

**THE INFLUENCE OF THE STUDENTS' MOTHER
TONGUE IN THEIR PROCESS OF LEARNING A
FOREIGN LANGUAGE. ON SOME INTERLINGUAL
ERRORS IN SPANISH LEARNERS OF ENGLISH**

**LA INFLUENCIA DE LA LENGUA MADRE DEL
ESTUDIANTE EN SU PROCESO DE APRENDIZAJE DE UNA
LENGUA EXTRANJERA. ALGUNOS ERRORES
INTERLINGÜÍSTICOS EN APRENDICES ESPAÑOLES DE
INGLÉS**



TRABAJO DE FIN DE GRADO

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ANEXO II

DECLARACIÓN DE HONESTIDAD ACADÉMICA

El/la estudiante abajo firmante declara que el presente Trabajo de Fin de Grado es un trabajo original y que todo el material utilizado está citado siguiendo un estilo de citas y referencias reconocido y recogido en el apartado de bibliografía. Declara, igualmente, que ninguna parte de este trabajo ha sido presentado como parte de la evaluación de alguna asignatura del plan de estudios que cursa actualmente o haya cursado en el pasado.

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ABSTRACT

Our main objective in this work is to research to what extent the student's mother tongue is present and determines his process of learning a second language. In particular, we are going to analyse some of the interlingual errors which, we believe, are characteristic of the interlanguage of Spanish learners of English as a foreign language in order to demonstrate if they are present and, if that is case, which is their frequency of occurrence. In order to achieve our goal, we have personally designed a questionnaire with two different sections—an obligatory multiple choice activity and an optional translation exercise— on the basis of some well-known and significant lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic contrasts that exist between English and Spanish (cf. cf. Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin, 1965; Whitley, 1984; Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012). The test has been completed by 144 students attending the third year of Secondary Education and the first year of A levels at a public and a semi-private educational center in Huelva. Despite its preliminary character, the results obtained in our research do confirm that the student's mother tongue does clearly have a strong influence on his process of learning English as a second language.

Key words: contrastive analysis; transference; interlanguage; error analysis; interlingual/intralingual error.

RESUMEN

Nuestro objetivo principal en este trabajo consiste en investigar hasta qué punto la lengua materna del estudiante está presente y determina su proceso de aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. En concreto, vamos a analizar algunos de los errores interlingüísticos que consideramos característicos de la interlengua de los estudiantes españoles de inglés como lengua extranjera para comprobar si realmente dichos errores se dan en dicho sistema lingüístico y con qué frecuencia de aparición. Para ello, hemos diseñado personalmente un cuestionario con dos partes bien diferenciadas —una actividad de opción múltiple obligatoria y un ejercicio de traducción opcional—, basándonos en algunos de los contrastes léxico-semánticos y morfo-sintácticos más significativos que existen entre las lenguas española e inglesa (cf. cf. Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin, 1965; Whitley, 1984; Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012). Dicha prueba ha sido completada por 144 estudiantes de tercero de ESO y de primero de Bachillerato de un centro público y de otro concertado de Huelva. Si bien aquí presentamos un estudio preliminar, los resultados en él obtenidos demuestran con

contundencia que la lengua materna del estudiante tiene, en efecto, una enorme influencia en su proceso de aprendizaje de inglés como lengua extranjera.

Palabras clave: análisis contrastivo; transferencia; interlengua; análisis de errores; error interlingüístico/intralingüístico

I. INTRODUCTION

The process of learning a second language is described in the literature as a very complex and long process in which many and diverse internal and external factors, such as, for instance, age, intelligence, personality, motivation, self-esteem, social status, and culture, just to mention a few, play an important role (cf. Asher, 1969; Selinker, 1972; Spolsky, 1989; Ellis, 1994; Brown, 1995; Ortega, 2009; and Lenet *et al.*, 2011, among others). One of this variables is the student's mother tongue which, being inherent to him and inevitably present, as such, in his learning process, has been unanimously recognized in the literature as influencing it either in a positive or negative way (cf. Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957; Corder, 1992). Notice, in fact, what Lado (1957: ii) states in his regard:

Learning a second language, therefore, constitutes a very different task from learning the first language. The basic problems arise not out of any essential difficulty in the features of the new language themselves but primarily out of the special "set" created by the first language habits. [...] Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture.

It is, precisely, this specific factor on which the present work focuses. In particular, our main objective is no other than to analyze and investigate to what extent Spanish, as the student's mother tongue, is present and determines his process of learning English as a second language. For that purpose, we have designed a specific and limited test, divided in two parts —a multiple choice exercise and an activity on translation, included in the final appendix of this work—, on the basis of some of the most significant lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic contrasts between Spanish and English which, despite being presumably known by the 144 Secondary Education and A Levels learners who have completed the questionnaire, we believe are going to be the source of numerous errors on their part. Notice in this regard that, without exception, all the grammatical issues asked for in the test are part of the contents established for the teaching of English as a foreign language at high school level in the BOJA and BOE reports issued by the Andalusian and the Spanish governments.¹

¹ See the following links: http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/eboja/2016/144/BOJA16-144-00289-13500-01_00095875.pdf; <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2017/07/08/pdfs/BOE-A-2017-7983.pdf>

Framed, thus, within the Applied Linguistic field of Second Language Teaching and Learning, the present work is divided in four different sections. The first one, which serves as its introduction, describes our object of study, the specific objective we want to achieve and, finally, the methodology we are going to use to reach it. The second section, devoted to frame our study, consists of five different parts; in the first one, Krashen's (1978) distinction between acquisition and learning is brought to light; in the second one, the notion of transference, a basic assumption underlying our study, is accounted for; in part three, the evolution over time of the versatile methodological tool crucial to understand our work, known as Contrastive Analysis, is presented, though in quite general terms; later on, in part four, the different kinds of learners' errors distinguished in the field of Error Analysis are described; and finally, in part five, the notion of interlanguage is explained. In section three, we offer a general overview of what a Spanish-English Contrastive Grammar should be, in which special attention is given to the most significant linguistic contrasts that exist between the two languages involved in it. Section four, of more practical nature, describes in detail, in the first place, the methodology we have used in our work to focus, later on, on the results and most important findings we have obtained in our analysis. In section five we present the conclusions that we have reached in the development of our work. And later on, in the sixth section, we list the bibliographical references that have been of great help to us for the development of the theoretical part of our project. To finish, we include at the end of the work an appendix with the questionnaire that the students have completed.

II. ON THE ROLE OF THE STUDENT'S MOTHER TONGUE IN SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNING

1. Second language learning *versus* second language acquisition:

The well-known distinction between second language acquisition and learning in the field of Applied Linguistics constitutes our starting point in this study. As stated in Krashen (1978), among others, the acquisition process, also described as implicit learning, is a subconscious process that takes place in a real and natural environment by means of which learners acquire a language without being aware of grammatical rules. Since its main focus is on communication and not on linguistic form, it is usually considered in the literature as quite similar to the process by which we acquire our first language (cf. Chomsky, 1965). On the other hand, second language learning, described, in turn, as explicit language, is the result of direct instruction in the rules of a language and is not, therefore, communicative. The learning process is, thus, a conscious process in which students are aware of the new language that is being learnt.

Second language learning, which constitutes the main focus of our study, is a very complex and well-studied phenomenon in the literature (cf. Asher, 1969; Selinker, 1972; Spolsky, 1989; Brown, 1995; Ortega, 2009; and Lenet *et al.*, 2011, among others), in which many different variables are said to take part. Although a large number of theories and proposals have attempted to explain this process, none of them has been completely satisfactory on its own (cf. Krashen, 1978; Larsen-Freeman and Long, 1991; Ellis, 1994). However, there is common agreement among them on many of the individual and external factors involved in the learning process. Ellis (1994), for example, includes age, aptitude, intelligence, personality and attitude within the former kind, since they are inherently different in each student, and what is usually referred to as input, the information about the second language that students get, and output, their linguistic production in the second language, within the latter. Some other scholars, like Lenet *et al.* (2011), for instance, point out some other cognitive, social and affective factors such as, for example, the student's level of attention, his motivation and self-esteem, which also influence his way of learning. And others, like Fries (1945), Lado (1957), Cook (1991), Corder (1992), focus mainly on the essential role that the student's mother tongue plays in his learning process. Corder (1992:

21), for instance, affirms that “the target language crucially depends upon the similarity or difference it bore to the mother tongue [...] The order of acquisition would be highly sensitive to the nature of the mother tongue and its relation to the target language”. It is, therefore, in this regard where Corder’s (1992) concept of “language distance” should be taken into account since, as Corder (1992) himself defends, the more similar the two languages are—the student’s first language and the language he is learning—the more the learner’s mother tongue will help him in his learning process.

