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**Interlanguage: What Can Errors Tell Us about How
We Learn a Language?**
An Analysis of Native Spanish Speakers' L2 Learner Language

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Abstract:

In the field of second language acquisition, Selinker's Interlanguage theory suggests that there is an intermediate mental stage suspended between the native and the target language. This theory has been interpreted as a way to describe what the process of learning the target language is like. This theory, along with Corder's Significance of Errors are the basis of error analysis studies. This study aims to analyse learner language from the perspective of both theories. Our study will focus on Spanish native speakers who are learning English as their first foreign language, with the aim of discovering what their errors can reveal, and to what extent their native language influences their target language production. Our hypothesis is that some mistakes are caused by language interference, not only because learners transfer features from their first language, but also because they may 'think' in their native language. Admittedly, it is not possible to trace their thoughts back to their origin to really determine in what language they are produced, but it is nevertheless likely that their errors can, to some extent, reveal how these Spanish speakers learn English.

Key words: (5)

Second language acquisition, error analysis, language interference, interlanguage, learners' errors

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans are the only species naturally and genetically designed to use language. This intrinsic and unique trait has been the object of interest for the scientific community since time immemorial. The scientific study of language, the field known as linguistics, attempts to solve questions about what the components of languages are, how we produce them, and how languages evolve over time. In this study, we will focus on the question of how we *learn* a language.

Many theories have tried to give an answer to this question and most notably, the Universal Grammar theory and the Interlanguage theory have played an important part in research on how language is acquired. The Interlanguage theory, despite being almost half a century old, is still relevant today, and its rules and principles have remained valuable in linguistic research. It is the aim of this study to explore this and other theories to try to discover how learners *learn*.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Language is a highly complex object of study, and what makes us innately predisposed to learning it has always been a crucial question. To understand how language acquisition evolved, we need to go back to the 1960s, when linguists like Noam Chomsky developed the theory that language, unlike other abilities, could not be learnt through a process of imitation, or trial and error. The study of human language presented interesting features hardly present in other learning processes, as individuals are able to produce an unlimited number of combinations of new words and meanings that exceed the variety of stimuli the individual in question could have been exposed to (Chomsky, 1986, pp. 25-26 and Clark, 2003 p.10). In other words, children are able to produce content and weave together different linguistic elements to build a sentence they have never heard before. This was one of the principles used to confirm that the human brain possesses a unique trait known as “language faculty” (Chomsky, 1986, p.3). Later, Chomsky put forward his Universal Grammar hypothesis, proposing that all human languages share an innate “system of categories, mechanisms and constraints” (Chomsky, 1986, O’Grady, 1996 in Dabrowska, 2015).

The theory of Universal Grammar argues that:

- (1) Language is innately human and all human languages, despite their differences, share similar properties.
- (2) Children, despite being exposed to different (and limited) input and stimuli are able to

acquire similar knowledge despite their dissimilar original information. Furthermore, they are able to learn with a minimum degree of exposure, and they all follow the same cognitive patterns in the process of learning.

- (3) Even though children may lack grammatical knowledge, they are generally able to distinguish grammatical and ungrammatical sentences (Chomsky, 1986 in Dabrowska, 2015).

This theory, along with other studies of early cognitive psychology, laid the foundations for the field that we will explore in this dissertation: language acquisition. The following sections deal with the basics of the fields that will be looked into for our study.

The process of learning their mother tongue is a crucial stage in children's development, and it has been described as a very complex area. One of the premises of the study of first language acquisition is the hypothesis that the process by which children acquire language results in the creation of a mental "grammar" (O'Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.362) that constitutes a system enabling humans to speak, understand and be understood.

First language acquisition also exposes the fact that there is more to learning a language than memorising sets of words and patterns. Doing the latter does not translate into being able to produce unknown and unheard speech acts, which is a basic and essential requirement for language use (O'Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.362). Children are equipped with a system to be able to recognise human speech, and the way they interact and distinguish human voices is different from how they react to other auditory input (O'Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.364). From one month of age, they can tell several sounds apart. When they are around six months, they start babbling and operating their vocal system, and this process continues until the age of about twelve months, when children manage to pronounce words with meaning.

What is interesting and relates to the Universal Grammar theory is that children – despite being raised in different languages – share patterns when producing their first sounds and learning their first words. As they grow up, children's comprehension level advances notably faster than their production. From the very earliest stages, there is a disparity between what children can *understand* and what they can *use*, and even as adults, this pattern persists. However, once children achieve a certain level of proficiency, this disparity goes largely unnoticed.

Second language acquisition (SLA) covers phenomena in which individuals who already have acquired their mother tongue learn another language. This may include learning a new

language after moving to another country or learning a foreign language as a subject at school, for example. However, in no case would we be dealing with the simultaneous acquisition of languages in a naturally bilingual context, as this is a separate object of study known as bilingualism, which is not the area we are exploring in this dissertation.

The first point we need to establish is the critical period hypothesis. This hypothesis suggests that age is a differentiating factor when acquiring a second language. According to the typical description of the critical period, there is an age threshold that prevents second language learners to acquire a native level of the second language. Allegedly, past that age – which ranges from childhood to puberty – the second language learner is not able to acquire native phonology, or complete accuracy of individual sounds, which means that the subjects would retain a “foreign accent” (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p. 420). Admittedly, this accent would be more or less noticeable depending on individual particularities such as the proximity of the first and second language, or the degree of exposure.

However, the critical period hypothesis does not provide a unilateral description of what the exact constraints of age are when it comes to acquiring second language proficiency. Some studies have indeed proven that the ability to acquire a second language is affected by age, and it has been associated with the natural aging of our brain, specifically the structures responsible for processing language (Ismail, Fatemi, Johnston, 2016). However, other studies suggest that adult learners do acquire a native degree of fluency, speed and grammatical accuracy (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.421), so there is no consensus regarding the extent to which limitations of age affect second language learning. Recent studies have renamed the concept of “critical period”, and suggest that “sensitive period” or “windows of opportunity” (Ismail, Fatemi, Johnston, 2016, p.1) are better descriptors, since age alone is not a definite, insurmountable obstacle for learning a second language. In fact, Corder suggests that the potential for learning a second language remains “available to us in a latent state” (Corder, 1968, p. 164).

We have already mentioned, at the beginning of this dissertation, that in the 1960s, the field of linguistics became interested in the mental processes involved in the learner’s mind when acquiring a second language, and cognitive psychology became more important in linguistic research (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.401). In the area of second language acquisition, we must acknowledge that learners have an extra influence not present in children learning their mother tongue: influence from their first language. Consequently, second language

learners create a system in their minds, which is influenced by both their first and second language, known as “interlanguage” (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p. 400).

Interlanguage is defined by linguists as the “system of learner language [...] produced by adults when they attempt meaningful communication using a language [...] they are learning” (Tarone, 2018, p.1) or a “midway of a second language learner towards the rules of [that] language” (Mazharu Islam, 2018, p. 4). Other researchers also observe that when adults are learning a second language, “second language learners [...] are developing a grammar that is systematic even if it is not nativelylike.” (Archibald, 1998, p.2). Interlanguage is thus a representation formed in the learner’s mind that combines the learnt features of the L2 plus the transferred ones from their first language (L1).

The concept of interlanguage was first introduced by Selinker (1972), who developed the work of Corder (1971) regarding errors in language learners (Ellis, 1982). The interlanguage hypothesis claims that a language learner creates a patterned system with features of both L1 and L2, which “can be described in terms of evolving linguistic patterns and rules, and explained in terms of specific cognitive and sociolinguistic processes that shape it” (Tarone, 2018, p. 1).

Interlanguage shapes learners’ utterances when they aim to produce content in their target language. Given the same meaning, utterances produced by most second language learners are generally not identical to what a native speaker would say to express the same concept, at least if we include phonetics in the equation (Selinker, 1972, p. 214). The two products (the second language learner’s utterances and the native speaker’s) are not exactly alike, which is why the theory of interlanguage suggests the “existence of a separate linguistic system” (Selinker, 1972, p. 214) that works as a bridge between the first and the second language in the learner’s mind.

The study of interlanguage focuses on three main aspects that need to be present in our study. The three variables that are of interest for the interlanguage discourse are, as first stated by Selinker in *Interlanguage* (1972),

- (1) utterances in the learner’s native language,
- (2) interlanguage utterances produced by the learner and
- (3) target language utterances produced by native speakers of said target language. These are referred as “sets of utterances” or “behavioural events” (Selinker, 1972, p. 214).

