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MOTHER LANGUAGE INTERFERENCE IN WRITTEN TEXTS IN ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

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ABSTRACT

English is taught as a compulsory subject in Ecuadorian universities; however, written production conveys incorrect messages due to limited linguistic knowledge. The objective research was to describe the most significant interference errors from L1 on L2 in narrative texts written by the EFL learners of the second level at Medicine School during the academic year October 2018 - July 2019, ESPOCH, Riobamba, Ecuador. A non-experimental research of descriptive cross-sectional study with a mix approach, socio-educational modality supported by field, documentary and content analysis research were applied. The population was made up of 109 learners and 04 teachers; the probabilistic stratified type sampling was 86 students. For gathering information applied a survey with its questionnaire and a writing test with its narrative text. The information was processed in spreadsheets and analyzing by descriptive statistics using frequencies and percentages. Error Analysis comparison was applied to revise narrative texts. The results determined that the most significant interference errors were both: Grammatical included overuse of articles, misuse of verbs, omission of the personal pronouns, incorrect word order and Lexical included misuse of prepositions and false cognates. To sum up, language transfer from L1 to L2 constitute an obstacle to achieve written texts production efficiently.

PALABRAS CLAVE: mother tongue interference, EFL learners, writing texts, interference errors, foreign language.

RESUMEN

El inglés en una asignatura de enseñanza obligatoria en las universidades ecuatorianas, sin embargo la producción escrita transmite mensajes incorrectos debido al limitado conocimiento lingüístico. El objetivo de investigación fue describir los errores de interferencia más significativos de L1 sobre L2 en textos narrativo escritos por los estudiantes de ELE del segundo nivel de la escuela de Medicina durante el año lectivo octubre 2018 – julio 2019, ESPOCH, Riobamba, Ecuador. Se aplicaron la investigación no experimental de tipo transeccional-descriptivo con un enfoque mixto, la modalidad fue socio-educativo apoyada por la investigación de campo, documental y análisis de contenido. El universo estuvo conformado por 109 estudiantes y 04 docentes, la muestra fue de tipo probabilística estratificada (86 estudiantes). Se obtuvo información a través de la encuesta con su cuestionario y una prueba escrita con su texto narrativo. La información fue procesada en hojas de cálculo y se analizaron a través de la estadística descriptiva utilizando frecuencias y porcentajes. La comparación de análisis de error fue utilizada en la revisión de los textos narrativos. Los resultados determinaron que los errores de interferencia más significativas son dos: Gramatical, incluye uso excesivo de artículos, mal uso de los verbos, omisión de pronombres personales, orden de palabras incorrectas; y Léxico, incluye mal uso de las preposiciones y falsos cognados. En conclusión, la transferencia de la lengua L1 hacia la lengua L2 constituye un obstáculo para alcanzar una producción de textos escritos eficientes

KEYWORDS: interferencia de lengua materna, estudiantes de ELE, textos escritos, errores de interferencia, lengua extranjera.

1. INTRODUCTION

English has been teaching in Ecuador since 1951 and the English National Curriculum as a Foreign Language has been in continuous reforms. In despite of it, there are still a lot of challenges and problems that teachers and learners have to face. In addition, English is a compulsory subject into the Ecuadorian Higher Education because it is a requirement to get a Bachelor's degree as well as to postulate to Master or PhD programs.

Nowadays, writing is demanding to respond the new society challenges due to the vertiginous rising of the technology and the looking for the globalization in many scopes such as economy, education, communication, culture, languages, etc., in order to convey communication with one another. (Quishpe, 2017, p. 227).