2. On the notion of transference:

As previously stated, the student’s mother tongue is one of the factors that clearly influences the students’ second language learning process. Actually, it is said to play a crucial role in this complex process since, being at all times subconsciously present in it, the student’s mother tongue usually acts as a source of transference that carries its linguistic patterns to the language he is in the process of learning. As stated in Ellis (1965: 159), there is no doubt that “[...] the learning of task A will affect the subsequent learning of task B”.

The student’s mother tongue transference is, in sum, an important and essential phenomenon because, as Cook (1991), for instance, remarks, it can help learners find common and similar elements and structures between the first and the second languages, such as the Spanish suffix *-ción* in words like *emoción*, *solución*, *evolución*, *educación* which normally has the English suffix *-tion* as equivalent (*emotion*, *solution*, *evolution*, *education*), which are not going to be, thus, problematic in their learning. On the other hand, it will also help them identify areas that exhibit a different behaviour in both languages, thus constituting areas of potential difficulty where errors are going to be frequently made. A case in point here highlighted by Cook (1991) is the usual omission of the syntactic subject in Spanish, as seen in (1a), which, when transferred to English, where it is always syntactically obligatory, is a clear source of ungrammaticality, (1b):

(1a) Juego al baloncesto.

(1b) *Play basketball

3. Contrastive Analysis:

The previously described transference hypothesis, initially formulated by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), gave rise in the middle of the twentieth century to what is known as Contrastive Analysis (cf. James, 1980). This new proposal, mainly devised to ease the

learning of second languages, consists of establishing a comparison between the student's mother tongue and the foreign language he is in the process of learning in order to bring to light the similarities as well as the differences between both linguistic systems. Whereas the former have been described as non-problematic for the student (positive transfer), the latter have been regarded as a good way to detect potential areas of difficulty in the learning process of a specific second language, where errors have been predicted to occur frequently due to the transference caused by the student's mother language (negative transfer or interference). In Lado's (1957: 64) words:

Those structures that are similar in both languages will be easy to understand due to the fact that they could be transferred from one language to the other working satisfactorily. Those structures that are different will be difficult to learn.

Being initially extremely successful, Contrastive Analysis soon became distrusted by applied linguists and second language teachers (cf. Wilkins, 1972; Ringbom, 1994), because, as Baird (1967) and Nemser (1980), among others, pointed out, it made false predictions about the learning errors and their cause and nature; that is, many of the errors predicted by this new pedagogical tool as being the result of some kind of linguistic interference never materialized or were the consequence of many other diverse factors that did not have anything to do with the student's mother language. Therefore, after this initial stage in the evolution of Contrastive Analysis, known as its strong version and initiated, as said before, by Fries (1945) and Lado (1957), two other stages were developed: the so-called weak and moderate versions.

The weak version of this new methodology in the field of Second Language Learning, mainly proposed by Jackson and Whitman (1971) in the 70s, radically opposed to its former and original form since it defended that errors and difficulties could not be predicted in advance or before they were made. Being only useful, therefore, to find and know the origin of the errors produced by the learner, once they were detected, this particular model of Contrastive Analysis was not very successful. As a consequence, at the same time an intermediate version of Contrastive Analysis, designed as a blend of the previous ones, was developed. Known as its moderate model and mainly defended by Oller and Ziahosseiny (1970), it focused not only on the contrasts between the two languages involved in the learning process but also on the cognitive nature of human learning in general.

Apart from the methodological problems for second language learning entailed by Contrastive Analysis, this new linguistic model of study was too much debated at the time owing to the theoretical problems it posed, but which we cannot develop further for reasons of time and place: among others, the appropriate theoretical frameworks for the comparison between the languages, the notion of equivalence and, as a consequence, the concept known as *tertium comparationis* (cf. Martín Morillas, 1997).

4. Error Analysis:

As has been previously pointed out, errors seem to play a crucial role in the linguistic model known as Contrastive Analysis. For that reason, when Contrastive Analysis was developing, a new model of analysis, known as Error Analysis, made its way in the linguistic scenery of the time, with Corder (1967) and James (1980) as its main advocates. For James (1980), in particular, Contrastive Analysis has to be seen as an enterprise which produces “two-valued typologies” that can be grouped into three different types, depending on the aims it wants to get: (i) translation theory, which bases itself on the conversion of texts; (ii) error analysis, which studies, analyzes and classifies the errors produced by learners when learning a second language; (iii) and finally, contrastive analysis on its own; that is, the comparison of two different languages just to point out the similarities and differences them.

Focusing now on Error Analysis and following Corder (1967), a first distinction between mistakes and errors has to be taken into consideration: whereas the former concerns the non-systematic errors that are produced due to external conditions such as memory lapses, tiredness, and the like, and which any speaker is aware of (cf. James, 1998), the latter refer to the systematic errors that pervade the learner’s production and which, as such, can be a good help to identify the real problems that students have to face when they are learning a second language. In fact, in opposition to mistakes, which are performance faults, errors are faults of competence (cf. Chomsky, 1957). Therefore, while mistakes are not considered relevant in the process of second language learning, the learner’s errors are extremely significant in this complex process because, as Corder (1967) states, “[...] they provide to the researcher evidence of how language is learned or acquired, [and] what strategies or procedures the learner is employing in the discovery of the language”.

As a consequence, in the field of Applied Linguistics, learners’ errors have been studied for many decades in order to establish a taxonomy of their origin and the causes and factors that motivate them. As regards their source, Richards (1971) distinguishes three kinds of errors: (i) interference errors, also known as interlingual errors, which are caused by some

kind of negative transference produced by the learner's native language in the second language that he is in the process of learning, as the one illustrated in (2a-2b):

(2a) Tengo veinte años.

(2b) *I have twenty years.

(ii) intralingual errors, which are caused, in turn, by false hypothesis and the overgeneralization and/or ignorance of the rules that govern the second language; or put it into different terms, errors that are due to some difficulties that the own second language presents:

(3a) *She getted a new phone.

(iii) and finally, developmental errors, which are the result of some cognitive processes which are also present in the acquisition of the student's first language and which, as such, should not be taken into account in the process of second language learning.

For Schachter and Celce-Murcia (1977), however, intralingual and developmental errors should not be distinguished as two different classes since the frontier between them is not clear. This same position was defended some time earlier by Richards himself (1980), who only identified interlingual and intralingual errors. Within the latter Dulay and Burt (1991) include the errors they call "unique"—those ones that are different in each individual and, as consequence, difficult to exemplify—, and Stenson (1983: 269), in turn, those called 'induced errors', which, as he states, are the learners' errors "that result more from the classroom situation than from either the students' incomplete competence in English grammar or first language interference":

(4a) He climbs like a monkey → He climbs as if he were a monkey.

(4b) She cries like a baby → *She cries as if the baby cries.

To finish, as regards the factors that motivate the production of learners' errors, no matter their source, James (1998) highlight several phenomena: among others, omission, (5); overinclusion, (6); misselection of words, (7); misordering of elements, (8); and blends created by the wrong connection of two grammatical forms, (9):

(5) *like chocolate.

(6) *We usually have lunch at the dinning room.

- (7) *They go to the cinema yesterday.
- (8) *I really like turtels.
- (9) *According to Peter's opinion, this is a good price.

5. The notion of interlanguage:

As can be deduced from what has been explained up to now, learners' errors, no matter their origin nor linguistic nature, are something always present in their learning process. As Corder (1967: 161) remarks, errors are necessary for the learning process to progress:

[...] they are significant in three different ways. First, to the teacher, in that they show how far towards the goal the learner has progressed. Second, they provide to the researcher evidence of how a language is acquired, what strategies the learner is employing in his learning of a language. Thirdly, they are indisputable to the learner himself because we can regard the making of errors as a device the learner uses in order to learn.

It is, therefore, at this stage that the notion of "interlanguage", coined by Selinker (1972: 214) and defined as the "separate linguistic system based on the observable output which results from a learner's attempted production of a TL norm", makes sense.

As deduced from the previous definition, while learning a second language, students construct a new linguistic system that is different from their mother tongue, as well as from the language they are in the process of learning, which is constantly changing, as the learning process is advancing, and which is individual and non-transferrable from one student to another one. Therefore, in complete agreement with Cook (1991: 5), the interlanguage that students personally create cannot be seen as a defective and faulty version of the second language, but "a system of language on its own right".

According to Selinker (1972: 37), there are five processes and strategies, listed below, that characterize the student's interlanguage. Since, as he continues explaining, each of them "forces fossilizable material upon surface IL [interlanguage] utterances, controlling to a very large extent the surface structures of these utterances", it can be concluded that the concepts of interlanguage and fossilization, understood as the linguistic phenomenon which makes learners constantly and subconsciously maintain in their interlanguage linguistic features of

very diverse nature that do not belong to the second language they are in the process of learning, go hand in hand:

(i) language transfer, which incorporates distinguishing linguistic features of the student's mother tongue into his interlanguage:

(10a) El examen anterior fue más fácil.