Analysing the three above-mentioned elements, linguists and psychologists aim to predict “interlanguage behaviour” (Selinker, 1972, p. 214), and how learners encounter and overcome difficulties, more or less successfully.

In his theory of interlanguage, Selinker (1972) coined the term “fossilization” to refer to the process by which learners apply rules from their first language and use them incorrectly in their target language. According to Selinker, fossilization involves both a cognitive process and also a structural phenomenon, and he suggests fossilization could remain within the learner’s grammar of the second language, even at a more advanced age, which may prevent the acquisition of proficient competence in the target language (Selinker, Han, 2005).

Another point worthy of attention is a common feature in second-language learner’s utterances: variation in performance. We have previously mentioned that SLA focuses on how learners acquire the abilities to produce content in the target language that is adequate for the context, rather than just analysing the way the grammar of a language becomes internalised by the learner. However, learners’ output is variable, as they can produce sentences with both a correct version and a faulty one of a single feature. What researchers are interested in is the cause of mistakes as they might not reveal competence flaws, but rather performance errors.

To try to explain what causes **errors in second language learners’ production**, some linguistic theories point towards controlled and automatic processing. Controlled processing in activities requires the brain to engage in several different cognitive functions. When an action takes place by controlled processing, a lot of effort is put into decoding the necessary parts or assembling the pieces, while automatic processing happens unconsciously (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.405). Controlled processing takes up more capacity of our brains, while automatic processing frees up space for the brain to focus on other tasks. That is why, with all their concentration focussed on the form of their utterances, learners may be able to produce correct sentences, but trying to juggle this with other demands, such as complex thoughts or other psychological constraints, they may act inaccurately. This suggests that the learner has a mental representation of the form in question but can have difficulty implementing or accessing it under certain conditions” (O’Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.405).

Taking this into consideration, it is easy to assume that learners' mistakes may indeed be caused by performance errors prompted by the natural restrictions of the non-native speaker, who has to concentrate on meaning as well as form (they need to think about what to say, but also how to say it). Given the interlanguage hypothesis and the nature of potential learners' errors, it seems only logical that research into second language acquisition should focus on the analysis of the "product" and explain it as a symptom of the processes that take place in the mind (O'Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p. 109).

Back in 1967, Corder suggested learner's errors were a symptom of the "interference [...] from the habits of the first language" (Richard 1967, p. 19), and research began to focus on the contrastive analysis between the second language and the mother tongue. Corder suggested that errors were the best evidence for knowing what construction rules the learner knew, and he established the difference between systematic and non-systematic errors.

(1) Unsystematic errors or errors of performance:

Errors due to "memory lapses, physical states such as tiredness and psychological conditions such as strong emotion". They are mere flaws in our performance and are not a reflection of faults in our learning. We realise they are incorrect when they happen, and we are able to correct them. Much like any speaker in their mother tongue, second language learners can also make them. Miller (1966) refers to this type of errors as "mistakes".

(2) Systematic errors or errors of competence:

Conversely, systematic errors are caused by knowledge (or lack of knowledge) of the language in question. Errors provide information of the type of system the learner is using. Analysis of these errors provides the researcher with data to discover how the language is learnt and acquired, and what strategies are used by the learner.

Dulay, Burt and Krashen (1982, 146) classify errors into several categories, which, in turn, are divided into other sub-categories. Their classification under the "surface strategy taxonomy" deals with the alterations of the outer layer of language, the elements of the sentence: its surface. The "linguistic taxonomy" describes errors according to the language components they affect. They identify the following divisions:

1. Surface strategy taxonomy

a. **Addition:** errors caused by the presence of unnecessary and incorrect items.

i. **Addition due to double-marking:** a linguistic feature (plural, tense,

- negation) is meant to be marked in only one of the elements in the sentence, but it is incorrectly marked in more than one (e.g. ‘I didn’t *watched the film yesterday’, ‘He does *speaks English’).
- ii. **Addition due to regularisation:** the misuse of a regular marker in place of an irregular one. It is the addition of a linguistic item that is incorrectly associated to the items of a certain class that do not need a marker (e.g. ‘She *putted the book on the table’).
 - iii. **Addition due to simple addition:** errors that do not fit into the other two categories are considered ‘simple addition’, such as using the article ‘the’ in ‘*the Spanish is spoken in many countries’, or ‘I go to *the school during the day’.
- b. **Omission:** errors are caused by the deletion of necessary items. Omission errors include those in which content words (nouns, verbs, adjectives...), inflection morphemes (plural, past tense, gerund morphemes...), articles or prepositions are deleted.
 - c. **Misformation:** errors caused by the use of a wrong form, morpheme or structure.
 - i. **Regularisation:** in the same way as ‘addition due to regularisation’, these errors reflect the incorrect use of a regular form instead of the correct irregular one (or none). Misformed words substitute the correct forms. These types of errors tend to be confused with the category mentioned above, and there is persistent confusion in linguistic studies about how to categorise errors like ‘The plane *flied above us’ or ‘Nowadays, many *womans study science’, as they could fall into both categories.
 - ii. **Archi-forms:** the incorrect use of only one member of a class, where the different members share a common characteristic: ‘They can’t swim, so going to the beach is not fun for *they’. The item chosen substitutes the rest of the members of the class.
 - iii. **Alternating forms:** the variation caused by the use of archi-forms, where learners associate different members of a class with different words or structures, creating incorrect combinations. In these errors, several forms are alternated, while archi-forms errors imply that only one form is selected. ‘I saw *they dancing. *Them were dancing well’, ‘*That books, *those story’.
 - d. **Misordering:** errors caused by the incorrect placement of parts in a sentence. ‘Tell me what *is that’.
2. **Linguistic taxonomy:** phonology, syntax and morphology, semantics and lexicon, and discourse.

Table 1: Error classification taxonomy: surface strategy and linguistic type (Dulay, Burt and Krashen, 1982 in Suhono, 2016)

This classification of errors serves as a starting point for error analysis studies and has been used in many research studies in this field (Imaniar, 2018), but the complexity of some of the errors questions this classification. Lexical errors, in particular, have been subject to many

ways to classify them (Andre, 2014). In *Errors in Language Learning and Use*, James (1998) describes extensively how to classify lexical errors, outside the surface strategy taxonomy:

A. Formal lexical errors (form of words)

- a. **Formal misselection:** includes incorrect selection of words that look and sound similar. Its sub-categories describe which morpheme or part of the word is affected.
 - i. **Suffix type:** the suffix used is incorrect: *confination instead of 'confinement'
 - ii. **Prefix type:** the prefix used is incorrect: *<in>satisfied instead of '<dis>satisfied'
 - iii. **Vowel-based type:** one or more vowels in the word have been misselected: *initi<e>lly instead of 'initi<a>lly'
 - iv. **Consonant-based type:** one or more vowels in the word have been misselected: 'advise' instead of 'advice' and viceversa.
- b. **Formal misformations:** includes those non-existent 'words' that learners attempt to produce in the target language, usually influenced by the L1. There are three types:
 - i. **Borrowing:** the L1 word is not adapted to the new code: 'Do you have a *tirita?' where learners might use *tirita instead of 'bandaid/plaster' (from Spanish *tirita*)
 - ii. **Coinage:** the L1 word is adapted to the new code: *nocive instead of 'harmful' (from Spanish *nocivo*)
 - iii. **Calque:** the L2 is created by the literal translation of an L1 word or expression: I go swimming *one time a week instead of 'once a week' (from Spanish *una vez a la semana*)
- c. **Formal distortions:** includes intralingual errors that create non-existent words in L2. Most of these non-existent words (i, ii, iii, iv) tend to create orthographic errors that do not affect the correctness of speech.
 - i. **Omission:** a necessary part of the word is deleted: *be<Ø>utiful instead of 'beautiful'
 - ii. **Overinclusion:** an unnecessary part is incorrectly added *tru<e>ly instead of 'tru<Ø>ly'
 - iii. **Misselection:** an incorrect letter, group of letters or morpheme is used in place of another: *bec<ose> instead of 'bec<ause>'
 - iv. **Misordering:** the elements of a word are altered: *litt<el> instead of 'litt<le>'
 - v. **Blend:** when an incorrect word results from the combination of two or more words: *depths (deeps + depth)