Writing is a productive skill that it can be defined as a form of expression and communication with people about their ideas, feeling and attitudes by means of using graphic symbols that constituted visible marks in order to combine each one to form words, combine words to form sentences, etc., on a surface (Lamia et al., 2016, p. 36). On the other hand, foreign language writers emphasize on language rather than content due to the limited knowledge of L2 which hinder the convey message effectively, so it constitutes the most hard skill owing to its complexity of structure and vocabulary (Srinivas, 2019, p. 142). Consequently, English's learners perceive to the written production as the most difficult skill, reason why, written texts in foreign language tend to be more constrained, more difficult and less effective than written texts in mother language

Derakhshan & Karimi (2015) from the psycholinguistics perspective notes that L1 is acquire naturally from birth while that L2 is learning after a mother tongue at a later stage in life, so in our country L2 is learnt in classroom mostly (p. 212). Alternatively, Weinreich (as cited in Lemsara, 2015) outlined that "the influence that exerts L1 on L2 learning is called 'language transfer' and it has usually a negative scope" (p. 22). Therefore, this study focuses on the errors called 'negative transfer' or 'interference' since both structures are different and produce an inaccurate learning. According to Brown (as cited in Lamia et al., 2016) Interlingua (interference) errors and intralingual (development) errors are the sources of the errors (p. 19, 23). However, 'Error analysis' is a type of linguistic comparison between students' interlanguage and the L2 in charge of studying and analyzing of errors made by EFL learners, which errors are taken as a source of the knowledge to find the causes and types of language errors that have significant implications in language teaching. According to Cunningworth (as cited in Lamia, 2016) "errors are systematic deviations from the norms of the language being learned" (p. 21).

Djedelbert explain that "students' mind involving conceptualizing the meaning, constructing Spanish sentence, translating Spanish sentence into English by choosing vocabularies, applying tenses, constructing Noun Phrase and Verb Phrase" (2017, p. 40). This research focuses on some formal linguistics areas such as morphology, syntax and semantic. First, morphology studies the structure of the words. Second, syntax studies the structure of the sentence. Finally, semantic studies the meaning in language (Adrianzén, 2017, p. 30). In addition, Bennu (as cited in Lemsara et al.,

2015) describes three main categories of L1 interference such us lexical interference due to the different level of vocabulary in both languages; syntactic interference is directly linked with the grammatical errors; and discourse interference caused by the writing style of both languages (p. 29).

Prior studies as Spanish interference in EFL writing skills concluded that the translation from L1 to L2 produced errors interference into grammatical and lexical category. The finding were misuse of verbs, omission of personal and object pronouns, misuse of preposition, overuse of articles, incorrect word order and misuse of articles (Cabrera, 2014). Other study performed by Hoyos & Roldán (2016) about 'Análisis de errores sintácticos en inglés por interferencia del español en estudiantes de la licenciatura en lenguas extranjeras de la Universidad del Valle' identified syntactic errors such as word order, omission of pronouns, and misuse of prepositions in argumentative text writing in English. Therefore, the 74 % of them were originated by linguistic interference. Other one, Lamia et al. (2016) studied 'The Effects of The EFL Learners' Mother Tongue Interference on their Writing in English'. It presented 8 major errors such as subject-verb agreement, prepositions, articles, word order, singular/plural forms, verb tense forms, auxiliaries and capitalization. Moreover, it concluded that L1 interference produce low achievement in English written production.

In fact, this investigation has been performing due to the existence of few publications related to the Spanish interference into written text of English language in Ecuadorian education. Finally, the present study has as objective to describe the main linguistic interference errors form Spanish language on English

narrative texts produced by the students of the English second level at Medicine School during the academic year October 2018 - July 2019, ESPOCH, Riobamba, Ecuador.

2. METHOD AND MATERIALS

The research designs was a non-experimental and belonged to the descriptive cross-sectional study because it is completely observational and their results intendent to be completely descriptive owing to the recording observation is performed at a single point in time (Quishpe, 2019 a, p. 4). Mixed approach allows gathering and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data in order to get a better comprehension of the research problem (Hernández, Fernández & Baptista, 2014, p. 534).

