Spanish-English Writing Structure Interferences in Second Language Learners[1]

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Abstract

Previous studies have drawn some results concerning the way in which second language (L2) students use their first language (L1) when producing texts in their L2. Therefore, this study examines the influence L1 written structure has on L2 written structure when students are asked to carry out assignments in the L2. To answer this question, twenty four students of the first semester at UNICA University were asked to write some papers in English during the semester. The results of this study indicated that the influence of L1 (Spanish) can definitely hinder the writing processes in L2. In addition, four basic mistakes in student papers were found to be a direct influence from L1 to L2 writing: word order, missing the verb "be", implicit subject, and the incorrect use of the article "the." Those mistakes emerged mostly due to the influence of their native language and also the lack of knowledge about the second language.

Keywords: second language acquisition, second language learning, bilingual education

Resumen

Estudios previos han arrojado algunos resultados con respecto a la forma en la cual los estudiantes de segunda lengua (L2) usan la primera (L1) en la producción de textos. A partir de esto, el presente estudio analiza la influencia que la expresión escrita, en lengua materna, ejerce sobre la estructura escrita en la lengua extranjera, cuando se les solicita a los estudiantes presentar trabajos escritos en ésta. Para responder a este interrogante, se le solicitó a 24 estudiantes de primer semestre de ÚNICA (Universidad Colombo Americana) escribir algunos textos en inglés durante el semestre. Los resultados de este estudio indicaron que la influencia de la primera lengua (L1) puede entorpecer en gran medida el proceso de escritura en la lengua extranjera (L2). Adicionalmente, se identificaron cuatro errores básicos con una influencia directa de la escritura de la primera lengua sobre la segunda lengua; orden de palabras, omisión del verbo "to be", sujeto implícito y el uso incorrecto del articulo "the". Los errores

identificados resultaron principalmente de la influencia de la primera lengua y de la falta de conocimiento de la segunda lengua.

Palabras claves: adquisición de una segunda lengua, aprendizaje de una segunda lengua, educación bilingüe

Resumo

Estudos prévios deram alguns resultados com relação à forma na qual os estudantes de segunda língua (L2) usam a primeira (L1) na produção de textos. A partir deste, o presente estudo analisa a influência que a expressão escrita, em língua materna, exerce sobre a estrutura escrita na língua estrangeira, quando se solicita aos estudantes apresentar trabalhos escritos nesta. Para responder este interrogante, foi solicitado a 24 estudantes de primeiro semestre de ÚNICA (Universidade Colombo Americana) escrever alguns textos em inglês durante o semestre. Os resultados deste estudo indicaram que a influência da primeira língua (L1) pode entorpecer em grande medida o processo de escritura na língua estrangeira (L2). Adicionalmente, identificaram-se quatro erros básicos com uma influência direta da escritura da primeira língua sobre a segunda língua; ordem de palavras, omissão do verbo "to be", sujeito implícito e o uso incorreto do artigo "the". Os erros identificados resultaram principalmente da influência da primeira língua e da falta de conhecimento da segunda língua.

Palavras chaves: aquisição de uma segunda língua, aprendizagem de uma segunda língua, educação bilíngue

Whhen learning a second language, most of the time students use their first language to try to communicate in the second one, which makes students follow the same grammatical patterns in both languages. The importance of the influence of the first language (mother tongue) in learning a second language (foreign language) has been a very important issue for a long time. It has led to several studies that attempt to explain this phenomenon. Through what I have seen during the process of writing this paper, I have noticed that many research studies have been carried out in the field of L1 reading influence on L2 reading, but few have been done with regard to the influence L1 written structures have on L2 written structures.

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I decided to embark on this study when I was teaching English to some introductory level students at UNICA a few semesters ago. I found that these students had the tendency to write English texts with Spanish structures. When they really tried to write in English, they usually resorted to using the direct translation technique.

This paper attempts to contribute knowledge in the field of writing and the influence L1 has on L2 regarding this topic, focusing on the written structures of both languages. Thus, students' written work in English (L2) is analyzed with three purposes. First, to find examples that give an idea of what the influence in English writing is. Second, to prove that grammar classes are essential when learning a second language. Finally, to demonstrate that exposure to language does lead to its acquisition; to learn a second language, L1 support is not always necessary.

As a method, teaching grammar classes with the purpose of avoiding literal translation from L1 to L2 has been applied in some parts of the world, but it has limited information. At UNICA, I applied this method in an introductory level course as an intervention to generate data that supported the research questions in this study. The results had significant, positive outcomes. Students improved significantly, avoiding literal translations when writing in the second language.