B. Semantic errors (meaning of words)

- a. **Confusion of sense relations:** includes errors that violate the rules of semantic relations, and the referential meaning of words.
 - i. **Using a hypernym for a hyponym:** a general word is incorrectly used instead of a more specific one: 'We *cooked (baked) a chocolate cake'
 - ii. **Using a hyponym for a hypernym:** a subordinate term is used instead of the general term: The bomb *burst (exploded) inside the building

- iii. **Using inappropriate co-hyponyms:** out of two or more terms that share the same hypernym, the word chosen is not appropriate: *He had to *scream (shout) because we couldn't hear him.
 - iv. **Using the wrong near-synonym:** wrong word choice of two or more terms that have a similar meaning but are not always interchangeable: *The climate (weather) in winter is very unpredictable.
 - v. **False friends or deceptive cognates:** an L2 word is incorrectly selected due to its resemblance with an L1 word: 'carpet' instead of 'folder' because it resembles the Spanish word *carpeta* (folder).
- b. **Collocational errors:** includes errors related to word-association where the appropriate combination of words is violated.
- i. **Semantically determined selection:** incorrect combinations because the meaning of the parts is incompatible: we say 'heavy rain' but not *solid rain, and 'solid evidence' but not *heavy evidence, even if 'heavy' and 'solid' could have a similar meaning in other contexts.
 - ii. **Statistically weighted preferences:** both 'big losses' and 'heavy losses' exist, but the latter is preferred.
 - iii. **Arbitrary combinations and irreversible binomials:** we say 'earn money' and 'gain an advantage' but they do not work the other way around (*gain money, *earn an advantage). Similarly, some expressions cannot be reversed, such as 'heads or tails', 'yes or no', 'back and forth'. We can also find examples where the components are ordered differently in different languages. Some examples that concern English and Spanish are: 'black and white' (*blanco y negro*), 'sooner or later' (*tarde o temprano*), 'safe and sound' (*sano y salvo*), where the elements are reversed.

Table 2: Lexical errors classification (James, 1998)

Another aspect of error analysis that is worth discussing are the possible causes for errors. Supporting the basic grammar principle, Corder suggests that learner's errors reveal the process by which they learn grammatical rules, and that is why they are interesting to analyse (O'Grady, Archibald et al, 2005, p.402). He concludes that "a large number" of systematic errors produced by learners are caused by interference with habits related to the native language, but rather than interference being an obstacle, errors can serve to draw a path to follow the learner's strategies in learning the second language. It is also worthwhile to take into account Richards' categories of errors, (Richards, 1971), which were expanded by Dulay and Burt (1974), Brown (1980), and James (1998) (Heydari, Bagheri, 2012). In the following list we propose a classification of errors resulting from combining several distinctions used by the above-mentioned authors.

<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Interference or interlingual errors 2. Intralingual and developmental errors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Overgeneralisation or undergeneralisation errors b. Unawareness of rule restrictions c. Incomplete application of rules d. False hypothesis 3. Context of learning or induced errors <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Materials-induced errors b. Teacher-talk induced errors c. Exercise-based induced errors d. Errors induced by pedagogical priorities e. Look-up errors 4. Communication strategies <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Avoidance b. Prefabricated patterns c. Cognitive and personality style d. Appeal to authority e. Language switch 5. Unique errors
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Table 3: Possible causes of errors (Richards, Dulay & Burt, Brown, James)

3. RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

Corder's *The Significance of learners' errors* (1967) and Selinker's *Interlanguage* (1972) opened the discussion about second language acquisition. As we have explained above, second language acquisition poses new challenges not present in monolingual first language acquisition: the influences of the first language. Following the hypothesis that second language learners create an intermediate system halfway between their first language grammar and the second language one (interlanguage), we have gathered texts produced by second language learners and we will analyse the relevant features in these texts, applying the categories proposed in previous work on interlanguage. For our error analysis, we will rely on the error categories outlined in the previous section ([Table 1](#) and [Table 2](#)). We will analyse errors present in free-writing tasks performed by students of English as a second language, all of them native Spanish speakers, and determine to what extent their faulty utterances reveal the nature of their process of learning, as explained above. The aim of this dissertation is (1) to recognise errors made by second language learners and try to establish their causes and effects, (2) test the hypothesis of interlanguage by determining whether errors are caused by

language interference, (3) predict which areas or features create conflict for the learner and (4) suggest how language teaching can help learners overcome these problems.

4. METHODOLOGY

We conducted this study in a private English language school in Spain¹. This school offers preparation courses for Cambridge English certification exams ranging from A2 to C2, as well as pre-A2 classes for younger students. The age and level of the students varies, and, naturally, classes are formed according to the students' level and age. Classes in this school take a test-based approach to learning English: students learn by facing test materials and follow-up discussions, which are prepared according to their target level. Throughout the academic year, students attend two 90-minute lessons a week, in which they do the exercises corresponding to the class level. For example, students working towards their B2 certification (and already have a B1 level) attend lessons twice a week, in which they practice the different exam parts that the Cambridge First Certificate contains: Use of English and Reading, Writing, Listening and Speaking. For this reason, students are very familiar with the exam format by the time they decide to sit the exam.

4.1. Participants

For our study, we needed students who were fluent enough to produce a meaningful text, but not so advanced as not to be affected by interference between Spanish and English. The latter would be of little use for our error analysis study, as we would not have such a varied repertoire of errors. Taking this into account, we selected B1 learners, who were students whose ages range from 12 to 14. We asked students of 3 similar classes at B1 level, with a total of 24 students. All students shared a similar linguistic background, and although some of them were bilingual native speakers of other languages such as Catalan or Romanian, they all shared at least one of their native languages: Spanish.

4.2. Task

Students needed to be familiar with the task given, as we did not want data to be contaminated by other difficulties unrelated to their own writing. For this reason, students were given writing exercises extracted directly from a B1 test-book manual, comparable to their own course materials; students were expected to produce a 100-word text in response to one of the following prompts:

¹ The Almassora English Centre

Read this email from your English-speaking friend Peter and the notes you have made.

From: Peter

Subject: Hobbies

Hi,

How are you? Has anything exciting happened since you last emailed me? I've moved to a new house.

I'm thinking of taking up a new hobby, but I'm not sure what I want to do. Have you got any ideas? What hobbies have you got?

Have you got any plans for the weekend? I'm going to visit my grandparents. They live near the beach, so I'm going to go swimming in the sea!

Write soon!

Peter

Yes! I...

What about...?

Tell Peter

My hobbies are...

Write your **email** to Peter using **all the notes**

Write your answer in about 100 words

Figure 1: Writing prompt in *Cambridge English B1: Preliminary Exam Trainer*, Oxford University Press, 2019, p.131

Read this email from your English teacher and the notes you have made.

New message

From: Ms Taylor

Subject: New cooking club

Hi

Thanks for contacting me about my new club. My idea is to help you improve your English while you learn to cook delicious food!

Could you please let me know if you've cooked much before?

We would cook foods from English-speaking countries, or we could all bring our favourite recipes from home. What do you think would be better?

Are there any foods that we should avoid? I want to choose things that everybody can enjoy eating.

Best wishes,
Ms Taylor

Great!

Give Ms Taylor details

Suggest

Explain

Write your **email** to Ms Taylor using **all the notes**

Write your answer in about 100 words

Figure 2: Writing prompt in *B1 Preliminary for Schools Trainer 1*, Cambridge University Press, 2019, p. 158

4.3. Data collection and classification: Corder's steps to analyse errors

The tasks were conducted during the 2019-2020 school year, during one of the lessons delivered at the academy. The three groups completed the task during their respective class times. Students were told to write their answer as they would have done in a real exam, so they were not allowed to ask questions or look up words.

In line with Corder (1974), the following steps to analyse learners' errors were taken:

- (1) Collection of samples of learner language: students were given 45 minutes to write the compositions, which were then collected at the end of the lesson.

(2) Identifying errors: these texts were examined and a list of all the errors found was compiled.

