems which are fossilisable. [...] It can be experimentally demonstrated that fossilisable items, rules, and subsystems which occur in interlanguage performance are a result of the native language, we are dealing with the process of language transfer” (RAMON, 2009, p. 151).

A problem that is often debated nowadays is that this interlanguage might have a devastating negative effect and it is that, if the learner assimilates a certain rule, item or word, which belongs to the interlanguage, *ergo* it is bad, he or she could fossilise it and

this would become available within his linguistic repertoire. As a result, the students and the teacher must try to eradicate those errors that tend to be commonly assimilated.

On the other hand, altogether with the interlanguage, comes the language transfer or transference. By transference we understood the process of transferring or taking some linguistic knowledge, expression, rules, lexicon from the L1 to the L2.

According to Selinker, he asserted in 1972 that “existían cinco procesos cruciales en el aprendizaje de una segunda lengua (transferencia de la lengua materna, transferencia en la instrucción, estrategias de aprendizaje, estrategias de comunicación y generalización excesiva de las estructuras de la segunda lengua)” (PAVÓN, 2001, p. 227-228).

In words of Brière (1968, p. 60), he considered that, similar to the interlanguage, there were two kinds of transference, positive and negative. For example, according to him, all the phonological or sound errors were made due to the negative transference. But all those correct answers common in resemblance, would facilitate the learning: líquido/liquid.

Thirdly, to understand our research, we must highlight the concepts of contrastive and error analysis. For the great majority of people, contrastive analysis aimed to study a pair of languages so as to find their structural similarities or differences. It has had a notable role in the SLA, as it enabled us to know which features of the target language were common or different to our native tongue and took profit of it by acknowledging the errors and strengthening the common points.

Thus, within the contrastive analysis, we would encounter ourselves with the error analysis which means analysing the errors found in the acquisition and learning process due to the contrastive analysis. Not only did we consider important collecting data and error's data from the students, but also it was something really useful for them to see and check their improvement and realise those negative aspects to change and avoid fossilisation.

Consequently, the comparison between the L1–L2 produced the identification of errors, differences, and similarities. By this, we meant contrastive analysis.

The Spanish linguist and teacher, Hurtado (1992, p. 190-191), gave an interesting procedure to carry this analysis out in any languages: description of both languages, selection of the elements to study, comparison between both languages and the prediction about what is going to happen.

Methodology & Corpus

In this action-research dissertation we kept in mind to recollect as much data as possible; we thought that it would be a brilliant idea to take profit from the teacher training period in the secondary school IES Ramón Muntaner de Xirivella in Valencia (Spain). In there, we created a questionnaire to students in 2nd of ESO (13-15 years old) in order to get information about their social and cultural background (age, nationality, mother-tongue, interests, etc.). The second part of it consisted on some activities about the story of an alien who only speaks Spanish, facing some linguistic problems such as false friends, translation, etc.

Few will dispute the claim that a questionnaire is something really useful to obtain such data for a Corpus; therefore, in the second part of it, the students were to answer some questions and translate some parts. It is undoubtedly true that translation has an important role in our matter. As pointed out in Pennock and Santaemilia (1992, p. 475) “la traducció pot construir un mètode molt útil de revisar el material lingüístic, hi ha d’altres papers que hi pot jugar i d’altres necessitats que pot satisfer” and also, by the same authors, some next lines state that there is “l’enorme influència de la llengua materna en l’alumne i la necessitat de contrastar estructures de la nostra llengua i de l’estrangera”.

Notwithstanding, we could have been carrying out more surveys with translation inside the classroom, but we found important not to do it as “la utilització constant de la traducció dins de la classe comportaria un perill: la substitució de la llengua estrangera per la nostra, la ‘necessitat’ constant de recórrer a la nostra llengua per a encarar l’altra, la qual cosa resultaria contraproductiu” (PENNOCK; SANTAEMILIA, 1992, p. 478).

An additional fact was that the story to translate was more informal and funny, being applicable to a real situation where they have to help someone or translate some street signs, etc. We believed that this was more interesting than classical translations of isolated sentences with no relationship at all to the real life or a realistic context.

Consequently, in the following lines we will take a look at the two pages’ questionnaire created for the 2nd of ESO class, so as to see its content, activities and images.

The data we collected was principally aimed to cope with the error analysis, as we only got those words or samples that contained errors, which would facilitate us the work and made everything much more visual.