The field and documentary research supported the present study. According to Flores (2016), the field research is developed where the problem, fact, or phenomenon are taken place, and it allows establishing the relation between cause and effect (p.18). On the other hand, the documentary research is developed through of the revising of different bibliographies resources related with the investigation problem (p.20). In addition, the 'content analysis method' was applied to study the writing texts in English language. According to Riffe, Lacy, Watson & Fico (2019) "content analysis is the systematic and replicable examination of symbols of communication" (p. 28). Lastly, this study was socio-educational because the education is a social phenomenon, then all educational phenomena has to be study with scientific outlook (Morales, 2016, p. 67).

The population in this study was 113 participants immersed directly in English teaching-learning process. The study group was selected by the stratified sampling whose strata fulfilled the academic status criteria of English teachers (4) and students (109) of the English second level. The sample size was 86 students and it performed a systematic selection of the analysis unit sampling which interval was 2. And the sample size teachers were 4 because it was considered as a small population (Botev & Ridder, 2017, p. 3)

The techniques applied were the survey and the Test, which instruments for gathering data were the questionnaire and the narrative paragraph respectively. They were designed according to the objectives and variables investigation. Firstly, the questionnaire with its respective items were applied to teachers and students (Baena, 2017, pg.82). The items were designed with the aim to measure the variable's attitude of teachers and students from study group. Therefore, the items were structured based on Linkert scale, each one had a closed question and 4 measure scales to determine the approved or rejected level to the question. Apart from that, the questionnaire was submitted to the judgmental approach in order to validity the instrument with the evaluation by expert judges (Taherdoots, 2016, p. 30). Moreover, the testing for instrument reliability was run by the Cronbach Alpha coefficient (α), which results were students α=0.98 and teachers α=0.97. Consequently, the items have a high degree of reliability because the value of both coefficients are closed to the index 1 according to Cronbach (as cited in Quishpe, 2019b, p.38).

Secondly, written a narrative paragraph was applied to the students only about some story of their childhood (Baena et al., 2017, pg. 90). The students have checked the organization of the paragraph: main idea, the supporting ideas and a concluding sentence, as well as, students had got 30 minutes to write a test with a word limit of 100 words as a minimum and 120 words as a maximum. Then, the texts were revising by error analysis comparison.

The data collected were analyzed through a database and processes through spreadsheet in excel applying descriptive statistics as frequency distribution and represented in charts with percent values. In addition, the results were described in function to the answers of the variables of study set in this investigation by the 'triangulation' method. Polit & Beck (as cited in Carter, Lukosius, DiCenso, Blythe & Neville) pointed out that "the triangulation method involves the use of multiple methods of data colleçtion about the same phenomenon" (2014, p̣. 545). Finally, those results were interpreted with the contribution of the theoretical framework relating each of them with the theory and the praxis. The written texts were analyzed linguistically to determine the most frequently interferences errors made by the students.

At present study, the independent variable is 'Mother tongue transfer', so it is defined as the transferring of all habit communications from the mother tongue (L1) to the foreign language (L2) during the learning process. Moreover, as dependent variable is 'Written Texts on English as a Foreign Language, which is defined as a productive skill of communication that the students have to achieve at the end of the learning process.

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3. RESULTS

The results in this research determined that the mother language transfer produce some important linguistics interference errors on English learning, which influences hinders the effective performance of the written texts production.

On the variable 'Mother tongue transfer', mostly students and teachers pointed out that the 'translation into mother tongue' has been using as a strategy in English writing learning. Therefore, those perceptions have a linear correlation between the statistical items and the scale in positive direction according to the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient because the student's criteria (84%) and teacher's criteria (75%) have high frequencies in the 'always' scale. However, the 'often' scale denote a substantial difference between teacher's criteria (25%) and student's criteria (7 %) in positive direction too. On the other hand, the student's criteria into the scale 'never' revealed that only 6 % writes texts in English directly without translating (see Figure 1).