(3) Describing errors: a table to classify errors was designed; this table was organised as follows:

Student	Errors found in students' writings	Spanish (L1) -English (L2) Analysis	Native speakers' utterances	Error Analysis		Cause of error
				Surface strategy taxonomy and lexical errors classification	Linguistic taxonomy	
Letter given to the students to identify them anonymously	Interlanguage utterances	Utterances in the learner's native language (what we assume the student <i>might have thought</i> in their L1)	Target language utterances produced by native speakers	Classification of errors according to the surface strategy taxonomy and lexical errors classification	Classification of errors according to the linguistic taxonomy	Possible cause of error, according to Richard's categories
		Word-by-word labelled translation and of the Spanish equivalent				
		Corrected sentence in English				

Table 4: Classification of errors

All errors found in our texts were entered into this table. With the purpose of truly understanding what the cause for each error might be, we follow Selinker's distinction of utterances (L1 utterances, interlanguage utterances and L2 utterances). Errors appear next to the possible L1 equivalent and in the next column we provide sentences produced by native speakers².

In addition to this, in order to clearly identify whether the Spanish structures and vocabulary influence the learners' target language sentence, we provide a word-by-word explanation of

² We acknowledge that it is not always possible to create an exact English-language counterpart for the interlanguage utterances, given that the native speakers that provided these sentences, who were given the context and the incorrect sentences and asked to rephrase them, may not have been thinking the exact same thing as the learners.

the Spanish utterances. Below this we provide a corrected version of the sentence, even if this does not always match the response given by the native speaker.

Regarding our error analysis, we decided to classify errors according to both the surface strategy taxonomy and the lexical errors classification, as it is normally done in studies in this field, and the linguistic taxonomy, to determine which areas are more affected by errors. Next to this, we attempt to determine the cause of these errors, with special focus on those errors that may have been caused by language interference and are thus of special importance for this study.

5. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section deals with the results extracted from the table used to analyse errors. This table presents the proportion of error types in learners' texts.

		Total number of errors: 93	
Addition	9 (10%)	Addition: Double marking	1
		Addition: Regularisation	1
		Addition: Simple addition	7
Omission	40 (43%)	Omission (article)	1
		Omission (tense and aspect)	11
		Omission (incomplete verb phrase)	5
		Omission ('-ing' form)	10
		Omission (subject)	8
		Omission (object)	1
		Omission (preposition)	1
		Omission (word class)	3

Misordering	7 (7%)	Misordering	7
Misformation	37 (40%)	1) Misformation: Alternating forms	2
		2) Misformation: Archi-forms	2
		3) Misformation: Regularisation	12
		4) Misformation: Formal lexical errors	
		4.1) Formal misselection (vowel-based type)	1
		4.2) Formal misformation (coinage)	3
		4.3) Formal distortion (misselection)	4
		4.3') Formal distortion (overinclusion)	2
		5) Misformation: Semantic errors	
		5.1) Confusion of sense relations (using the wrong near-synonym)	1
		5.1') Confusion of sense relations (deceptive cognates and generalisations)	8
		5.2) Collocational errors (semantically determined selection)	2
		Grand Total	93

Table 5: Distribution of errors (surface strategy taxonomy)

Total number of linguistic errors (by category)	93
Morphology (24%)	22
Syntax (68%)	63
Semantics and Lexis (8%)	8

Table 6: Distribution of errors (linguistic taxonomy and lexical errors classification)

		Total number of possible causes: 93	
1. Interference or interlingual errors	57 (61%)	1. Interference or interlingual errors	57
2. Intralingual and developmental errors	36 (39%)	2a. Overgeneralisation	4
		2b. Ignorance of rules restrictions	5
		2c. Incomplete application of rules	20
		2d. False hypothesis	7
		Grand Total	93
In 12 of these cases, errors may also be interpreted as unsystematic or performance errors, but these will be disregarded as they are not of interest in our study		Unsystematic errors	12

Table 7: Distribution of causes of errors

The next step of error analysis, (4) Explaining errors, consists of a more detailed explanation of the errors found in learner language. It is divided in two parts: first we will take a look at errors that may be triggered by L1 interference, and then we will examine the rest of the errors.

5.1. Interlingual errors

In the next section we will take a closer look at the 61% of errors that are likely to have been caused by language interference.

A. ADDITION ERRORS

Articles

English does not normally use definite articles in the same context as Spanish. As our data reveals, native Spanish speakers tend to add the definite article as they normally would in their first language. This creates a **simple addition error**:

J: 'I love **the** football.' (Spanish: *Me encanta **el** fútbol.*)

O: 'I went to Paris **the** last month.' (*Fui a París **el** mes pasado.*)

Plural

Adjectives in English do not take a plural form when they accompany a plural noun, while in Spanish, both adjectives and nouns normally have plural morphemes. This creates a **double marking error** (using the plural morpheme in both items in English the same way Spanish does):

M: 'My **favourites** sports.' (*Mis deportes **favoritos**.*)

Modal and auxiliary verbs in sequence

The future tense in Spanish is marked with inflectional affixes attached to the verb, while English uses the auxiliary 'will'. To express a verb in the future, Spanish speakers need to use the future tense of this verb which, in most cases, has the same root as all the other forms of the verb: *hablar-hablaré* ('talk'-'will talk'). In English, while the future construction generally requires use of the auxiliary 'will' before the infinitive (without to) of the verb, sequences of two modal verbs are ungrammatical in standard English, so alternative constructions must be used in some cases. In this example, the future tense for 'can' is not formed by the simple addition of 'will'; we need to use the semi-auxiliary 'be able to', which allows another preceding auxiliary ('will be able to'), while 'can' does not (*'will can'). Transferring the Spanish pattern of simply using the 'future morpheme' to English is likely to create errors like:

V: 'I prefer to cook food from English-speaking countries because they **will can know** other recipes.' (*Prefiero cocinar comida de países de habla inglesa porque **podrás/podrán conocer** otras recetas.*)

Subjunctive mood

Spanish uses the subjunctive mood in many contexts where English uses the indicative mood. Our two examples show cases where learners have tried to emulate the Spanish subjunctive mood using other tenses that share features with the subjunctive intended. In the first example, *si tú vinieras* (which could have been the meaning intended) would be translated into English as 'If you came', but learners at a B1 level are not very familiar with the second conditional sentences in English, so they might not know the right tense to use is the past simple ('came'). For this reason, they might try to emulate the past subjunctive (*vinieras*) by using the auxiliary verb they do know is present in conditional sentences, 'would'.

The second example shows how the construction **when + present subjunctive** from Spanish was incorrectly translated into English. In the sentence 'when the party finishes' in Spanish, *cuando la fiesta acabe*, the verb appears in the present subjunctive, which reflects the futurity of the event, which is not overtly marked in English conditional clauses. The example shows how learners try to mark futurity, an integral component of the prospective aspect expressed by the Spanish subjunctive here, by using the future auxiliary 'will'.

A: 'If you **would come**, I don't have problems.' (*Si **vinieras/ si vienes**, no tengo problema.*)

B: 'When the party **will finish**, we go to sleep.' (*Cuando la fiesta **acabe**, iremos a dormir.*)

'Go to' construction

The next example shows a direct calque of the Spanish expression *ir a + verb*. *Ir a* is used to talk about an action that the subject is going to do in the near future, almost always in cases that involve physical movement (*Vamos a ir al cine*, meaning 'We are going to go to the cinema'). It is worth taking into account that when the word *ir* is conjugated, it can describe an action taking place in the immediate future which does not necessarily imply physical displacement (*No lo sé. Voy a buscarlo en internet*, meaning 'I don't know. I'm going to look it up online'). Depending on the context, this expression may have several equivalents in English, such as 'be going to', a present continuous or the simple future with 'will'. Since the Spanish construction is used in several situations that do not explicitly correspond to the English ones, failing to identify the actual tense and aspect of the intended sentence may

cause errors. In this example, *ir a ver* was translated word by word as ‘go to watch’. Here ‘we can go to watch’ could be *podemos ir a ver* (‘we can go [to the cinema] to watch...’), where ‘go to’ would indeed refer to physical displacement. Since English does not usually use ‘go to +infinitive’ in this sense, a more appropriate translation would have been simply ‘watch’.

O: ‘I haven’t got planes, we can **go to watch** a film and dinner in a restaurant³.’ (*No tengo planes, podemos ir a ver una película y cenar en un restaurante.*)

B. OMISSION ERRORS

Subject

One of the most obvious errors committed by Spanish-speaking learners relates to the null subject parameter. Their native language, Spanish, allows subject omission (+null subject), while English does not (-null subject). This creates conflict and often leads to errors for learners at this level.