(10b) *Last exam was more easy.

(ii) transfer of training, which is said to provide the student's interlanguage with fossilized material that is the result of inadequate and deficient methodological and didactic tools and methods:

(11) I have two shelves in my bedroom

(iii) strategies of second language learning, which refer to the general and diverse techniques that a learner uses in any kind of learning process and which applied to the field of second language learning can be summarized as those ones that allow him to internalize the linguistic material, such as rules, patterns and structures, that the student is learning. Furthermore, they help learners establish fixed patterns when they communicate that can become repetitive if, as in (12), the same element is used once an again:

(12) You can come but you should know that is dangerous, but it is ok if you want to, but it is not easy to enter.

(iv) strategies of second language communication, such as, for instance, the creation of a new word in order to express a concept:

(13a) I want to travel in a balloon.

(13b) I want to travel in an air ball.

(v) and finally, overgeneralization of target language linguistic material, which consists of the wrong generalization that the student makes of the rules that govern the second language:

(14a) *I buyed the new book

(14b) I bought the new book.

III. SPANISH AND ENGLISH CONTRASTS.

A GENERAL OVERVIEW

As Jakobson (1959) asserts, a complete equivalence between two languages can never be given because each unit of meaning carries inherent associations and connotations of the cultural linguistic system to which they belong. Owing to this fact, Guinea Ulecia (1996) predicts that the different grammatical elements and patterns of the student's mother tongue which lack a complete equivalence in the second language he is in the process of learning are going to entail many problems and difficulties for the second language learner. As a consequence, their teaching should be emphasized and implemented in the second language classroom with the help provided by a Contrastive Grammar of both languages.

A Contrastive Grammar with pedagogical purposes should be, first of all, following Martínez Vázquez (1996), selective and not systematic; that is, it should include only the grammatical features that differ in the languages that are compared. And in the second place, due to the "virtual impossibility" to contrast different languages in their entirety, it should pay attention only to the differences that are found at the different linguistic subsystems of the languages at issue.

As regards Spanish and English, the following contrasts, mainly derived from their belonging to different linguistic families —Romance and Germanic, respectively— have been pointed out in the literature (cf. Stockwell, Bowen, and Martin, 1965; Whitley, 1984; Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012). Since in our analysis we focus just on several lexical-semantic and morpho-syntactic Spanish-English contrasts, for reasons of time and space we will mention only some of the most relevant phonetic, phonological and pragmatic differences between both languages to proceed, later on, to describe in more depth the lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic issues on which our study is based.

1. Phonetics and Phonology:

In the contrastive analysis of the phonetic and phonological systems of English and Spanish carried out by Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965), they point out several differences, among which the two following ones can serve as an example:

- (i) the inexistence in English of the Spanish consonant sound, graphically represented with the letter *ñ* (*año*, *sueño*) and the sound [X], graphically represented with the letter *j* or the letter *g* when followed by the vowels *e* and *i* (*jamón*, *juego*, *genio*, *giro*).
- (ii) the distinction between the bilabial [b] and labiodental [v] English sounds, exemplified, for instance, in *bomb* (/bɒm/) and *valley* (/vaeli/), which does not have any parallel in Spanish, where the letters *b* of *balón* and *v* of *ventana* are both pronounced alike, as the bilabial sound [b]: /balon/, /bentana/.

2. Pragmatics:

Pragmatics, where socio-cultural and extra-linguistic factors are to be included, also plays an extremely important role in languages. Therefore, second language teaching and learning must pay attention to it. Among the most significant pragmatic contrasts between Spanish and English, Cenoz and Valencia (1996: 225-238) point out, for instance, the distance kept by Spanish and American people in a conversation, which is much closer in the first than in the second case; the tendency of Spaniards to maintain eye contact when speaking, which is not so much present in English people's interactions; the constant use of courtesy and polite forms, such as, for instance, *thank you*, *please*, *could you...?*, *would you...?*, in English requests, which, on the contrary, tend to be absent from their Spanish equivalent speech acts. It should be noticed here, furthermore, that, according to these scholars, their continued and repetitive use in Spanish requests can be seen as excessive and even ironic.

3. Lexicology and Semantics:

There is no doubt that the knowledge of an extensive vocabulary is necessary for having a good command of the second language that the student is in the process of learning. However, the second language vocabulary is a complex area to learn for two main reasons: first, because not all the vocabulary of the student's mother tongue finds a clear and total equivalence in the second language; and secondly, because sometimes the meaning of words that exist in both languages is not the same. Among the most significant lexico-semantic problems for students of Spanish and English as foreign languages, lexical voids, false friends and the phenomenon known as lexical split are usually included.

Lexical voids refer to vocabulary items of the foreign language like, for instance, the English terms *kettle* and *pudding* or the Spanish ones *siesta* and *churros*, that do not have any correspondence at all in the student's mother tongue, usually because they denote realities

typical of the foreign culture which, as such, lack a name, and quite often are even unknown, in the learner's culture. They are, therefore, problematic words to learn for students of foreign languages.

False friends, like, for instance, *actually* and *actualmente*, are words that have the same form, but a different meaning in two or more languages, thus constituting another clear problem for second language students, who quite often use them in the wrong contexts believing that the meaning of the foreign word is equivalent to the meaning that the formally similar word in their mother tongue has. Another lexico-semantic difficulty students have to face when learning a foreign language concerns the phenomenon known as lexical split, which consists of the presence of more than one term in the foreign language to cover the meaning of one single word of the target language, or the opposite situation; that is, the existence of more than one lexical item in the student's mother tongue to cover the meaning of just one single word of the foreign language. In order to differentiate them, the first case of lexical split described, illustrated in (15), is called divergence, and the second one, exemplified, in turn, in (16), is known as convergence:

(15) tiempo → tense, weather, time.

(16) bufanda and pañuelo → scarf.

4. Morphology and syntax:

Many differences have been pointed out in the literature in the contrastive analysis of Spanish and English morphology and syntax (cf. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin, 1965; Whitley, 1984; Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012), which we classify in several groups:

4.1. Inflectional morphology:

As regards inflectional morphology, the grammatical categories of number, gender, comparison, case and tense present a wide array of problems for the students of English and Spanish due to the different behaviour they exhibit in the two languages at issue. We focus here just on number, the comparison of adjectives and case, because gender, not being, in opposition to what happens in Spanish, a distinctive grammatical category of English nouns, is not a problem for Spanish students of English. Tense will be compared and contrasted, but in the section devoted to lexical categories.

Although Spanish and English differentiate between the singular and the plural numbers in nouns, the English plural is not easy to learn for Spanish students due to several

reasons: first, because of its many irregular forms, that are regular in Spanish, as seen in (17a-17b); secondly, because of the different behaviour English and Spanish nouns exhibit in terms of their countability, (18a-18b); in the third place, because some nouns that are inherently plural in Spanish are singular in English or viceversa, as seen in (19a-19b); and finally, because the plural number is not used in the same contexts in Spanish and English, as illustrated, for instance in (20a-20b):

(17a) pie/pies; hombre/hombres; niño/niños; ratón/ratones; oveja/ovejas.

(17b) foot/feet; man/men; child/children; mouse/mice; sheep/sheepØ.

(18a) un consejo/varios consejos; un mueble/varios muebles.

(18b) *an advice/a piece of advice/some advice; *a furniture/apiece of furniture/ some furniture.

(19a) noticia/noticias; pantalón/pantalones

(19b) *new/news; *trouser/trousers; *pant/pants

(20a) Los estudiantes levantaron la mano derecha.

(20b) The students raised their right hands.

In opposition to nouns, English adjectives are morphologically invariable in terms of number. This invariability seems to be a problem for Spanish learners of English because in Spanish adjectives show number and gender contrast, which quite often they transfer to English. Furthermore, English and Spanish adjectives present another important inflectional morphological contrast, this time related to their degrees of comparison. As Mackenzie and Martínez Caro (2012: 17) state, this difference is to be seen only in the so-called short English adjectives which, as seen in (21a), use the inflectional morphs *-est* and *-er*, respectively, to create their superlative and comparative of superiority forms. Long English adjectives do behave, however, in this regard like Spanish adjectives since they use the periphrastic forms *the most* and *more....than* before the adjective to form both degrees:

(21a) He is smarter than me.

(21b) Él es más listo que yo.

(22a) My sister is the most beautiful girl in her class.

(22b) Mi hermana es la chica más guapa de su clase.