The data reflected that the 'translation' has been using as educative resource, which role for foreign language learning has been changing. According to Newmark (as cited in Dweik & Othman, 2017) and Hatim & Munday (as cited in Susanto, Waluyo & Aprianto, 2018, p. 6) concluded that the 'translation' is an obstacle to achieve the ability to write texts on English language effectively due to the production of many errors into the morphology, syntax and semantic. linguistics elements

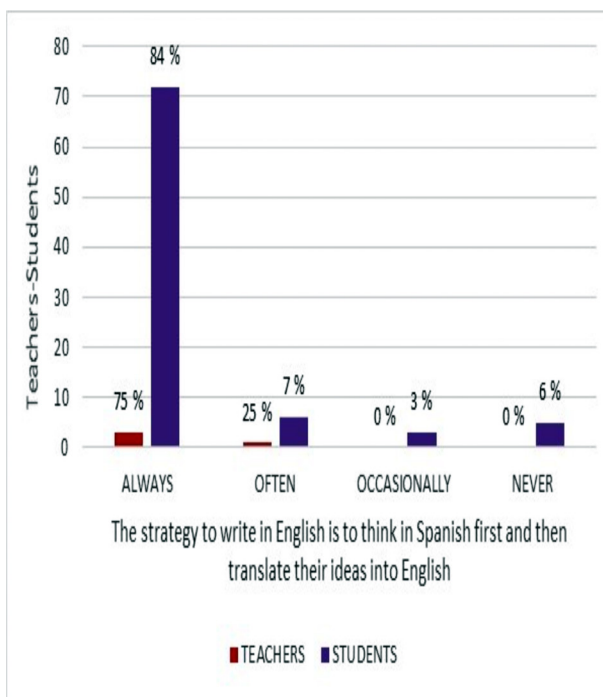On the variable 'writing text production on English Language', the results evidenced

Figure 1. Mother language transfer.
Resource: Survey applied Teachers and Students of the English second level, at Medicine School from ESPOCH
Made by: Luis Quishpe - Researcher

that the students made a significant number of interference errors of different types when they wrote a narrative texts. The total number of errors were 994 errors counted in 86 narrative short paragraphs. The data presented in the Figure 2 showed that the 'overuse of article' was the most significant error that the students made in written text with a 35 %. In the second place came errors in 'misuse verb' with a 27 %. The 'omission of the personal pronouns' with a 16 % were in third position. Finally, the 'misuse of prepositions' had an important data with 11 %. On the other hand, the results showed the lowest frequencies in the types errors such as 'incorrect word order' with 8 % and 'false cognates' with 3 %.

The mother language is acquired by the human communication as a social individual need, while that the foreign language learners have already got a communication

code, so that it is not necessary to learn. Therefore, the results allow inferring that these errors have a negative influence on development of writing texts in English that affects some elements of the linguistics system of the target language. (Cabrera et al., 2014, p. 44; Seitova, 2016, p. 288; Hoyos et al., 2015, p. 50).
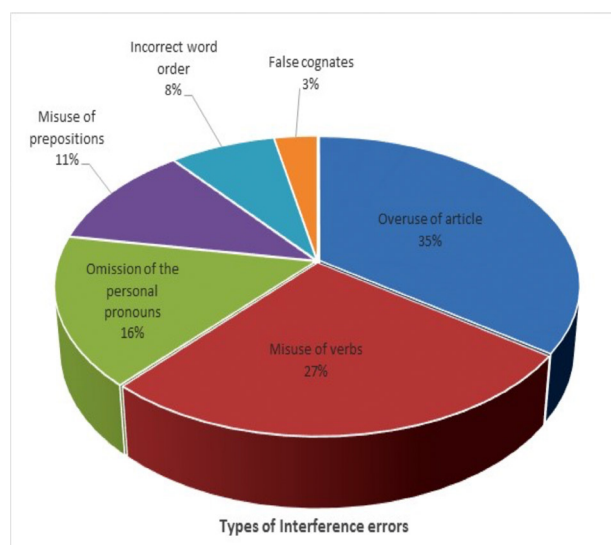

Figure 2. Types of Interference errors.
Resource: Error Analysis Matrix of the written texts by the Students of the English second level, at Medicine School from ESPOCH
Made by: Luis Quishpe - Researcher

4. DISCUSSIONS

The most significant findings found in the present study were both, the 'translation' as a strategy for foreign language learning and 'linguistics interference errors' performed in written productions on English language.