D: ‘I love my friends, **are** so kind and amazing.’ (*Adoro a mis amigos, Ø son muy amables y alucinantes.*)

D: ‘What about football? I think you should try it because **is** easy.’ (*Y el fútbol? Creo que deberías probarlo porque Ø es fácil.*)

F: ‘In my job the boss is ill. In the party, he falls down the stairs. It was funny but a little sad too because **is** kind.’ (*En mi trabajo el jefe está enfermo. En la fiesta se cayó por las escaleras. Fue divertido pero también un poco triste porque Ø es majo.*)

J: ‘I practise football because **is** my favourite sport and if you are fat keep fit.’ (*Juego a fútbol porque Ø es mi deporte preferido y si estás gordo, te mantienes en forma.*)

J: ‘I recommend football because **is** an adrenaline sport.’ (*Recomiendo el fútbol porque Ø es un deporte que produce adrenalina.*)

N: ‘I play computer games because **are** funny, **are** entertaining and fantastic.’ (*Juego a videojuegos porque Ø son divertidos, entretenidos y fantásticos.*)

T: ‘**Is** a good idea to create a new club.’ (*Ø Es buena idea crear un nuevo club.*)

O: ‘You have to play football because **is** the best sport in the world.’ (*Tienes que jugar a fútbol*

³ The use of the ‘go to’ construction in this example is not a grammatical mistake but rather an unidiomatic expression which was influenced by the Spanish structure.

porque Ø es el mejor deporte del mundo.)

Object

Another interesting contrastive aspect is that in some cases, students may omit the direct object when the Spanish construction allows the corresponding noun to be omitted. The Spanish verb for ‘to like’ is *gustar*, but the way these two verbs work is very different. In the English sentence ‘I like vegetables’, ‘I’ is the subject, ‘like’ is a transitive verb and ‘vegetables’ is its direct object. In the same sentence in Spanish, *Me gustan las verduras*, *gustan* (‘like’) is an intransitive verb: the subject of the sentence is actually *las verduras* (‘vegetables’) and the personal pronoun for ‘I’ or ‘me’, *me* in Spanish, becomes the indirect object of the sentence. When students do not identify the correct subject of the Spanish clause (and realise it can be omitted in Spanish because it is the subject), they do not see that in English this element has a different function (direct object) and cannot be omitted.

H: ‘I avoid broccoli and lettuce because **I don’t like.**’ (*Evito el brócoli y la lechuga porque no me gustan Ø.*)

Tense (future)

To discuss events in the future, Spanish allows using the present tense to refer to upcoming events: *te llamo más tarde* (I [will] call you later). In most cases where Spanish uses the present simple when referring to future events, English uses either the present continuous or a future construction. In the next example we see a direct influence from the L1 Spanish, where the learner has used the verb in the present simple tense (‘go’) to refer to a plan in the future where a present continuous would have been more appropriate (‘I am going’).

I: ‘I have plans. On Friday, me and my family friends going out to a concert. On Saturday I **go** shopping with my sister.’ (*Tengo planes. El viernes voy con los amigos de la familia a un concierto. El sábado voy de compras con mi hermana.*)

‘-ing’ forms

The use of the English gerund covers many areas, and these may create conflict for Spanish speakers in sentences where Spanish would take an infinitive form.

Attribute phrases

One area that often leads to errors for Spanish-speaking students learning English is the use of the ‘-ing’ form of verbs as attributes (or subjects) of the sentence. In Spanish, in a sentence like ‘my hobbies are drawing and painting’ (*mis aficiones son dibujar y pintar*), the verbs ‘drawing’ and ‘painting’ take the infinitive form in Spanish (‘draw’ and ‘paint’). A typical mistake influenced by the Spanish construction is to omit the ‘-ing’ form of the verbs in English and to use the infinitive form instead.

A: ‘My hobbies are **draw**, **watch** anime, **listen** to music...’ (*Mis aficiones son **dibujar**, **ver** anime, **escuchar** música.*)

A: ‘I think your new hobbies will be **meet** with your friends...’ (*Creo que tus nuevas aficiones serán **quedar** con tus amigos...*)

D: ‘My hobbies are swimming because I think that the water is so relaxing and **travell** because you meet another countries and cultures.’ (*Mis aficiones son: **nadar**, porque creo que el agua es muy relajante y **viajar**, porque conoces otros países y otras culturas.*)

G: ‘My hobbies are **play** videogames, do ski in Andorra, **play** basketball and **hang out** with my friends.’ (*Mis aficiones son **jugar** a videojuegos, **hacer** esquí en Andorra, **jugar** a baloncesto y **quedar** con mis amigos.*)

K: ‘My hobbies are **play** the drums...’ (*Mis aficiones son tocar la batería...*)

N: ‘My hobbies are **play** football, **play** computer games, **jump** into the sea.’ (*Mis aficiones son **jugar** a fútbol, **jugar** a videojuegos, **saltar** en el mar.*)

‘-ing’ or infinitive with ‘to’ after specific verbs

English verbs such as ‘love’, ‘hate’ and ‘prefer’ are normally followed by the ‘-ing’ form of verbs or the ‘to + infinitive’ form. As we mentioned earlier in this analysis with the verb *gustar* in Spanish (see ‘[Object](#)’ in the previous section), verbs like ‘to like’ or ‘to love’ take a different form in these two languages. In Spanish the subject of these sentences is an simple infinitive, but in English, verbs that express likes and dislikes cannot be followed by a simple infinitive without ‘to’. In the next examples, we see that ‘see’ and ‘swim’ are used in the simple infinitive form, so learners have omitted the preposition ‘to’ or the ‘-ing’ form of these verbs.

L: ‘I love **see** snow. I love **swim**’ (*Me encanta **ver** la nieve. Me encanta **nadar**.*)

L: ‘I love **swim** in the pool’ (*Me encanta **nadar** en la piscina.*)

Prepositional phrases

The next example shows a lack of both the ‘-ing’ form and the preposition. This might have its origin in the corresponding Spanish structure. *Me interesa aprender* is probably the most common translation for ‘I’m interested in learning’. While the Spanish construction has an infinitive as its subject and the experiencer as an indirect object, in English the experiencer is the subject and the activity (s)he is interested in takes the form of a prepositional gerund construction. This might well be a case of interference because the absence of the correct preposition and the ‘-ing’ form partly emulates the most common structure in L1.

Student T: ‘**I’m interest learn cook**’ (*Me interesa aprender a cocinar.*) [meaning: ‘I’m interested in learning to cook.’]

Other cases

The next example shows a syntactic unit that should be followed by the ‘-ing’ form of the verb, whereas in Spanish, the equivalent would use an infinitive.

F. ‘I’m looking forward to **meet** with you.’ (*Tengo muchas ganas de quedar contigo.*)

Incomplete verb phrases

The next examples show situations where Spanish interference may create conflict with auxiliary verb phrases. For instance, the equivalent of ‘to have got’ in Spanish is a single verb (*tener*), and learners might omit a part of the verb phrase. This error could also be treated as an overgeneralisation as ‘have’ is indeed the equivalent of *tener* (to have). The problem here is that overgeneralising ‘to have’ and extending it to non-auxiliary usages results in an incorrect combination where learners use ‘have’ as a non-auxiliary verb and add the ‘not’ or ‘-n’t’ negation.

J: ‘**I haven’t** plans.’ (*No tengo planes.*)

T: ‘**I haven’t a lot of idea**’ instead of ‘I haven’t got an idea,’ although most likely ‘I don’t know a lot about that.’ (*No tengo mucha idea.*)

Word class

Interestingly, more than one student in our study incorrectly used the noun ‘dinner’ as a verb. In Spanish to ‘to have dinner’ is expressed by a single verb (*cenar*) derived from the corresponding noun (*cena*), and this may be transferred into English.

D: 'I'm going to go **dinner** with my dad's friends.' (*Voy a ir a **cenar** con los amigos de mi padre.*)

G: 'I'll go with my best friend Diana to Valencia to see many things and go **dinner**.' (*Iré con mi mejor amiga Diana a Valencia a ver muchas cosas e ir a **cenar**.*)

O: 'I haven't got plans, we can go to watch a film and **dinner** in a restaurant.' (*No tengo planes, podemos ir a ver una película y **cenar** en un restaurant.*)

Calquing of predicative constructions

The next example shows the omission of the article. We have a sentence where Spanish uses a structure that seems similar to the English one, but rather than a simple omission, the error is the transference of the whole predicative construction. In Spanish, [*ser*] *buen estudiante* ('[to be] a good student'), the predicative noun phrase does not require an article, whilst an indefinite article is required in the corresponding English construction.