Non-existent in Spanish, the form, as well as the use, of the so-called English Saxon Genitive are weird for Spanish students and a common source of errors. Therefore, learners

usually avoid its use, as stated in Sánchez Benedito (2007: 65-69), thus transferring the postnominal possessive structure available in Spanish to those English contexts, like, for instance, the one illustrated in (23a-23c), where the only valid option is the Saxon Genitive pattern:

(23a) Es el libro de Pedro.

(23b) *It is the book of Peter.

(23c) It is Peter's book.

4.2. Lexical categories:

Determiners conform a closed class of words that entail many problems for students of English and Spanish as foreign languages because their use differs in a wide array of contexts. Among them, the following ones are usually pointed out: (i) noun phrases with an item of clothing or a part of the body as head which, as seen in (24a-24b), are introduced in English by means of a possessive determiner and in Spanish by any of its definite articles; (ii) nominal subject complements that denote professions, religious affiliation, nationality and the like, which, as seen in (25a-25b), are headed by the indefinite article in English and no determiner at all in Spanish; (iii) and finally, noun phrases with generic and non-specific reference which, as illustrated in (26a-26b), do not require the presence of any determiner in English but in Spanish are headed by the definite article:

(24a) We have to take off our earrings.

(24b) Debemos quitarnos los pendientes.

(25a) He is a dentist.

(25b) Es dentista.

(26a) Water is good for health.

(26b) El agua es buena para la salud.

Within the lexical categories included in the so-called open word classes we have chosen verbs as part of our study due to their complexity, if compared with the remaining ones. Specifically, we will focus on tense, mood and some of their non-finite forms. As regards tense, several contrasts are usually pointed out in the literature; among others, the existence of three main tenses in Spanish (present, past and future) and only the first two ones in English; the existence of two different past tenses with different aspectual connotations in Spanish —the *pretérito imperfecto*, (27a) and the *pretérito perfecto simple*, (28a)—, which

converge into one single past tense, the simple past, in English, as seen in (27b-28b); and the equivalence of the Spanish simple present and the English present perfect to denote situations that started in the past and still continue in the present time, (29a-29b):

(27a) Jugaba con mis amigos cuando era niño.

(27b) I played with my friends when I was a child.

(28a) Jugué con mis amigos ayer.

(28b) I played with my friends yesterday.

(29a) Uso estos zapatos desde que tengo 15 años.

(29b) I have used these shoes since I was 15.

In relation to mood, the subjunctive deserves special attention since both its form and usage is radically different in English and Spanish. Whereas in Spanish it is fully conjugated, (30a-31a), as the indicative mood, in English it makes use just of the base form of the verb, without any kind of inflection, in the present, (30b), and in the past it exhibits the same form as the past tense of the indicative mood, (31b):

(30a) Es normal que estén al tanto de la situación

(30b) It is normal that they be aware of the situation

(31a) Ojalá tuviera suficiente dinero.

(31b) If only I had enough money.

As regard its use, it should be noticed that in Spanish it is quite extended, while in English it is not frequently used, being virtually restricted to formal contexts. This is so because as, stated in Kerl (1861: 169), the English subjunctive “has been well-nigh absorbed by conjunctions, adverbs and auxiliaries”. Notice in this regard that the diverse modality values of possibility, probability, uncertainty, non-factuality, etc. conveyed through the Spanish subjunctive are expressed in English by some other alternative grammatical devices: among the most common ones, modal verbs, (32b), and infinitive constructions, (33b):

(32a) Tengo que intentarlo, aunque sea difícil.

(32b) I have to try, although it may be difficult.

(33a) Intenté que ellos te convencieran.

(33b) I tried them to convince you.

Non-finite English and Spanish verbal forms also have different functions in the two languages at issue. A case in point here is the so-called gerund, which in English is allowed to perform both a nominal and adverbial function, (34a-35a), whereas in Spanish it only has an adverbial function, (34b). Notice here that the nominal function of the English gerund is expressed in Spanish by means of an infinitive, (34b):

(34a) He entered the room singing and dancing.

(34b) Entró en la habitación cantando y bailando.

(35a) Running is good for your health.

(35b) Correr es bueno para la salud.

4.3. Syntactic functions:

In relation to syntax, the first striking contrast between Spanish and English concerns the syntactic expression of pronominal subjects, which being compulsory in English, (36a), are frequently omitted in Spanish. Hence, the classification of English as a non-null subject language and that of Spanish, in turn, as a null-subject language:

(36a) They gave me a present.

(36b) Me dieron un regalo.

The reasons that explain this contrast are to be found in the different morphological behaviour verbs exhibit in these two languages: whereas in Spanish they are inflected for person in all the tenses, the English verb is only inflected for person in the third person singular of its simple present tense.

Another syntactic function that differs in both languages concerns direct object with human and animate reference, thus presenting learning problems. Notice here that in English they are formally identical to any other direct object, being realized by a noun phrase, (37b-38b). In Spanish, however, they become prepositional phrases headed by the completely grammaticalised preposition *a*, (37a), which, as in (37b), is absent from non-animate direct objects:

(37a) Vi a mi hermano ayer.

(37b) I saw my brother yesterday.

(38a) Vi una película ayer.

(38b) I saw a film yesterday.

4.4. Word order:

Sentential word order is said to be more rigid in English than in Spanish due mainly to the different inflectional morphological potential of English and Spanish verbs. Therefore, whereas in Spanish there are not strict rules that dictate the position that elements must occupy in the sentence, in the English kernel and basic sentence pattern each constituent must occupy a specific position. To illustrate this contrast, interrogative patterns are a good example. Whereas in English they obligatorily trigger subject-operator inversion, in Spanish they only differ from their affirmative or negative counterparts in their intonation, unless they have a lexical noun phrase as subject that, as a general rule, is located at the end of the question, (39a-40b):

(39a) ¿Vives en Londres?

(39b) ¿Do you live in London?

(40a) ¿Qué hace María?

(40b) What is Mary doing?

There are, nevertheless, two exceptional cases in English which deserve special attention here: on the one hand, interrogative patterns whose subject is the question word itself, which, do not require subject-operator inversion; furthermore, if they describe situations encoded by means either of the simple present or the simple past they do not even need any kind of *do* support to function as operator, (41a-41c); and on the other, indirect questions that, contrary to expectation, follow the prototypical word order of a statement, (42a-42c):

(41a) ¿Quién escribió esa novela?

(41b) Who wrote that novel?

(41c) *Who did write that novel?.

(42a) ¿Sabes dónde está la Torre Eiffel?

(42b) Do you know where The Eiffel Tower is?

(42c) *Do you know where is The Eiffel Tower?

Within phrases, however, elements occupy a fixed position in English and Spanish, despite not always being the same in both languages. As is well known, adjectives that function as nominal modifiers, for instance, precede the noun in English, whereas in Spanish they are placed in a postnominal position, (43a-43b); and the adverbs of time that are usually combined with the present perfect tense, like, for instance, *ya/already* in (44a-44b), must be

placed between the auxiliary and the lexical verb in English and either at the beginning or the end of the clause in Spanish, where this middle position is not allowed.

(43a) He/She is a big person.

(43b) Es una persona grande.

(44a) I have already paid the bill before.

(44b) ‘Ya he pagado la cuenta/He pagado la cuenta ya.

(44c) *He ya pagado la cuenta.

4.5. Negation:

Negation is another controversial aspect to keep in mind in the teaching and learning of foreign languages. In relation to the two languages at issue in this work, the most significant contrast here concerns the phenomenon of multiple negation, allowed in Spanish but forbidden in English. This means that whereas a Spanish sentence can contain more than one negative element, (45a), only one is allowed in English, (45b-45c). According to Mackenzie and Martínez Caro (2012), this is so because the postverbal position of a negative element in English turns the whole sentence negative, thus not allowing any other negative mark be inserted in it. As a consequence, to convey the meaning of the Spanish negative elements outside the verb, when the verb is already negative, English resorts to its series of ‘non-assertive items’, such as *any*, *anyone*, *anything*, *ever*, etc., (45d):

(45a) No veo nada.

(45b) I can see nothing.

(45c) *I can’t see nothing.

(45d) I can’t see anything.

4.6. Other structures:

Among the multiple structures that, for different reasons, present difficulties and problems for Spanish students of English as a foreign language, we have selected the so-called reverse constructions and causative patterns as part of our study because they are usually introduced at the initial stages of the student’s learning process.

The former consists of pairs of Spanish and English sentences, as the one illustrated in (46a-46b), whose verbs, despite being lexically equivalent and requiring, as such, the same participants, present a radically different subcategorisation frame in which the same syntactic functions are present, but realized by different participants in each language (cf. Marras and

Cadierno, 2008). Verbs like *gustar/like* and *encantar/love*, which are learnt very early, enter this kind of construction. Notice, in fact, here that the participant *el fútbol/football* is the grammatical subject of the Spanish sentence, but the direct object in its English counterpart; and on the other hand, *a Pedro/Peter* functions as indirect object in Spanish and as subject in English:

(46a) A Pedro le encanta el fútbol.