My interest in describing and analyzing this phenomenon may support future studies, which would contribute to the field of academic writing. I believe that applying this method with first semester students will lead to positive writing skills later on in more advanced levels, where students are required to write more complex texts. Due to the drastic change students have to face from high school to college regarding thinking processes, this method is relevant in their beginning level courses. In high school, some students are only asked to reach the minimum level to pass. By the time they get to college, things change radically. This is one of the reasons why students in beginner levels have difficulties when writing complex texts, even more if those are required in another language. The aim of this paper is for teachers to help students to lessen basic mistakes when writing in the L2, in order for them to focus their attention on the content and thus give way to academic writing.

Area of Focus Statement

The purpose of this study is to describe the influence L1 written structure has on L2 written structure in UNICA's intro students.

Research Questions

This research project has a general research question:

1.   What is the impact L1 written structure has on L2 written structure? Besides, it has specific research questions:

Beyond this, it has the following specific research questions:

1. What are the most frequent mistakes students make when writing in the second language?

2. What literal translations from L1 to L2 do students make when they write in the second language?

3. How do grammar lessons affect students' writing in L2?

4. How do Spanish-English and English-English dictionaries influence L2 students' writing?

Theoretical Framework

L1 influence is an important aspect to keep in mind in its process for the development of all the four basic skills an L2 requires: reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Second language acquisition is not an easy matter. It is known that when a person is learning a second language, he/she uses the first language as a tool to make this process easier and faster. What people may not know is that the L1 does not only have a positive influence when acquiring the L2; it can also have negative influences. In order to identify the role L1 has in the acquisition of L2, this work is based on some very pertinent theories by professors and researchers which are highlighted and summarized below.

A relevant way to organize the theoretical framework of this paper is to refer to Chomsky (1959) who posits that imitation of L1 develops routines in L2 practices. In a similar manner, Krashen (1981) says that there are L1 positive and negative transfers, which take into account true and false cognates. Furthermore, Cummins (1982) talks about the transferability of linguistic characteristics and the influence of L1 in L2 phonology. Finally, Cummins (1981), with his famous "Iceberg Theory" states that the role of first language is essential for the acquisition of the second one, because through L1 learning, L2 becomes easier.

In this section, some of the most influential current theories of language learning are going to be outlined. Chomsky's language acquisition theory talks about how learner's imitation of what they hear in L1 develops habits in L2. This theory clearly relates to this research regarding how L1 supports L2 acquisition. Chomsky's work is helpful in understanding the implications of first language in the acquisition of a second language and how the use of the mother tongue affects learning the target language. However, one of the negative implications L1 can have on L2 is that students translate every single word into English. Translating is a problem because sometimes the idea you want to give may not be clearly understood in the second language. Another

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negative implication could be that students make up words in order to express themselves in the other language.

The "language transfer theory", also known as L1 interference, is the effect the learners' first language has on his/her production of the second one. It states that the effect can be in any aspect of language: grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, speaking, and listening, among others. This theory is divided into two parts: Positive and negative transfers. The first one, positive transference, is seen when the structure of both languages is the same and so the interference of linguistic patterns can result in correct language production, sometimes called "true cognates." True cognates are used as a strategy to write in an L2 and it is part of the positive transfer theory. Conversely, as Krashen (1981) pointed out, "negative transference" is frequently discussed as a source of errors; this means that students transfer words or structures that are not the same in both languages, otherwise known as "false cognates." Many students may translate words from L1 to L2 thinking that they have the same meaning in the target language, or in the case of this research study, English. Words in English such as "amazed" or "pan" are some of the false cognates an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) student may incorrectly use when translating from English into Spanish. For example, "amazed" could be translated in Spanish as "amasar" which in English is "knead."

In his research article "*Second Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning*", Krashen talks about first language interference. He attempts to provide some empirical data for a position first held by Newmark (1966), who points out that "Interference is not the first language 'getting in the way' of second language skills. Rather, it is the result of the performer falling back on old knowledge when he or she has not yet acquired enough of the second language" (p. 7). This theory is a useful tool for this action research project, given that it takes into account some of the aspects included in the study, such as the positive and negative effects L1 has on L2 acquisition. Likewise, this theory posits that when a student is acquiring a second language (L2), he is both benefited and hindered by his native language (L1). In his native language, there are certain norms in pronunciation and syntax that may differ from those of the second language and interfere with his or her use of the new language. On the other hand, Krashen (1981) said that native language literacy and cognitive development in the native language will help a student learn a new language by transferring concepts from one language and applying them to the new one. In this case, Krashen`s work talks about the negative effects the first language can have on the second one. This author states that first language influences may

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be, thus, an indicator of low level of acquisition or the result of the performer attempting to produce before having acquired enough of the target language to say what he wants to say.