E: 'I'm very good student.' (*Soy Ø muy buen estudiante.*)

Preposition

The next example shows an area that is likely to create errors: prepositions. In particular, both languages have verbs that use prepositions to link their objects, but these prepositional structures do not necessarily coincide for semantically equivalent verbs in the two languages. In the following example, the absence of the preposition 'for' is likely to be due to the influenced of the L1 construction *esperar Ø algo* ('to wait [for] something').

C: 'I'm **waiting your** answer.' (*Espero Ø tu respuesta.*)

C. MISFORMATION ERRORS

To classify these errors, which under the surface strategy taxonomy would be called 'misformation errors', we will use James's classification in *Errors in Language Learning and Use* (1998).

Formal lexical errors: formal misselection

In this example, the learner misspelled the word 'English' probably because they made the association that the first 'e' in the word 'English', (/ɪ/) has a similar pronunciation to Spanish

‘i’ (/i/). Additionally, the sound (/i/) is also represented in English with the letter ‘i’, so the misspelling is logical.

VOWEL-BASED TYPE

K: ‘I enjoy inglish’

Formal lexical errors: formal misformation

The next examples show non-existent English words incorrectly borrowed from Spanish and adapted to the L2 code. In these examples students adapted Spanish words into English: *interesant, *impresionant and *amablous are adaptations of the Spanish adjectives *interesante* (interesting), *impresionante* (impressive) and *amable* (nice, friendly). These examples reveal that students do have a good idea of these word formation processes in English.

COINAGE

L: ‘Basketball is the **interesant** sport.’ (*El baloncesto es un deporte interesante.*) [meaning ‘interesting’]

Q: ‘Wow, it’s **impresionant**.’ (*Vaya, ¡es impresionante!*) [meaning ‘impressive’]

R: ‘[...] our friends are very **amablous and students**.’ (*...nuestros amigos, son muy amables y estudiosos.*) [meaning ‘kind and hard-working students’]

Semantic errors: confusion of sense relations

In some cases, students use English words incorrectly because they identify them as the translation of the word in the sentence they aim to produce. They are not completely wrong because, often, their wrong choice would be an appropriate translation in a different context.

In these examples, we see English words in a context where they do not make sense. *Mal* does mean ‘bad’, and *hacer* does have the same meaning as ‘make’ or ‘do’ (for example when *hacer* describes a production activity), the same way *como* could be ‘how’ in English. The case of the preposition in examples M and P is similar, learners incorrectly chose the option that they thought was closer to the Spanish equivalent. More interesting though, is the case of ‘bored’: in Spanish, both ‘to be bored’ and ‘to be boring’ are expressed with the same word (*aburrido*), so this often confuses learners. For all these reasons, we could classify all these errors as overgeneralisation errors.

Example T shows an error caused by deceptive cognates, where ‘form’ in English is similar to *forma* (‘way’ or ‘style’) in Spanish but has a different meaning. This is just one of the many words classified as ‘false friends’ or ‘deceptive cognates’ that often cause errors.

DECEPTIVE COGNATES AND GENERALISATIONS

A: ‘[How are you?] I’m **bad.**’ (*Estoy mal.*)

B: ‘We will **make** a pyjama party.’ (*Haremos una fiesta de pijamas.*)

H: ‘I hope to cook something **rich.**’ (*Espero cocinar algo rico.*)

T: ‘Your **form** of you teach is really good.’ (*Tu forma de enseñar es muy Buena.*) [meaning ‘way’ or ‘style’]

J: ‘Can I go with you at the beach because I will bored in my house because my mum and my sister are very **bored.**’ (*Puedo ir contigo a la playa? Estaré aburrido en mi casa porque mi madre y mi hermana son muy aburridas.*)

P: ‘**In** Sunday he will **do** a concert.’ (*El domingo hará un concierto.*)

X: ‘I choose cooking English food **how** fish and chips.’ (*Elijo cocinar comida inglesa como pescado y patatas.*)

COLLOCATIONAL ERRORS

M: ‘You are very good **in** racket sports.’ (*Eres muy bueno en los deportes de raqueta.*)

Another more complex error caused by generalisation is exemplified in the next sentence:

W: ‘We should cook all the food **for** the people **can choose.**’ (*Deberíamos cocinar toda la comida para que la gente pueda elegir.*)

One of the equivalents for the Spanish preposition *para* in English is ‘for’. Examples of this are: ‘This is for you’ (*esto es para ti*) or ‘I’m not ready for that’ (*no estoy preparado para eso*). While there are other equivalents for other contexts, such as ‘in order to’, ‘to’ or ‘so’, at a B1 level, it is common to find that ‘for’ is the one students use most (sometimes incorrectly). In the following example we see an error caused by the generalisation of the equivalence between *para* and ‘for’, in the translation of *para que* (so that), given the shared lexical item of *para* in both structures.

Other lexical errors

Direct translation of ‘lo necesario’

The next example shows the incorrect translation of the Spanish neuter definite article *lo*, which is used in Spanish to nominalise the adjective that goes after it, thus creating an abstract noun. The problem is that English does not have an equivalent nominalising

structure, so the learner in this example attempted to use the English article ‘the’ as the Spanish *lo*, which creates an error.

W: ‘I don’t have **the** necessary.’ (*No tengo lo necesario.*) [meaning: I do not have what is necessary]

Alternating forms

Another interesting problem is that learners overlook the distinction between ‘another’ and ‘other’, and they often combine them with singular or plural nouns incorrectly, as shown in the following examples. This error might be influenced by the L1, as Spanish does not allow the use of *otro* and *un otro* as synonyms. *Otro* means ‘another’ and *un otro* is the combination of the article *un* + *otro* (‘an’ + ‘other’). Students might think that this rule also applies in English, as ‘another’ seems to work the same way as *un otro*, and might omit ‘an’ in ‘another’. On the other hand, other learners do in fact use ‘another’, but their errors reflect and overgeneralisation of ‘another’ in all contexts.

Q: ‘I will go to the cinema with my friends Alberto and Gilberto, and then we go to the discou with **another friends**. Then we go to Manuel’s house.’

T: ‘I prefer these recipes because is very easy and simple and **other reason** is a simple ingredients.’

D. MISORDERING ERRORS

Some English structures do not take the same form in Spanish, and the following examples show several errors that first-language interference may have contributed to. In these examples, learners have transferred the L1 structure to the L2, but rather than a simple word-by-word translation, they have adapted it to the rules of target language.

A: ‘Two days ago, **it happened something.**’ (*Hace dos días pasó algo.*)

B: ‘All my family was scared but **I don’t happen anything.**’ (*Toda mi familia estaba asustada pero no me pasó nada.*)

F: ‘Since I emailed you **there happens many things.**’ (*Desde que te escribí han pasado muchas cosas.*)

B’: ‘I will go to the **party surprise** for my cousin.’ (*Iré a la fiesta sorpresa de mi primo.*)

C: 'Last week I borrowed one **book of horror.**' (*La semana pasada cogí prestado un **libro de terror.***)

C': 'He **plays very good** football.' (*Juega **muy bien** a fútbol.*)

F': 'If you want a new hobbie you can go Sundays with me and **two friends more** to the swimming pool.' (*Si quieres una afición nueva, puedes venir los domingos conmigo y con **dos amigos más** a la piscina.*)

On the one hand we see that the verb 'to happen' (*pasar*) has caused several errors. In the Spanish phrase for 'something happened', *pasó algo*, generally the verb precedes the subject. When students try to transfer this structure into English, they show interference with L1 (by misordering the elements) but also a correct application of the L2 rules (they create a subject for the verb, which for them, is apparently correct). We see examples of this in the first three sentences.

On the other hand, examples B' and C show the classic problem with the position of adjectives and nouns in Spanish and English. Learners may try to transfer the Spanish structure '**noun + complements**' to English, where the correct word order is the other way around. The first example shows the inversion of the adjective and noun, while the second one shows a direct translation of the Spanish phrase '**noun + of + complement**' (*libro de terror*). Similarly, example F' shows another attempt to translate directly from the L1: *dos amigos más* (two other friends).