This six-questions questionnaire was designed to make the classroom more pleasant, again, in a real context with possible questions to years 13-15 students. This is the reason why the design could seem more childish and the story had an alien as the main protagonist:

Questionnaire

1) **Could you tell me your nationality, age and school year? (Spanish, French...):**

E.G.: I am Spanish, I am fifteen years old and I am in 1st of ESO.

2) **Which is your favourite subject? Why?**

3) **How many lessons of English do you have per week?**

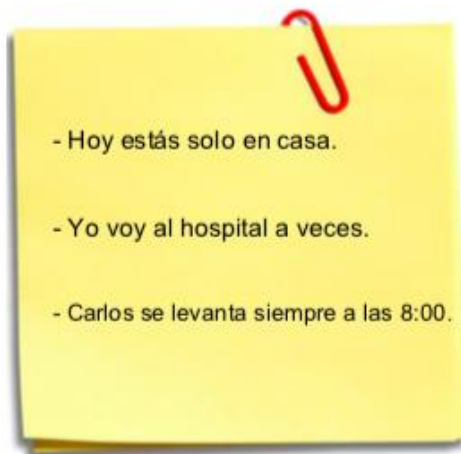
4) **Which languages do you speak? Are you learning another second language? Where?**

5) **Can you say what you find easier and more difficult in English?**

E.G.: I love learning new vocabulary but I think that grammar is very difficult.

6) **In this text, there is the story of an alien. Can you complete it filling the gaps?**

E.T. is an alien who is new in the Earth and he has only learnt Spanish. He does not know anything of English and he needs your help. **Can you help him?** ☺
_____. He lives in a house with the Pérez family, and the mother left a note in the morning, but he can't understand it. **Can you help the alien and translate all?**



There is another problem. Our alien is really hungry but he doesn't have money. The mother left some under the carpet. **But, what is a carpet?** _____.

Now that he has found the money, he wants to read some books, but he doesn't know what a library is. **Do you know the word for it in Spanish?** _____.

He has enjoyed the books! But he is still hungry. The alien says that he can only eat vegetables, and he asks in a restaurant if they have some tomatoes, potatoes, etc. But the waiter answered him:



What does it mean? Can you translate everything into Spanish?

Finally, he decides to go home again, and he sees a signal of two dogs, that seems very dangerous... **Can you tell him what does it say in English?**



Again, it was crucial to give a reason why we decided to create such a funny and enjoyable questionnaire, as motivation in learning and doing activities is an undeniable point in education.

This statement merits closer examination. In words of Dörnyei, we must “make the teaching materials relevant to the learners. One of the most demotivating factors for

learners is to have to learn something that has no apparent relevance to their lives” (2014, p. 526).

For this dissertation we have only paid attention to those linguistic units which were merely lexicological, morphological and syntactic, due to restrictions in the length limitation of it. Finally, our last goal was to create some lexicographical charts about the most usual errors they have made in the questionnaire.

All of them shared the same structure as the one that follows and they will be appearing according their type of phenomenon:

Sample	Only
Context	“Hoy estás solo en casa – Today you are only in the house”.
Kind of word - Type of phenomenon	Adverb.
Type of phenomenon	Equivalent.
Observations	In Spanish there is one word (solo) for the adverb and the adjective while in English we find “alone” (adj., with no one) and “only” (adv., simply, barely). The error was made as the students did not know the form ‘alone’ yet and did not know this difference in English.

First, we find the word or collocation within its context in the questionnaire’s story. We would locate each item within its linguistic category: verb, adjective, noun, adverb, collocation, etc. Later, we considered that it would be useful relating each phenomenon within the classification made by Hurtado (1992, p. 190-191) and Rizzo and Villafane (1975, p. 62-70).

Finally, we tried to give reasons about why a certain phenomenon had happened, if it could be beneficial or negative for the student, the resemblance to Spanish, and some other interesting facts about them, etc.

Outcomes from the questionnaire

In this part of the essay we have come to consider that it was a very good point to give details of all the samples we have obtained from the high school questionnaires.

Before going in depth with the linguistic questions, it was necessary to say that in this 2nd of ESO class, a number of 18 students completed the questionnaire (in a class of 20) and there were students from different nationalities.

In the class, the majority was Spanish (11 students), there was a Chinese student, two students from Pakistan, an Indian student, a Moroccan student, and two Spanish speakers from Ecuador and Colombia.

As a result, the mother tongues we found in this class of 2nd of ESO were: Valencian (Catalan), Spanish, Mandarin Chinese, Urdu, Arabic (Moroccan dialect and Arabic dialect) and Punjabi. Furthermore, all of them had a good level in the Spanish language and had no difficulties in writing it or speaking it. They had three lessons of English per week (a total of three hours) and they seemed to enjoy and like the subject.