(46b) Peter loves football.

The latter, in turn, are to be defined as those constructions that express an action that is performed by an agent different from the participant functioning as the clausal subject and which, quite frequently, does not surface in the sentence. Whereas in Spanish this kind of structures does not present any particular distinguishing syntactic frame, in English they require a peculiar type of passive pattern: namely, the one usually referred to in the literature as the “have/get something done” causative passive pattern, (47a-47b):

(47a) Mis padres pintan la casa todos los años.

(47b) My parents have/get their house painted every year.

IV. ANALYSIS OF THE DATA AND DESCRIPTION OF RESULTS

As stated in the introduction to this work, our starting point in this study is the well-known hypothesis that the student's mother tongue influences to a great extent his process of learning a second language. To prove that this premise holds true, we have created a test, consisting of two parts—an obligatory multiple choice exercise with twenty questions and an optional activity on translation in which also twenty Spanish sentences have to be translated into English—, based on some of the most significant lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic contrasts that exist between Spanish and English: i.e., lexical cases of convergence and divergence, use and form of tenses, mood, prepositions, determiners, word order, negation, etc.—. It should be noticed here, nevertheless, that all these contrasts should be known to the students for whom the test is designed since they are part of the contents established for the teaching of English as a foreign language at high school level in the BOJA and BOE reports issued by the Andalusian and the Spanish government² and included, as such, in the students' text-books. This way we can demonstrate if Spanish, as the students' mother tongue, is present in their learning of English, being the source of potential interlinguistic errors caused by cases of negative transference (interference).

The questionnaire, included in the final appendix of this work, has been completed just before Easter holidays and under the English teacher supervision by 144 students of two different educational levels—the third year of Secondary Education and the first year of A Levels—attending two different schools in Huelva: on the one hand, the public high school *IES La Orden* and, on the other, the semi-private school *Los Maristas*. We have chosen the two aforementioned educational levels in order to analyse the students' progression over time for three main reasons: first, because they both start a new educational stage in the their curriculum; second, because the former is obligatory and the second optional; and finally, because in them both the students are supposed to have an intermediate command of English.

Before presenting the individual results obtained for each of the grammatical issues included in the questionnaire, it should be noticed that the translation activity, being optional,

² See the following links: http://www.juntadeandalucia.es/eboja/2016/144/BOJA16-144-00289-13500-01_00095875.pdf; <https://www.boe.es/boe/dias/2017/07/08/pdfs/BOE-A-2017-7983.pdf>

has not been done by the majority of the students selected as participants in the study. Although there can be many subjective reasons that account for this fact, it objectively reveals that, when students do not have any kind of guidance to follow, they do find more difficulties than when they have to perform other tasks such as, for instance, the multiple choice activity, which are more “closed”.

Without taking into account the many possible external factors that may have influenced the completion of the tests on the part of students, our analysis of the answers given to both parts of the test have produced the following results:

1. Lexico-semantics:

1.1. False friends:

As stated in the previous section of this work, the vocabulary items of two different languages known as false friends are listed among the most difficult words to learn for second language learners since their similarity in form make them believe that they are also similar in meaning. For this reason, we have provided students with one sentence in the translation activity —sentence number 13— that contains a Spanish word usually listed within the problematic group of Spanish-English false friends—*actualmente*/**actually*/*nowadays*—:

(13a) Actualmente, todo el mundo usa el móvil todos los días.

(13b) Nowadays, everyone uses their mobile phones every day.

Despite being a vocabulary item usually introduced in the student’s curriculum quite early in time, its learning seems not to be achieved since only a 40% of the participants in the study have selected the correct option among the ones given. The remaining 60% of the students that have taken part in the study have chosen, instead, the false friend option. As regards the accurate answers, it should be noticed, on the one hand, that the 14% come from the students attending the public school and the remaining 26% from the learners from the semi-private educational center. In relation to the participants’ age, our results seem to indicate that the older students have done better here than the younger ones: 22% versus 18% of right answers.

1.2. Lexical splits: a case of Spanish-English divergence:

Since, as also explained, the cases of lexical split known as divergence also constitute another of the main lexico-semantic problems the students of foreign languages have to face

in their learning process, in the optional translation activity we have included two sentences —sentences number 16 and 17— with the lexical verb *hacer* which, as known, has multiple equivalences in English depending on the context in which they appear. Since the contexts in which this Spanish lexical item is inserted are clearly differentiated —in 16 *hacer* denotes the creation of something material and in 17, in turn, the creation of an intellectual activity— the English lexical items *make* and *do* should be, respectively, selected:

(16a) Me gusta hacer pasteles.

(16b) I like making cakes.

(17a) Hago mis deberes todos los días.

(17b) I do my English homework every day.

Analysing globally the results obtained for both sentences, it can be concluded that the equivalence between *hacer* and *do/make* do indeed represent a problem not overcome yet by the students who have taken part in the study since the 65% of the answers given here mistake one verb for the other: **I like doing cakes*; **I make my homework every day*. Once again, the older the students are, the better the results obtained. Notice, for instance, that the 35% of the right translations given to sentence (17a) is distributed as follows: a 20% comes from A Levels students and the remaining 15% from learners attending the third year of Secondary Education.

1.3. Prepositions:

Due to the different lexico-semantic behaviour they exhibit in Spanish and English, prepositions are, as stated in Stockwell, Bowen and Martin (1965), a real problem for the Spanish student of English as a second language. As a consequence, we have included in the test two different issues concerning English prepositions in order to see how students manage with them: locative prepositions, in questions number 2 and 3 of the multiple-choice exercise. and temporal prepositions in sentences number 15 and 16 of the translation activity.

Apart from the difficulty entailed by English prepositions on their own, the first two aforementioned questions of the multiple choice exercise, repeated below for convenience, involve a case of convergence (lexical split). Notice here that the Spanish words *esquina* and *ricón* they contain, which obviously have a different meaning, have *corner* as their English equivalent. Though this is the English term that must be used in both answers, the prepositional phrases in which it is inserted is headed, as seen below, by a different

preposition —*at* in the first case and *in* in the second— which disambiguates the two possible meanings inherent to it, thus denoting the realities pointed out by *esquina* and *rincón*:

(2a) Él está en la esquina.

(2b) He is at the corner.

(3a) Él está en el rincón.

(3b) He is in the corner.

Most of the participants in the study have selected the option containing the preposition *in* as the right answer for both questions: in particular, in the 82% of the cases for question 2 and in the 90% of the instances for question 3. This means that the great majority of the students have answered right to question number 3, but wrong to question 2.

As regards questions 15 and 16 of the translation exercise, the potential interlinguistic problem students have to face concerns Spanish and English temporal prepositions, whose meaning and use, as will be immediately seen, is highly dependent on the verbal tense employed in the sentences. Since in the first case a particular point in the past is specified to encode an action that started in the past and still continues in the present, the preposition *since* must be used; in the second, however, an action that is finished at the present time is encoded, thus activating the use of *for*:

(15a) Vivo en esta casa desde que murió mi abuelo.

(15b) I have lived in this house since my grandfather died.

(16a) He vivido en esta casa durante cuatro años.

(16b) I have lived in this house for four years.

Once again, the results obtained here show some confusion on the part of the participants in the tests. In relation to these two sentences, the 72% of the answers given are wrong mainly because the uses of the preposition *since* (particular point in time) and *for* (period of time) are mistaken. There is, furthermore, another 20% of wrong answers in which learners have not used any preposition at all, a fact which clearly reveals that this kind of temporal prepositions is, indeed, an obstacle that they have not overcome yet.

There is, furthermore, one more sentence in this same activity —sentence number 7— with a temporal preposition which, however, the students have not had any problem with. All of the participants have, in fact, selected the right answer with *on* to introduce a day of the

week, no matter that in Spanish no preposition, but a definite article, is used in this particular context:

(7a) Voy a clase de inglés los lunes.

(7b) I go to English classes on Mondays.

2. Morpho-syntax:

2.1. Inflectional morphology:

As explained before, the grammatical categories marked by means of inflectional morphs exhibit such a completely different behaviour in the two languages at issue that we firmly believe they are going to be the source of many interlinguistic errors. For reasons of time and space, in relation to the number of nouns, we are going to focus just on three English nominal irregular plurals whose Spanish equivalents are pluralised in a regular way: specifically, *ovejas/sheep*, included in sentence 9 of the multiple choice activity, and *personas/people* and *ratones/mice*, present, in turn, in sentences 7 and 17 of the translation exercise:

(9a) Las ovejas me encantan.