5.2. Intralingual errors and other causes

Apart from the errors that can be directly linked to L1 influence, the rest of the errors can also provide insight into how learners learn what they learn. These errors, which also are a part of learner language, can be summarised into:

A. ADDITION ERRORS

The incorrect addition of an item can be classified as ‘simple addition’ error because the misplacing of an individual item is the cause of the error.

Simple addition

G: ‘We **will going** to see “Bad Boys”.’

P: ‘I’m **learning playing** piano.’

U: ‘I **would to avoid** the recipes with vegetables.’

In our first two examples, we see the incorrect addition of the ‘-ing’ form, and while we can’t be certain about the cause for this error, we might hypothesise that using the ‘-ing’ form could indicate an action that involves physical movement. Students might have noticed that motion verbs frequently appear in the gerund form and therefore associated the gerund itself with the idea of ‘movement’.

On the other hand, for the error ‘I would to avoid’, the cause may be related to different teaching strategies. Particularly at lower levels, in order to avoid other errors, students are often told that English infinitives consists of the preposition ‘to’ + verb, and that they should not use an infinitive without ‘to’. Something that is often taught is that *would* clauses should be followed by the preposition *to* (‘I would like to dance’, as opposed to *‘I would like dancing’). While these rules do apply in most contexts and do in fact prevent other errors, sometimes students may overgeneralise them incorrectly.

B. OMISSION ERRORS

Omission errors indicate that a necessary item is missing in the sentence. Not surprisingly, many of the errors in this section relate to typical L2 learner errors.

Tense and aspect

A: 'I **was cry** for an hour.'

B: 'Then we will go to her house in the beach and we **have** a fantastic party.'

E: 'I have two plans: I **go** to visit my grandparents to Oslo (we are going to car) and I **go** to cinema with my friends for watching the film "Bad boys for life".'

F: 'In my job the boss is ill. In the party, he **falls** down the stairs.'

G: 'Last weekend we **go** to the cinema and we **go** to dinner.'

G: 'My girlfriend and me are going to met to walk on the beach, after this we **go** to lunch.'

H: 'When **I'm** a child, I cooked with my grandmother.'

Q: 'I will go to the cinema with my friends Alberto and Gilberto, and then we **go** to the discou with another friends. Then we **go** to Manuel's house.'

R: '[I went to Paris] and we **go** to the cinema and **hanging out** with our friends.'

One of the most common errors is the failure to mark past tense. While students know that the sentence they want to produce is in the past, and this is evident by their use of markers such as 'then', 'last weekend' or their use of another sentence in the past in sequence with the error, they omit the past tense morpheme '-ed' (or the irregular form of the verb). In other cases, students fail to mark future tense, and that creates faulty sentences that refer to the past or the future, which use verbs in their present tense. Failure to mark tense in a sentence (like we see in these examples) does not show an incorrect understanding of the temporal system in the target language. How learners process and produce tense and aspect has been explored from many different perspectives (Leung Chan, 2012); the cause for these errors in the English produced by the informants for the present study is not clear and would require further research.

Incomplete verb phrase

The next group of errors might reflect an incomplete understanding of the grammar rules, as these are verb tenses that are or should be familiar to B1-level students.

I: 'I have plans. On Friday, me and my family friends **going out** to a concert. On Saturday I go shopping with my sister.'

J: 'Can I go with you at the beach because I **will bored** in my house.'

X: 'The last time I cooked was yesterday, but **while I cooking** the food burnt that is why I bring pre-made food.'

These omission errors might indicate areas that should be explored when teaching and assessing students. Structures like ‘be going to’, ‘to have got’ or ‘to be + -ing’ (present continuous), and ‘to be bored’ are incomplete in the next examples. These examples could be treated as performance errors, but given that these and other similar structures are also present in other types of errors, our hypothesis is that they were likely caused by an incomplete application of rules.

C. MISFORMATION ERRORS

In this section we describe misformation errors that can be classified according to the surface strategy taxonomy as well as other lexical errors classified according to James’s lexical classification (1998).

The first one includes those examples where a regular marker is incorrectly used where an irregular one was needed.

Regularisation

- A: ‘[Two days ago something happened] It was **more sad**.’
N: ‘I **don’t moved** to a new house.’
P: ‘My uncle **live** near the sea too, we can go together at the beach.’
B: ‘I **has** bought a new car.’
B’: ‘[The following week] I **have** an accident but **I’m** okay.’
B’’: ‘My hobbies **is** watch TV, play tennis, play volleyball and do surf.’
E: ‘The best hobbies **is** sports, games and play a instrument. I have many hobbies **is** play drum, go to swimming, go to academy, read a book and watch Youtube.’
R: ‘We **goes** to the swimming pool.’
S: ‘I **don’t cooked** a lot before, only some sandwiches.’
S’: ‘No one **like** them.’
T: ‘I prefer these recipes because **is** very easy.’

The cause of these errors or the easiest way to correct them is not always straight-forward. In examples N and S we see a regularisation of the past tense, by using the auxiliary ‘do’ in the present tense followed by the main verb in the past tense. Example A shows a typical pattern of regularisation in the comparative form of adjectives by using the regular construction (‘more + adjective’) instead of adding the appropriate marker ‘-er’. Another example that is also classified in the regularisation category is the reduction to one verb tense, where a

combination of different tenses would be correct, such as example B'. Lastly, the rest of the errors reflect the typical regularisation of grammatical person and verb agreement, where learners might incorrectly omit or add the third person singular morpheme, as seen in the rest of the examples in this list.

Archi-forms

The next examples show the incorrect use of third-person pronouns and possessives. It is the fact that the contraction 'it+is' (it's) is phonetically the same as the possessive 'its', and learners' limited knowledge of grammatical and syntactic functions that causes these errors.

E: 'I have a new pet **it's** dog. **It's** name is Zeus.'

X: 'I would like to avoid tomatoes because I hate **it's**, some seafood because I am allergic and because I don't like **it's** flavors and finally, I would like the bitter food, because I don't like **it** flavor too.'

Apart from these categories, we will classify the next errors using James's lexical errors classification (1998).

Formal lexical errors

Lexical errors found in learner language may point towards a misassociation of the meaning of words or a missassociation of their sound. Most of them were caused by homophones or pseudo-homophones that learners confuse and misspell.

FORMAL DISTORTION: MISSELECTION

B: 'All my family was scared but I don't happen **anythink**.' [/θɪŋk/ instead of / θɪŋ/]

C: 'Hello Peter! I **rode** you email.' [/rəʊd/ and /rəʊt/]

E: 'The girl that I loved sent me to friendzone but I'm **find**.' [/faɪnd/ instead of / faɪn/]

O: '[I went to Paris] and is the best travel in my **live**.' [/laɪf/ instead of /laɪv/]

FORMAL DISTORTION: OMISSION

F: '**Were** is your new house?' [/wɜːr/ instead of /hwɛər/]

FORMAL DISTORTION: OVERINCLUSION

O: 'I haven't got **planes**, we can go to watch a film and dinner in a restaurant.' [/pleɪn/ instead of /plæn/]

Semantic errors

CONFUSION OF SENSE RELATIONS: USING THE WRONG NEAR-SYNONYM

D: 'I hate the broccoli and **very** vegetables.'

COLLOCATION ERRORS: SEMANTICALLY DETERMINED SELECTION

H: 'We can go **with** bike.'

Our last two errors show different problems. The first one can be analysed from two perspectives: (1) the student omitted 'much' in the phrase 'I hate broccoli and vegetables very much' and it is an error by omission and (2) 'very' was used instead of 'many' because they share a similar meaning of intensifying. For our analysis we choose the second approach and we treat this error as a confusion of sense relations, where the meaning of 'very' and 'many' has been confused.

The second example shows an error related to the wrong selection of a preposition in a collocation. In this example, the learner chose 'with' instead of 'by', though 'by' is the appropriate preposition for means of transport. It is interesting to highlight that this error is most likely not related to L1 influence, as the preposition used for means of transport in Spanish would normally be *en*, and the most obvious mistake learners would make would be 'I go in/on bike' (*Voy en bici*).

D. MISORDERING ERRORS

Apart from the misordering errors caused by language interference that were previously mentioned, no other misordering errors were found.