First, 'translation' as a learning strategy has got negative results in learning process because it is usually an inability on the part of the learners to use the language for communication since the learning is facilitated through attention to similarities between (L2) and (L1).

Ángeles Carreres (as cited in Serra et al., 2012, p. 23) concluded that the 'translation' strategy focus only two linguistics competences such as writing and reading. It means that 'translation' is important for students to learn about the form of the target language. To sum up, 'translation' is counterproductive because it forces students to observe the foreign language from the same point of view that they use in their mother tongue and this can cause interference and a strong dependence on the mother tongue to express themselves in the foreign language. This criterion was corroborated by Zalbabeascoa's research (as cited in Serra et al, 2012, p 24) when concluded that 'translation' inhibit to think in foreign language, create interferences and dependence regard to the mother tongue.

The results stated that the linguistics interference errors were focused into the semantic, morphology and syntax linguistics branches. Therefore, the most significant errors were grammar structure and lexical. Grammar interference were made owing to learners' entrance of the rules and instructions of L1 into their L2 translation. Lexical interference were made due to literal translation and inappropriate elections of equivalents, mismanagement of dictionaries and sources. Moreover, learners tend to use false cognate words because they are morphologically similar to words in their L1 but those words have completely different meanings in L2. Those problems were similarities in preview studies developed by Havlaskova et al., (2010); Erarslan et al., (2014) and Dweik & Othman et al., (2017). To sum up, the interference errors identifying in this study in a hierarchy of descending order are (1) overuse of articles, (2) misuse of verb, (3) omission of the personal pronouns, (4) misuse of

prepositions, (5) incorrect word order, (6) false cognates, those findings were similarities to the found in Cabrera (2014) studies.

The 'overuse of articles - the' were the highest frequency interference errors, the examples found about it was the expression: "My parents got back to the Riobamba city in the 2015", definite article 'the' is used twice and there is a L1 interference into grammatical rules and semantic linguistic brunch. First, 'the' can be applied with names of the countries in Spanish but it is not used with names of the countries in the singular form in English. Second, years accept to use 'the' in Spanish. For instance, 'en el 2015'. Although, cardinal numbers do not accept 'the' in English since it refers to a specific year. On the other hand, the statement is written in correct way according to the syntax level except by the extra article 'the' that in these examples are overuses because they are not necessaries. Nevertheless, the interference language occurs in Semantic level when translate utterances from L1 to L2. This interference category had an important correlation with the gathering data in investigations development about grammatical errors made by EFL learners writing texts such us Maros (2007), Abushihub (2011), Watcharapunyawong & Usaha (2013, p 74).

For type error 'misuse of verbs', the statement "I hit my passport photo on the ID card" presents interference error for misuse of the verb 'hit'. According to Websters's Collegue Dictionary "hit" means 'to deal a blow or stroke to, to come against with the impact'. The correct verb would be 'glue', according the context means 'to join or attach firmly with glue or

as if with glue'. Then, there was a lexical interference category from L1 to L2 because the verb 'hit' was used to mean 'to attach firmly with a sticky substance'. Furthermore, Syntax level does not show a notable interference because the statement keeps the basic structure of the sentence (S+V+C). Even so, Semantic level display an unmistakable clear interference and to achieve the correct expression the sentence have to get the verb in past form. Lastly, this sample shows morphology and semantic interference. Morphology level occurs because the verb 'glue' has to be written in past form 'glued' adding the suffix [–d] since it is a regular - transitive verb. Clearly, the findings found in Pulido's study were almost the same from these type of errors (2010, p. 87).