(9b) I love sheep.

(7a) Había seis personas en el coche

(7b) There were six people in the car.

(17a) No he visto nunca ratones en mi casa.

(17b) I have never seen mice in my house.

The results obtained here show, surprisingly, that students have not overcome yet the learning of basic irregular plurals since only the 15% of the answers given select the right forms expected. It is even more astonishing to observe that all the accurate answers are given by the youngest students taking part in the project; that is, those attending the third year of Secondary Education. On the contrary, the students in the first year of their A Levels select, on a regular basis, the options in which the wrong regular plurals **sheeps*, **persons* and **mouses* are provided. In complete agreement, thus, with Berko (1958) we can conclude that, besides the interferences caused by the student's mother tongue, irregularities in the foreign language the student is in the process of learning are also a common source of errors.

Another pluralisation issue tested in our analysis concerns adjectives since they are morphologically invariable in terms of number and gender in English but, conversely, they

show number and gender contrasts in Spanish to agree with the noun they refer to (cf. Stockwell, Bowen and Martin, 1965: 50). Though this contrast, asked for in sentence number 3 in the translation section of the questionnaire, is introduced to Spanish learners of English at the early stages of their learning process, our analysis shows that it still causes some interlinguistic problems. Notice, in fact, that the potential interference error it may produce, namely **I like reds roses*, has been attested in the 20% of the answers received:

(3a) Las rosas rojas me gustan.

(3b) I like red roses.

Adjectives in English are, however, morphologically inflected in their superlative and superiority comparative degrees, if they belong to the class of “short adjectives”. Long ones, instead, have their different degrees periphrastically expressed, as well as all Spanish adjectives (cf. Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012: 17). In order to examine if this kind of morphological inflection is already learnt, the translation section of the test contains the sentence below in which the Spanish adjective *barato*, with a short English adjective as equivalent, appears in its superlative form:

(19a) Este abrigo es el más barato.

(19b) This coat is the cheapest one.

The results obtained here demonstrate, surprisingly, once again, that this particular grammatical aspect of English is a very common source of errors since the 60% of the translations provided are wrong. In opposition to what has been attested up to now, here two kind of errors have to be distinguished: on the one hand, the expected interlinguistic one in which Spanish interferes with English, thus producing the incorrect sentence **This coat is the most cheap*; and on the other, an intralinguistic error, illustrated in **This coat is the more cheap*, that makes students blend the comparative of superiority and superlative degrees in the same phrase.

To finish with the section devoted to the analysis of the interlinguistic errors originated by different aspects related to inflectional morphology, we have to mention the English Saxon Genitive case. Non-existent in Spanish, where possession can only be indicated in a postnominal position within a noun phrase, we expect the Saxon Genitive case to be problematic for the Spanish learners of English. Contrary to expectation, however, only a 10 % of the students taking part in the project have wrongly transferred the Spanish pattern

to English in sentence number 6 of the translation activity, thus committing an interlinguistic mistake. All the wrong answers analysed come from the students in the third year of Secondary Education:

(6a) Es el libro de María.

(6b) It's Mary's book.

2.2. Lexical categories:

As has been previously shown, a contrastive analysis of Spanish and English determiners reveals that they are a problematic grammatical lexical category for learners of these two languages because their use is completely different in several contexts. Due to the spatial constraints imposed on a work of this kind, we have focused just on three contexts in which the use of determiners differs in the two languages at issue. The first one, tested in sentence number 10 of the multiple choice exercise and in sentence 9 number of the translation activity, concerns noun phrases with parts of the body or items of clothing as heads, which are introduced into discourse by means of a possessive determiner in English and through a definite article in Spanish:

(10a) Ellos levantaron la mano.

(10b) They raised their hands.

(9a) Nosotros nos quitamos la chaqueta.

(9b) We take/took off our jackets.

The results obtained for these two questions reveal that the expected interlingual error is highly present; the 58% of the answers received are wrong since in them the English definite article is chosen to introduce this particular kind of noun phrases, by analogy with their Spanish counterparts: **They raised the hand*, **We take off the jacket*. Our results also show a higher percentage of correct answers in the public center (41%) than in the semi-private school (17%).

The second environment chosen for our study in which the use of English and Spanish determiners is different concerns noun phrases with a plural noun as head intended to mark them as generic. In this specific case, whereas the definite article is once again required in Spanish, no article is needed in English, as illustrated in the following pairs of examples that correspond to sentences number 2 and 3 of the exercise on translation:

(2a) ¿Qué comen los tigres?.

- (2b) What do tigers eat?.
- (3a) Los rosas rojas me gustan.
- (3b) I like red roses

The omission of the definite article in English before plural nouns to indicate generic reference seems to be a real problem for learners since, on the basis of our results, only the 15% of the answers given are right.

The last context concerning determiners tested in our study —sentence 11 of the first part of the questionnaire and sentence 12 of the second section— alludes to the contrasts that exist in the two languages at issue in relation to the use the indefinite article before subject complements denoting nationality, religious affiliation, professions and the like:

- (11a) Soy profesora.
- (11b) I'm a teacher.
- (12a) Él no era buena persona.
- (12b) He was not a good person.

Whereas this kind of complements are not headed by any determiner in Spanish, the presence of the indefinite article is compulsory in English. Once again, the influence of the student's mother tongue in the answers given is highly visible, being attested in the 56% of the wrong answers given: **I'm teacher*, **He was not good person*. Again here, the students of the semi-private school seem to do better than those attending the public high school since a 35% and a 21% of the correct answers have been obtained from each educational center, respectively.

As previously stated, verbs are the lexical category within the open word classes we are interested in. As regards tense, our goal is to see how students employ two of the English verbal tenses whose use differs from that of their Spanish counterparts: namely, the present progressive and the present perfect. The former, looked for in sentences 1 and 12 of the multiple choice exercise and in sentence 4 of the translation activity, seems to be learnt when the situation described in the sentence are taking place at the moment of speaking, despite the fact, as seen in the last two examples, that Spanish resorts to the simple present text in this context. In fact, an accurate answer has been given in the 90% of the cases analysed. It is worth mentioning here, furthermore, that the wrong answers obtained in the remaining 10% of the cases come from the youngest students taking part in the study. The results obtained for the use of the English present progressive that refers to an action that will certainly take

place in a near future, exemplified in (1) are, nevertheless, radically the opposite. Here, students, by analogy with their mother tongue, have made a wrong use of the English simple present tense in the 45% of the cases examined:

- (1a) Voy al cine esta tarde.
- (1b) I'm going to the cinema this afternoon.
- (12a) ¿De qué habláis?
- (12b) What are you talking about?
- (4a) ¿Qué haces?
- (4b) What are you doing?

In sentence 15 of the translation exercise, on the other hand, students are asked to express in English an action that started in the past but which still continues in the present time. Therefore, the verbal tense that should be used here is the English present perfect. However, students, misled by their mother tongue, where these temporal connotations are encoded through the simple present tense, make an erroneous use of the English simple present tense in the 100% of the cases:

- (15a) Vivo en esta casa desde que murió mi abuelo.
- (15b) I have lived in this house since my grandfather died.

In relation to mood, we focus on the encoding of the subjunctive into English because, though also existent in this language, as explained earlier in this study, its use is not as frequent as that of its Spanish counterpart. With the intention to prove if Spanish students have good knowledge of how to encode the modality values conveyed through the Spanish subjunctive into English, they have been given the following sentence in the multiple choice activity:

- (15a) Quiero que Elena venga a mi casa hoy.
- (15b) I want Elena to come to my house today.

As expected, due to complexity entailed by the verbal category of mood, in the 70% of the cases students have selected the option in which the Spanish sentence is literally translated into English: **I want that Elena comes home today*. It is quite interesting to highlight here that most of the negative answers (45%) come from the youngest students taking part in the study who are attending the public high school.

As regards non-finite verbal forms, two Spanish sentences containing an infinitive after *de* verb *dejar de/parar de* have been given to students —sentence number 5 in the multiple choice activity and sentence 1 in the translation exercise— in order to see if they know that the non-finite verbal form with a nominal function that has to be used in this particular English context, in which a particular action is no longer done (terminative aspect), is the gerund:

(5a) Deja de ser tan borde.

(5b) Stop being so rude.

(1a) Tienes que parar de fumar.

(1b) You have to stop smoking.

Not surprisingly, the results obtained for the first sentence illustrated above show a high percentage of wrong answers (60%). In them students have chosen the option with the infinitive. *Stop to be so rude*. It should be highlighted here, moreover, that, besides its interlinguistic nature, the error observed may also have been produced by intralingual reasons since the selection of an infinitive or a gerund is, indeed, an internal complexity of English. Notice that the sentence given as a wrong answer to this question does exist in English, if to indicate initial aspect and having, thus, as a consequence, the following Spanish sentence as equivalent: *Paró para ser borde*. The results obtained for sentence number 5 in the multiple choice activity are verified, and even reinforced, in the translation activity, where sentence 1 has not been translated at all.