6. CONCLUSIONS, LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

For the last step of the error analysis process, (5) Evaluating errors, we will recall the 4 questions we initially built this study on: *(1) recognise errors made by second language learners and try to establish their causes and effects, (2) test the hypothesis of interlanguage by determining whether errors are caused by language interference, (3) predict which areas or features create conflict for the learner and (4) suggest how language teaching can help learners overcome these problems.*

The first question has been explored in the previous sections of the study, in which errors have been classified and explained taking into account the possible causes. The second question is more subjective. Our data revealed that 61% of the errors may have been caused by language interference. Of course, we cannot be completely sure of the causes of errors, or to what extent they may have been caused by language interference, if that is their cause at all. Instead, the approach we take is that similarities and differences between students' L1 and L2 can cause interference, and in a context where the learner language is shaped in a similar way to the native language, it stands to reason that these errors are triggered by the presence of an existing cognitive model in the learner's mind.

Our data reveals many examples that do, in fact, support the interlanguage hypothesis. Our study had a limited number of subjects, and it would not be statistically sound to suggest that our results represent the majority of Spanish-speaking learners of English. However, it is no coincidence that almost all learners made similar errors. If there was not some kind of pattern behind L2 language learning, learners would probably not display the same kind of *symptoms*. Our analysis revealed that learners do share the way they organise information in their L2, and that they make rules or assumptions to help them produce content in the foreign language.

Regarding the third question, we identified the following categories as the areas in which errors are most likely to occur:

Articles and pronouns	
Definite article 'the' and where (not) to use it	'I love *the football.' 'I went to Paris *the last month.'
Third-person pronouns and possessives: 'it', 'it's', 'its'	'I have a dog, *it's name is Zeus.' 'I hate *it's. I don't like *it's flavours.'
Syntax	
Omitted subjects (particularly the third person pronoun 'it')	'I play computer games because *are funny.' '*Is a good idea to create a new club.' 'You should try football because *is easy.'
'-ing' or infinitive + 'to' form of verbs	'My hobbies are *draw, listen to music...' 'I love *swim.' 'I like *play football and *play computer games.'
Misordering 'complements + noun'	'book *of horror.' 'the *party surprise for my cousin.'
The verb 'to happen' as a translation from the Spanish <i>pasar</i>	'It *happened something.' 'There *happens many things.'
Morphology	
Plural (adjective + noun)	'My *favourites sports.'
The verb 'to have'	'I *haven't plans.' 'I *haven't a lot of ideas.'
Verb tenses and moods	
Using the appropriate verb tense to talk about the past and the future.	'Last weekend we *go to the cinema.' 'On Saturday I *go to a concert.'
Subjunctive mood	'When the the party *will finish, we go to bed.'
Conditional sentences	'If you *would come.'
Lexis	
Common false friends and translations of the Spanish verb <i>hacer</i> .	'I'm going to go *dinner with my dad.' 'We will *make a party.' 'He will *do a concert.'
'Another' and 'other'	'We *go with another friends.' '*Other reason is...'
Direct calques from Spanish	'*impresionant', '*amablous'

Table 8: Areas likely to cause interference errors

The examples shown above are just a few of the numerous mistakes Spanish-speaking learners tend to make in English. Errors like incorrectly omitting the subject or the '-ing' form of verbs were common to almost all students in our group. By identifying these potential areas of conflict, we aim to widen teaching methods to recognise that, in the natural process of learning, students can be directed or corrected in order to minimise their errors. If we know which areas are most problematic, we can directly try to solve these problems, and

by having students produce content in their target language that is directed at these problems, we can at least try to make them internalise these structures.

Discovering how learners learn should be a crucial question in SLA, and teachers should not only be aware of the errors to correct them, but also to find how the L1 can provide solutions to L2 problems. For a long time, the L2 classroom has been considered a space that L1 should not contaminate, and particularly in schools in Spain, throughout the history of English as a second language in education, using L1 in the classroom has been discouraged. In its origins, when English was first introduced in the education system (Jefatura del Estado, 1970), it was treated as any other subject, and teaching tended to overlook the specific needs of second language acquisition (Barber, 2012). Over time, the approach shifted from writing and vocabulary activities to a more communicative environment. Nevertheless, lessons remained grammar-based, where the contents would simply be delivered to the class and students would only engage passively (Barber, 2012). Most recently, the compulsory education curriculum describes the necessary skills to learn English in terms of reading and listening comprehension and written and oral production (Consejería de Educación, Cultura y Deporte, 2015) and as a result, the current English curriculum puts heavy emphasis on communication and production. While it is clear that English teaching has evolved since it was first implemented, there is still a common factor to every education plan implemented in Spain: using L1 in the L2 classroom is discouraged and even criticised.

Many studies have suggested that an English-only environment is not ideal for the L2 class, and that “making use of one’s language to achieve communicative goals” is advisable (Zulfikar, 2019, p.3). The English-only approach is unrealistic and using L1 as a bridge can help students overcome the initial reluctance to express themselves in the foreign language (Zulfikar, 2019). In contrast with this, counter arguments point out that deliberately using L1 in L2 instruction may aggravate interference problems (Kerr, 2019 p.6) and the widespread opinion among the teaching community is that L1 is undesirable in the English classroom and should be excluded.

While there might be truth in every argument, the final reflection should be the obvious fact that “learners attempt to find ways to comprehend the new structures in the L2 by trying to find the equivalents in their L1” (Swan, 1985 in Yavuz, 2012, p. 4341).

Using L1 as a tool to teach a foreign language is an area that has rarely been explored in Spain, but it would be interesting to continue doing research in SLA by testing whether using

active translation exercises or having students work with bilingual materials, or even teaching them in their own language, could improve their learning. Ideas like this should be explored in SLA, as language teaching should evolve continually. Evidently, there is still a lot of room for improvement regarding English teaching in schools in Spain, and while a lot has changed since it was first implemented in the public education system, it still fails to provide students with the necessary abilities to become users of the language, while other European countries do succeed (Education First, 2019).

The final conclusions we would like to present answer the fourth and last question: *how can language teaching help learners overcome these problems?*

It is clear that the native language does influence L2 production at least to a certain extent. The reality is that language learners inevitably turn to their L1 (and gradually separate from it as they progress in L2 learning) to produce content in the target language. Teaching them how to successfully move from the native language to the target language would be beneficial for them to find real communicative equivalents. As we mentioned before, in foreign language lessons, it is often discouraged to translate from the native language, but interference is a reality, and language teaching can take advantage of that. In this final section we would like to suggest some paths that English teaching could explore to better suit and facilitate the learning process:

- Allowing L1 in the L2 classroom could reduce the initial reluctance, common among lower level students, to participate in class, as they would not face any negative consequences for asking what an expression is in English or how to translate a given sentence into the target language. Furthermore, embracing L1 as a tool could be useful to highlight differences and similarities between both languages.
- Understanding that the process of producing a sentence may begin in the L1 is essential, and therefore, interference errors are to be expected. If, in class, teachers acknowledge that interference is likely, they are better prepared to explain to their students how to address these issues. In the case of errors caused by interference, it is particularly useful for students to understand the exact nature of the mistake, as understanding why they made the mistakes makes them easier to remember and is likely to help avoiding them in the future.
- Giving students the chance to make the connection between their L1 original sentence and the L2 version can only be helpful. Be it through comments made in L1

highlighting differences between L1 and L2 or even providing them with the translation of the L2 sentence or text, learners will be able to see for themselves the L1-L2 route their ideas and sentences follow.

- Active translation from L1 is still a controversial topic in second-language teaching, but there are two reasons why it could be beneficial. Firstly, it is a process that naturally takes place in beginner learners, so guiding them through the path they need to follow would make them be more acutely aware of the how to phrase their ideas in L2, and secondly, if they familiarise themselves with correct, meaningful grammatical sentences in the target language, even implicitly, their mental repertoire of things they *know how to say* will keep expanding. As a result, the process of jumping from the initial *what I want to say* to *what I can say* will become smoother.

These are some suggestions that could be implemented to test to what extent L1 interference can be used in favour of L2 learning, and it is an interesting topic that further research in SLA should consider. Language teaching should enhance students' learning by recognising the problems and creating solutions that specifically target them. By allowing students to use L1 to bridge over gaps in the knowledge of the target language, we can help them establish a solid foundation that will support further development of their skills in L2. Trying to improve learners' abilities, especially regarding production (be it written or spoken) is definitely a priority in language teaching, and if the native language can be a tool, instead of an obstacle, it should be more than welcome.

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