In a similar way, in his research about "The Natural Order Hypothesis", Krashen (1982) posits that the acquisition of grammatical structures follows a natural order. In some contexts and depending on the language, some grammatical structures may be acquired earlier or later. According to this theory, some of the patterns in one language are naturally transferred to the second language which may be an indicator of error in some structures. Not all the structures in the L1 are the same in the L2. As a result, students may make many mistakes.

A further theory for this research study is proposed by Cummins (1981). It has to do with how the transferability of skills from one language to another plays a critical role in second language acquisition. According to this theory, there exists a universal linguistic transference of characteristics and knowledge acquired from one language to another. In the same way, the influence of the first language is likely to be more evident in second language phonology, especially in pronunciation. L1 helps second language learners by providing a linguistic and cognitive framework, especially at the beginning stage. The relationship between this theory and my research study is explicit because of the fact that this paper tries to find out what knowledge is transmitted from one language to another and how this knowledge influences the acquisition of an L2.

Another theory on this important issue is the one proposed by Jim Cummins (1982), called the "Iceberg Theory". In his theory, he mentioned that first language literacy and learning can be a benefit to L2 acquisition. Language devices and concepts learned in a first language make learning the second language easier because students do not have to re-learn, in the new language, what they already know in their native language. Understanding a concept in the first language requires only a re-labelling of terms in the second language and not a re-learning of the concept (Cummins, 1982). According to this theory, concepts and skills are usually developed in the first language before they are transferred to the second. This is why it is important for students to continue to gain experience and input in their first language at home (Cummins, 1981).

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The role of the first language in the acquisition of the second one is a very important factor to bear in mind, due to the fact that L1 can influence the acquisition of L2 positively or negatively. Taking into account the theories previously mentioned, I will research the influence, either positive or negative, L1 written structure has on L2 written structure. Based on reliable studies made by recognized people

in the field of education such as Krashen (1981) with L1 interference and Cummins (1981) and his Iceberg theory, this research study will present a wide perspective of how first language knowledge influences second language attainment. These theories are an excellent source for this research study and contain a great variety of aspects that can be taken into account to achieve good results in the learning of a second language.

Literature Review

There are many controversial points of view regarding the acquisition of an L2. Based on my experience observing classes, I have wondered if it would be possible to learn a second language in the same way we learned our first language, without basing our new data on previous knowledge. It would be interesting to know why it is so important to include our first language in order to learn the second one. Currently, English as a Foreign Language (EFL) teachers are implementing students' mother tongue in the acquisition of their second language in order to convey meaning. Research studies like the one done by Schweers (1999) have demonstrated that deleting first language (L1) in second language (L2) situations is completely inappropriate. On the contrary, if L1 is used in a suitable way when learning an L2, it could be very beneficial. Based on what Schweers said, teachers should use students' first language in lessons in order to create a sense of security in students, allowing them to express themselves as they really are.

Due to the fact that I had to face the problem of teaching English classes for beginners without using Spanish in the lessons, I decided to research the influence of first language in the acquisition of a second language. Thus, this paper will show that the native language is a very important factor when a person is acquiring a second language. Also, this paper will show that exposure to language most of the times leads to its acquisition. In like manner, the results when learning only through exposure are higher than when using the L1 to learn a L2. This research study aims to show that grammar lessons are required in order for students to understand that there are structural differences between the two languages; thus, they will not make literal translations.

This section reviews studies that focus on one or more of a set of six variables related to role of L1 role in L2 situations. The first study analyzes grammar transference from L1 to L2. Other studies look at the transferability of cognates and word association models. Moreover, other studies investigate interlingual awareness and positive and negative transference. Finally, another study examines the role of

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first language during the acquisition of the second one, along with its positive and negative points. In order to have a stronger idea of these studies, a summary of all of them is presented in the next section.