To finish with the analysis of English verbs, we have included a question in the multiple choice exercise —sentence number 7— related to one specially problematic issue of the grammar of English: the so-called complex verbs which, as already known, combine a verb with an adverb or a preposition to create an indivisible lexical unit where both the verb and the particle lose their original meaning. They constitute, in fact, one of the great obstacles for Spanish students of English for two main reasons: first, because though existent in their mother tongue, they are not as common and recurrent in their language as they are in English and, secondly, because it is quite weird to find a match between complex verbs in the two languages at issue. As a consequence, we expect here a high percentage of wrong answers on the part of the learners:

(4a) Estaba escuchando música.

(4b) I was listening to music.

Contrary to expectation, nevertheless, the results obtained here are quite positive since the right answer of the four ones given has been provided in the 85% of the cases. In our view, this good results come from the fact that the complex verb exemplified in (4b) is introduced to students quite early in their learning process and is quite frequent in oral activities directions done in the classroom: *listen to me, listen to the recording, listen to the people in the interview, on TV*, etc.

2.3. Syntactic functions:

Although the syntactic functions displayed in English and Spanish sentences are the same (subject, direct, indirect, and prepositional objects, subject and object complements and adverbials), some of them differ in the two languages at issue in some specific traits. English pronominal subjects, for instance, are a real problem for Spanish students because, as explained earlier in this work, in opposition to their possible syntactic omission in Spanish, they must surface in the English sentence. Despite being one of the first issues of the grammar of English taught to Spanish students, its learning does not seem to be successful since the error percentage obtained in the two sentences of the questionnaire intended to prove if this contrast is or not overcome is remarkably high —sentence number 11 of the multiple choice exercise and sentence 6 of the translation activity—:

(11a) Soy profesora.

(11b) I'm a teacher.

(6a) Es el libro de María.

(6b) It is Mary's book.

Though this clearly interlinguistic error, committed in the 70% of the cases, is more common among the youngest students taking part in the study (50%), it is still surprisingly present to a remarkable extent in the production of A Level students (20%). Another interesting result to comment on here is that this error seems to be more frequently repeated in the translation activity than in the multiple choice exercise.

The way to encode into English direct objects with human reference also seem to present problems and difficulties for the Spanish learner since he tends to wrongly transfer the grammaticalised preposition *a* that introduces them in Spanish to English. This negative transference has been observed, in fact, in all the incorrect answers (20%) given to sentence number 19 of the multiple choice exercise, where students from the third year of Secondary

Education have chosen the option in which the English direct object is headed by the preposition *to* (**I have seen to Mary*):

(19a) He visto a María.

(19b) I have seen Mary.

There is, however, a high percentage of positive and good answers here (80%), which suggest that this particular grammatical issue is not as problematic as could be thought at first sight. Notice in this regard that none of the answers provided by the A Level students has been wrong.

2.4. Word order:

Taking into account the contrasts concerning sentential word order in the two languages at issue stated in the third section of our work, we have included in our study two Spanish questions —sentence number 6 of the multiple choice exercise and sentence 13 of the translation activity— whose English equivalents have a peculiar word order, thus being exceptional cases to the regular interrogative English pattern. As illustrated below, the first one exemplifies what is known as a subject question in the literature, and the second one, in turn, an indirect question:

(6a) ¿Quién escribió *El Quijote*?

(6b) Who wrote *El Quijote*?

(13a) ¿Sabe dónde está el centro comercial?

(13b) Do you know where the shopping center is?

The results obtained for sentence 6 clearly show that English subject questions are indeed a problem for Spanish learners since the 75% of the answers received are completely wrong. The errors observe here cannot, however, be classified as interlinguistic since they are not caused by any transference from Spanish. Quite on the contrary, they seem to be the result either of some internal difficulties characteristic of English, which have made students select the option in which *did*, as the simple past operator, surfaces in the sentence as in any other English question (**Who did write El Quijote?*), or of the student's incompetence to identify syntactic functions, which, in turn, has made learners wrongly translate sentence 13 with two subjects (**Who did El Quijote write?*), thus not been able to recognize the direct object function of *El Quijote*. As regards sentence 13, half the answers received are also wrong (50%). Since the error found in them all is that the indirect question is wrongly

encoded, following the word order of the prototypical English sentence which triggers subject inversion (**Do you know where is the mall?*), once again, it has to be classified as intralingual.

In relation to examine if Spanish learners know the word order that governs some particular English phrases, we have selected two particular cases whose linear structure is the opposite to the one ruling their Spanish equivalents: on the one hand, noun phrases with adjectival modification, tested in sentence number 5 of the translation activity; and on the other, adjective phrases intensified by means of the adverb *suficiente*, tested, in turn, in sentence number 18 of the multiple choice exercise:

(5a) Tienes una casa muy bonita.

(5b) You have a very beautiful house.

(18a) Eres lo suficientemente inteligente para entender esto.

(18b) You are intelligent enough to understand this.

The results obtained for both questions are remarkably different since, whereas a 25% of negative answers have been received in the first case, a 55% of incorrect answers have been given to the second question. Whereas all the wrong answers to the first question are clearly due to the fact that the Spanish word order has interfered in the student's interlanguage, making them produce the ungrammatical English sentence **You have a house very beautiful*, the problems observed in the second question are more of intralinguistic nature. They come, in fact, from the peculiar nature of the adverb *enough* which, in opposition to the rest of English adverbs, occupies, as Mackenzie and Martínez Caro (2012) state, a "post-adjective rather than a pre-adjective position". This means, in sum, that the learning of English noun phrases with adjectival premodification do not seem to entail as many difficulties and problems for the learners as adjective phrases with the intensifier *enough*.

Another interesting, as well as complex issue, we have tested in our questionnaire —sentences number 17 and 18 of the translation activity— is the position of the temporal English adverbs that are usually used to modify actions encoded through the present perfect tense:

(17a) No he visto nunca ratones en mi casa.

(17b) I have never seen mice in my house.

(18a) Nunca antes había visto nada así.

(18b) I had never seen anything like that before.

(18c) Never before had I seen anything like that.

The results obtained for these two sentences are somewhat surprising since for the former no wrong answers have been given but for the latter the 80% of the answers received are wrong. In our view, this is so because, though both Spanish sentences constitute cases of multiple negation, only the first one has its verb in the negative form, thus forcing the other negative elements appear after it. We can conclude, thus, that in this particular context the intermediate position between the auxiliary and the lexical verb that the temporal adverb must occupy in English is well learnt. In sentence 18, however, the Spanish verb is not negative and, as a consequence, the other lexically negative elements in the clause can appear both in preverbal (*nunca*) and postverbal (*nada*) position. When this is so, the learner follows the order of the Spanish sentence (**Never before I had seen anything like that before*), committing, hence, a clear interlinguistic error, without being aware that the placement of a negative element at the front of an English sentence triggers subject-operator inversion, as illustrated in (18c) (cf. Mackenzie and Martínez Caro, 2012: 67). It has been quite curious to observe that in none of the answers given to sentence 18 the middle position of the English adverb has been made use of.

2.5. Negation:

As stated in section two, the phenomenon of multiple negation is allowed in Spanish but forbidden in English. Therefore, with the intention to examine if Spanish learners of English transfer to the language they are in the process of learning the multiple negative structures so common in their mother tongue, we have included two negative Spanish sentences of this kind —sentences number 10 and 18— in the translation activity of the test:

(10a) No veo a nadie aquí.

(10b) I do not see anyone here.

(18a) Nunca antes había visto nada así.

(18b) I have never seen anything like that before.

The results obtained here seem to indicate that Spanish learners have a relatively good command of this particular aspect of the grammar of English. Only the 20% of the answers received maintain the double negation in English.

2.6. Other structures:

As explained in the previous section, reverse constructions and causative structures show a very different behavior in English and Spanish. Therefore, in order to see how Spanish learners face these two peculiar patterns, the translation activity in our questionnaire contains three sentences which focus on them. The Spanish sentences number 9 and 3 constitute together with their English equivalents examples of reverse constructions, and sentence 20 exemplifies, in turn, a causative pattern:

(9a) Las ovejas me encantan.

(9b) I love sheep.

(3a) Las rosas rojas me gustan.

(3b) I like red roses.

(20a) Mi hermano se ha cortado el pelo.

(20b) My brother has had his hair cut.