For them, the most difficult aspects of English language were the speaking/oral expression and the grammar, but the easiest ones to remember were the vocabulary, mainly when there were similar words in Spanish.

Thus, after scrutinising the answers from the questionnaire, we might conclude that there were four of the most striking features of this influence and interference in the error analysis of our students. Those four features were the ones that we have only paid attention in a higher level and those we have decided to focus on: spelling problems, language equivalents, false friends (difference in the semantic field) and syntactic order:

1) Spelling problems:

Firstly, we analysed some samples that contain errors made by the spelling. In this part, we faced some mistakes made by the influence in the Spanish language spelling that had affected, negatively, the learning and acquisition of the English language:

Sample	Difficult (for Difficult)
Context	“The easier is the colours and the <i>difficult</i> is the irregular verbs”.
Kind of word	Adjective.
Type of phenomenon	Spelling problem.
Observations	The resemblance in the word to the Spanish equivalent is obvious, but in Spanish it contains only an <i>f</i> .

Sample	<i>Etics (for Ethics)</i>
Context	“Which is your favourite subject? <i>Etics</i> , it’s fine”.
Kind of word	Noun.
Type of phenomenon	Spelling problem
Observations	The error is due to the resemblance in Spanish “ <i>ética</i> ”, but in English there is an extra <i>h</i> in the spelling: ethic/s .

2) Language equivalents:

A language equivalent is a word which has more than one equivalent word in another language. It is, while in Spanish, for example, there is only one form for a certain word, there can be more than one in the English language, or vice-versa:

Sample	For
Context	“I have English three days for week”.
Kind of word - Type of phenomenon	Preposition.
Type of phenomenon	Equivalent
Observations	In this example, the student has come up with a problem in meaning and translation. If we translate this sentence into Spanish, it would be something like: “(Yo) tengo ingles tres veces por semana. The preposition <i>por</i> in Spanish can have, mainly, three equivalents in English: <i>per</i> , <i>for</i> , <i>by</i> and in some cases <i>a</i> . Our student could have misinterpreted the meaning or have thought a sentence where he uses the Spanish <i>por</i> : “This is for you”, where in this case, <i>por</i> is <i>for</i> .”

Sample	Only
Context	“Hoy estás solo en casa – Today you are only in the house”.
Kind of word - Type of phenomenon	Adverb.
Type of phenomenon	Equivalent
Observations	In Spanish there is one word (solo) for the adverb and the adjective while in English we find “alone” (adj., with no one) and “only” (adv., simply, barely). The error was made as the students did not know the form ‘alone’ yet and did not know this difference in English.

3) *False friends:*

False friends are words in two or more languages that are similar in structure and sound, but they convey a totally different meaning. Some examples between Spanish and English could be: terrorífico/terrifying, inédito/unedited, estrechar/stretch, etc.

In our questionnaire we added plenty of false friends to check how our students coped with them:

Sample	Actually as Actualmente
Context	“Lo siento señor, actualmente no tenemos vegetales en este restaurante”.
Kind of word	Adverb.
Type of phenomenon	Differences in the semantic field or “False friends”
Observations	By intuition and resemblance, the student thought that <i>actual</i> means in Spanish “ <i>actual</i> ” and the suffix <i>-ly</i> (-mente) lead him guess that actually is <i>actualmente</i> .

Sample	<i>Vegetales as Vegetables</i>
Context	“I’m sorry mister; actually we don’t have vegetables in this restaurant / Lo siento señor, actualmente nosotros no tenemos vegetales en este restaurante”.
Kind of word	Noun.
Type of phenomenon	Differences in the semantic field or “False friends”.
Observations	In this case we face another mistake made by the similitude between English and Spanish. Vegetables sound more similar to <i>vegetal(es)</i> rather than the correct translation for this sample: <i>verduras</i> .

4) Syntactic order:

Each language has its own syntactic order and rules, and they may be similar or not to other languages. In English, for example, it is obligatory to add a subject in a sentence whilst in Spanish it isn’t (in some sentences). At the same time, the adjective order is slightly different in those two languages, etc.:

Sample	<i>Dogs dangerous</i>
Context	“¡Atención! Perros peligrosos / Stop! Dogs dangerous”.
Kind of word	Adjective.
Type of phenomenon	Syntactic order
Observations	In English, the adjective must be placed before the noun: dangerous dogs. Notwithstanding, it is usual in Spanish to place it after the noun: <i>perros peligrosos</i> .