The 'Omission of the personal pronouns' is another interference error into the grammar category located in the following example: "My vacation was unforgettable because was very strange and terrible". Then, L1 interference to L2 in the statement is quite noticeable since the omission of the pronouns 'it'. The pronouns can be omitted in Spanish since all of the verbs' conjugation differ depending of their subject and each subject has its own individual verb form because its means is intrinsic into the verb form. However, the omission of pronouns are not allowed in English structure because the verb conjugations are not complex, but the pronoun is obligatory for the subject to be known. In addition, the findings allow deducing L1 interference on L2 into the Syntax and Semantic brunches in accordance with the conclusion stated by Coello & Coello (2009, p. 53) in their investigation.

For the category 'misuse of preposition', the statement "I always came back to my house in bus" indicated that exists an interference of lexical category from L1 to L2 into the Semantic level due to the incorrect preposition selected. The interference occurs owing to the inappropriate translation from L1 to L2 of the preposition 'in', 'en', this preposition is a homonym and express different ideas that in English is expressed with different words like 'in, on, into, inside, by and at'. Therefore, the correct preposition in English is 'by' and due to its meaning in context´, which can be used with different means of transportation. In addition, this example no denote interference errors in morphology and syntax levels.

The category 'word order' is presented in following example: "I usually sang with my sister romantic music on Saturdays". It was written applying syntactical rules of L1. Therefore, it can be written in both ways by using the past verb 'sang+D.O or I.O in L1. For instance, <D.O> "Yo usualmente cantaba música romántica con mi hermana los sábados"; <I.O> "Yo usualmente cantaba con mi hermana música romántica los sábados". Either form is acceptable in L1 but in L2 only [V+DO 'sang + romantic music']. In fact, this example was written semantically and morphological correctly.

For the category 'false cognate', the example: "I assisted at dance school three times last year" and "My friends played soccer with a Mikasa balloon" generate a lexical L1 interference into the Semantic level. In the first example, there is an interference error called 'verb false cognate' because the verb ['assist'-/ə sist´/ in L2 has a homonymous sound /asis'tir/ in L1. However, the Webster's

College Dictionary define the verb 'assist' in English as 1) give help or assistance, be of service; 2) work for or be a servant to; 3) act as an assistant in a subordinate or supportive function, so the use of the verb is incorrect. Lastly, the correct verb in English according to the context is 'attend' because it means 'be present meeting, church services, school, university, etc'. In fact, Morphology and Syntax level are correct in the example but false cognate errors produce L1 interference in L2 due to the word in two languages or dialects look or/and sound similar but differ in meaning.

The 'misuse of prepositions', 'word order', and 'false cognate' conclusions are very similar with the stablished in the studies performing by Pulido et al. (2010), Hoyos et al. (2015) and Lamia et al. (2016).

5. CONCLUSIONS

- In the Pedagogy and Didactic scope for English teaching-learning process, the results in this study determined that the students from the English second level at Medicine School develop the 'translation' in the classroom as an strategy to write English texts. Therefore, it constitute the main factor to make linguistic errors interference in English written texts because the written production of the learners depend strongly on Spanish grammar structures. In fact, the most frequently interference errors found in this study were the overuse of articles, misuse of verbs, omission of the personal pronouns and incorrect word order. As well as, the 'direct translation' of word for word from L1 to L2 produced linguistics interference errors such us false

cognates and misuse of preposition. Consequently, the most frequent linguistic error interferences were located into the lexical interference category because of the literal translation of lexicons, and into the grammatical interference category at level of the rules and structures of both languages. Therefore, there is a significant linguistic transference from Spanish language to English language due to the 'translation' from L1 to L2, which constitutes a negative Psycholinguistic phenomenon that impede the improvement of the writing skill of the English Foreign Language learners.

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