Though the verbs of sentences 9 and 3 —*encantar/love* and *gustar/like*— are usually introduced at the early stages of the student's learning process so that he can express his likes and dislikes, the results of our analysis do show that the command of reverse constructions is not achieved yet. Notice in this regard that, in the 65% of the answers received (the majority of them, a 50%, coming from the students in the third year of Secondary Education), both English sentences maintain the syntactic organization of their Spanish counterparts, thus producing wrong translations like *Sheep love me*, *Red roses like me*.

To finish, we can conclude, on the basis of our results, that the English causative pattern is completely unknown to Spanish learners, regardless of their age, who in the 80% of the cases have literally translated the Spanish sentence into English as *My brother has cut his hair*, which, though not ungrammatical, describes the situation in the clause as performed by its agentive grammatical subject.

V. CONCLUSIONS

From our own experience, we have always believed that Spanish, being our mother tongue, has influenced our way of learning English as a second language since many of the grammatical and communicative problems we have faced throughout this process have been related to the differences and contrasts existing between both languages. English modal verbs and constructions such as the resultative, the *get* passives, the causative, just to mention a few examples, have been problematic for us either because their Spanish counterparts do not exist or, if existent, they exhibit a different behavior in form and/or in usage from that of their English equivalents.

Since our desired goal in the near future is to become teachers of English in Spain, we have thought that our final degree project should be devoted to research this topic —the influence that a student's mother tongue has in his process of learning a second language— so that what we learn from it could be some day put into practice in the second language classroom. And for that reason, this is what we have done here.

In the literature that examines the complex and long process of second language teaching and learning, the student's first language has been considered indeed one of the many crucial factors directly involved in it. As a consequence, several proposals and hypotheses have been set forth in order to describe, on the one hand, to what extent the student's mother tongue is present and how it determines their learning of a second language and, on the other, to help students avoid the so many interlinguistic errors that, due to it, are detected in their production; namely, Contrastive Analysis (cf. Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957; Oller and Ziahosseiny, 1970; Jackson and Whitman, 1971, among others), the transference hypothesis (cf. Fries, 1945; Lado, 1957; Cook, 1991; Corder, 1992), Error Analysis (Corder, 1967; Richards, 1971; Schachter and Celce-Murcia, 1977; James, 1980; Dulay and Burt, 1991), the construction of the student's interlanguage (cf. Selinker, 1972; Cook, 1991).

After presenting them all in the theoretical section of our work (section two), , if in general terms for temporal and spatial reasons, in section three we have focused on some of the most significant lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic contrasts between English and

Spanish that should be included in any pedagogical contrastive grammar of both languages to help students with their learning. These grammatical differences constitute, furthermore, the basis of the questionnaire that we have created specifically for this project in order to examine if they are, in fact, the cause of many of the errors whose presence we want to prove in the interlanguage of the 144 Spanish students of English as a foreign language who have completed the test. The lexico-semantic and morpho-syntactic issues that we have dealt with are the following ones: false friends, lexical splits (cases both of convergence and divergence), the meanings of temporal and locative prepositions, the inflectional morphological categories of number, comparison and case, the lexical categories of determiners and verbs, the syntactic functions of subject and animate direct objects, some issues related to sentential and phrasal word order, the universal phenomenon of negation, and to finish, the so-called reverse and causative structures.

In section four we have presented the most important finding and results of our analysis. The first general conclusion that has been observed is that, despite the fact that all these grammatical aspects of the grammar of English should be known to students, being part of the contents that the Spanish and Andalusian governments stipulate for the teaching of English as a foreign language in Secondary Education and A-Levels, and included, as such, in their English text-books, they are not still well learnt. In fact, many of the interlinguistic errors caused by some kind of transference from the student's mother tongue that we expected to take place in their interlanguage have been frequently detected in the answers they have given to the two exercises contained in the test they have done. Among them, the most recurrent errors, both of them syntactic in nature, are related to the expression in English of the modality values entailed by the subjunctive mood (**I want that Elena comes to my house today*) and to the compulsory syntactic expression of the subject (**Is the book of Mary*). Besides the many interlinguistic errors observed in the students' production, some others, which should be classified as intralinguistic, have been analysed. Among these ones, which stem from some internal difficulties characteristic of the English language, irregular plurals and exceptional question patterns have been frequently observed.

We would like to finish by suggesting that, due to the strong impact, as has been demonstrated throughout this work, that the student's mother tongue has on his process of learning a second language, the teaching of foreign languages should be based and pay attention to the contrasts that exist between the two languages involved in the student's learning process which are described and examined in different contrastive grammars.

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APPENDIX

Curso:

Edad:

Centro:

I) Multiple choice exercise: choose the right answer of the ones given

1. Voy al cine esta tarde
 - a) I go to the cinema this afternoon
 - b) I'm going to the cinema this afternoon
 - c) I'm going the cinema this afternoon
 - d) None

2. Él está en la esquina
 - a) He is at the corner
 - b) He is in the corner
 - c) He is on the corner
 - d) None

3. Él está en el rincón
 - a) He is at the corner
 - b) He is in the corner
 - c) He is on the corner
 - d) None

4. Estaba escuchando música
 - a) I was listening music
 - b) I was listening to music
 - c) I was hearing to music
 - d) None

5. Deja de ser tan borde
 - a) Stop to be so rude
 - b) Stop being so rude
 - c) Stop to be very rude
 - d) None

6. ¿Quién escribió *el Quijote*?
 - a) Who did write "el Quijote"?
 - b) Who did "el Quijote" write?
 - c) Who wrote "el Quijote"?

- d) None
7. Voy a clase de inglés los lunes
- a) I go to English classes on Mondays
 - b) I go to English classes the Mondays
 - c) I go to English classes on Mondays
 - d) None
8. Soy un chico de veinte años
- a) I am a twenty-year-old boy
 - b) I am twenty-years-old boy
 - c) I am a boy of twenty years.
 - d) None
9. Las ovejas me encantan
- a) I love sheep
 - b) Sheeps love me
 - c) I love sheeps
 - d) None
10. Ellos levantaron la mano
- a) They raised the hand
 - b) They raised their hands
 - c) They raised the hand up
 - d) None
11. Soy profesora
- a) I'm a teacher
 - b) I'm teacher
 - c) Am teacher
 - d) None
12. ¿De qué habláis?
- a) About what are you talking?
 - b) What are you talking about?
 - c) What do you talk?
 - d) None
13. Actualmente, todo el mundo usa el móvil todos los días
- a) Actually, everyone uses their mobile phones every day
 - b) Actually, everyone uses his mobile phone every day
 - c) Nowadays, everyone uses their mobile phones every day
 - d) None
14. Luisa es mi amiga
- a) Luisa is a friend of mine

- b) Luisa is a friend of me
 - c) Luisa is me's friend
 - d) None
15. Quiero que Elena venga a mi casa hoy
- a) I want that Elena come to my house today
 - b) I want Elena comes to my house today
 - c) I want Elena to come to my house today
 - d) None
16. Me gusta hacer pasteles
- a) I like doing cakes
 - b) I like do cakes
 - c) I like making cakes
 - d) None
17. Hago mis deberes todos los días
- a) I make my homework every day
 - b) I do my homeworks every day
 - c) I do my homework every day
 - d) None
18. Eres lo suficientemente inteligente para entender esto
- a) You are intelligent enough to understand this
 - b) You are enough intelligent to understand this
 - c) You are enoughly intelligent to understand this.
 - d) None
19. He visto a María:
- a) I have seen Mary
 - b) I have seen to Mary
 - c) I've seen to Mary
 - d) None
20. ¡Qué estúpido eres!
- a) How stupid are you!
 - b) How stupid you are!
 - c) What stupid are!
 - d) None

II) Translate the following Spanish sentences into English:

1. Tienes que parar de fumar.
2. ¿Quécomen los tigres?
3. Las rosas rojas me gustan.

4. ¿Qué haces?
5. Tienes una casa muy bonita.
6. Es el libro de María.
7. Había seis personas en el coche.
8. Lo importante es participar.
9. Nosotros nos quitamos la chaqueta.
10. No veo a nadie aquí.
11. ¿Cuánto tiempo vive un elefante?
12. Él no era buena persona.
13. ¿Sabe dónde está el centro comercial?
14. He estado en Italia dos veces.
15. Vivo en esta casa desde que murió mi abuelo.
16. He vivido en esta casa durante cuatro años.
17. No he visto nunca ratones en mi casa.
18. Nunca antes había visto nada así.
19. Este abrigo es el más barato.
20. Mi hermano se ha cortado el pelo.

III. Students' textbooks:

3º ESO:

- *English in Use*. Burlington books, 2015.
- *English World*. Burlington books, 2011.
- *Spectrum*. Oxford, 2015.

1º BACHILLERATO:

- *Bridges for students*. Burlington books, 2013.
- *Valid Choice*. Burlington books, 2013.
- *Performance*. Anaya, 2016.