Sample	Sometimes
Context	“Yo voy al hospital a veces – I go sometimes to the hospital / I go to the hospital sometimes”.
Kind of word	Adverb.
Type of phenomenon	Syntactic order
Observations	It is acceptable in Spanish to place the adverb before or after the verb: <i>Yo voy a veces al hospital / A veces voy al hospital</i> . The problem comes up when the Spanish learner thinks it is possible in English, but it is unacceptable.

Conclusion

As we been able to experience, we have made the case of proving to what extent existed an influence of the Spanish language (within a Spanish teaching setting) in the learning and acquisition of English as the foreign language. Our results have indicated that the transference and the interlanguage are important and real aspects in the learning process and acquisition of, not only English, but any Second Language.

The most satisfactory conclusion we could achieve was that, obviously, existed that influence and interference of the Spanish language in the 2nd of ESO learners and, despite we primarily focused our attention to the lexicological, morphological and grammatical side of the language, we were able to prove the objectives of this dissertation, to see and analyse in which ways it happened.

In the final analysis we created a questionnaire which has been more than useful to collect the data needed to prove our hypothesis and fulfil our objectives. The most relevant factors about this, were that learners enjoyed the questionnaire at the same time we came up with the idea of transferring the questionnaire's outcomes into a detailed error analysis.

The first thing that impressed us was that, being a class of nine foreign students, most of those had another mother tongue different to Spanish, Catalan or English. Notwithstanding, they adapted their English, or had a significant influence, with the Spanish language, as the Spanish student made the same mistakes with an origin in the Spanish language. Thus, due to such error analysis from the questionnaire's outcomes,

we do believe that it is of high importance to correct these mistakes knowing how to do it

When correcting them, we must know that “el alumno se sentirá más cómodo si no le obligamos a preocuparse tras cada elocución emitida por su corrección, y así fomentaremos en él el sentimiento de que expresarse es lo más importante y la manera de hacerlo, algo subsidiario” (SANTOS, 1993, p. 102).

We strongly agree with this quote, as, if we repeat every single time, over and over, the correct word or sample, it might create a feeling of failure or lack of motivation in our students that could end up in giving up the English lesson, the learning and acquisition, or even in bad behaviour and worse cases. Notwithstanding, we, as teachers, cannot let those errors get fossilised. Those errors made by the interference or interlanguage can easily be adapted in to the student’s linguistic repertoire.

We consider that a foreign or second language teacher should be able to identify each phenomenon so as to prevent or eliminate the errors that could emerge from these and a further fossilisation.

Consequently, there are sundry of methods or ways to carry this out. In our case, we identified some by doing questionnaires at the beginning of the term (but the chances are that they could be more powerful and useful at the beginning of any academic year, term or even unit). We made use of translation activities, remarking those common mistakes, making them visible to our classroom. It is very important that teachers become aware and reflective in their teaching, in order to prevent or avoid those mistakes bound to the negative transfer. Any classroom would have its own needs, preferences, and depending on those factors, the teacher should consider carrying out any activity or highlighting certain words, expressions which could be negative for them.

The other side of the coin should be the positive transfer. As we said at the beginning of this dissertation, there were some words or grammatical rules which are totally similar in English and Spanish (without becoming false friends) that were really beneficial to the learners.

For our part, it might be well to note what Burt and Dulay (1974) stated: “la interlengua del estudiante está constituida por instancias desviadas y erróneas, pero también contiene frases correctas. Entonces, ¿por qué señalar solo las incorrecciones?” (apud SANTOS, 1993, p. 102). We could remark, from that quote, that it should be crucial for a proper learning and assimilation to congratulate and reward them when they

have good answers. At the same time, we must explain how to benefit from the positive transfer, as this would become the words or rules that they will learn easily. A possible example could be that the second conditional is more similar to Spanish, than an inversion:

If I had a brother, I would call him Iván > Si yo tuviese un hermano, le llamaría Iván.

Not a single souvenir did she send me when she was in Brazil > Ni un solo recuerdo me envió cuando ella estuvo en Brasil.

As we have seen, the grammatical transference could be used and enhanced in the first case, being much more difficult in the second one.

Another measure to take into account is to consider and review the old materials and the possibility of creating new material to a specific kind of speakers (English for Spanish / Catalan speakers, etc.). If our students had certain textbooks aimed to deal with their mother tongue or educational setting, with some exercises or clues to avoid the interlanguage or highlighting those false friends or linguistic mixtures, it would be easier and more productive for, not only the teacher, but the whole learning process.

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