Grammar Transference

The following study looked at the importance L1 has on the acquisition of L2 and how grammar in the first language is somehow transferred to the second language. The study tried to define to what degree the first language determines the acquisition of grammar in adult learners of a second language. In a study of seven people done in Italy, Kim (2002) wanted to know which position best captures the role of the first language: No Transference, Partial Transference or Full Transference. He found that the frequency of occurrence of the grammar transference in the first language into the second one varied among the students, regardless of the language in which the second language is taught. This means that no matter what language the first or the second is, the transferability of the first language into the second one will vary because of the student, not the language. Other authors that talked about this issue were Sanjo Nitschke and Evan Kidd from the University of Manchester, who studied a population of 20 adults (Germans and Italians) to do their research. Sanjo Nitschke and Evan Kidd (2009), through their investigation about how L1 transference affects L2 sentence processing. They discovered that L1 transference affects L2 processing and therefore L1 hinders the acquisition of L2. This means that although the acquisition of the L2 is affected by the first language, it does not prevent people from learning a second language. Sanjo Nitschke and Evan Kidd evidenced that priming can occur for what are essentially novel form-meaning pairings for L2 learners, suggesting that adult learners can rapidly associate existing forms with new meanings. These studies help teachers understand the importance of the first language when learning a second language. Also, these studies show how teachers can improve or create new strategies which help students acquire the L2 easier and faster.

Furthermore, Karen Barto-Sisamout, Janet Nicol, Jeffrey Witzel, and Naoko Witzel (2009) carried out their study "Transfer Effects in Bilingual Sentence Processing" with a population of 48 native speakers of English in the University of Arizona. The main purpose was to find out if transferability exists between L1 and L2, and also if there was a relationship between the processes of grammatical morphology between them. The results they got were that Spanish-English bilinguals did not show processing difficulty. Nevertheless, late Spanish learners of English indicated a tendency showing intrusion effects in the first language, which means that students use their L1 to support their

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L2. In a similar manner, Adela Solis (1986) looked for evidence of language transference (Spanish to English, English to Spanish) with the study "Language Transference in the Acquisition of Negation" which was done with a 4-year-old girl from El Salvador. Solis wanted to discover if the phenomenon of language transference existed. She found that the child had internalized the rules of Spanish negation well enough to influence the use of Spanish negative structures in her English constructions. On the contrary, in the second sample taken on sentence subject omissions, Solis revealed no Spanish intrusion, but rather that the student had acquired enough English rules on sentence subject inclusion to influence her use of this structure in both Spanish and English, signifying a two-way transfer effect. Taking into account what these authors said, it can be concluded that transferability of native language grammar and structure exists when acquiring a second language. Furthermore, when a person is learning a second language, he/she uses his native language to support and make the process easier.

The Transferability of Cognates

Williams (1992) studied "The Cross-Language Transfer of Lexical Knowledge". This study was carried out with a population of 74 upper elementary school students who were literate in both Spanish and English. Williams sought to discover how Hispanic bilingual students' knowledge of Spanish vocabulary and awareness of Spanish-English cognates influence comprehension of English expository text. She found that the students were aware of cognates and made some use of that knowledge in their English reading. This means that students consciously use their native language in order to support their reading in the second language, and thus, make their reading understandable and easier for them. This author found that the contribution of Spanish vocabulary knowledge to English reading is not automatic, but depends on the degree of awareness of the languages' cognate relationship. What it says is that if you know about cognate relationships, you will be able to use cognates to help develop vocabulary in L2. When you have internalized more vocabulary, you do not have to guess the words you do not know or translate them into the nearest word in your mother tongue. Finally, Williams found that student knowledge of cognates could be even greater; suggesting that explicit instruction in cognates may be useful.

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In the study "First Language Transfer in the Writing of Hispanic ESL Learners" carried out with thirty-two ESL learners from the Educational Services Basic English Program at the Bayamon University Technological College in Puerto Rico, Schweers (1995) demonstrated the variety of communication/transfer strategies learners will employ

to solve problems of lexical deficit when communicating in a second language. For example, students employ strategies such as using an invented form of a word of his/her native language, combining it with the morphology or phonology of the principles of the second language. In a summary, it says that the student will take a word and modify it in such a way that it looks like a word in L2. One example of this is when a Spanish speaker says "destination" to say "destiny" or "comparation" in order to say "comparison".

Another study that talked about cognates as a support for learning a second language was done by Hancin-Bhatt and William Nagy (1993). They stated that poor knowledge of vocabulary has a negative effect on reading. Subsequently poor reading has been shown to have a negative impact upon academic success. Many research studies done in Spanish and French by Hancin-Bhatt and Nagy discovered the relevance of finding out cognates when reading. These previous findings highlighted data that reported that 6th and 7th grade proficient Latino readers in L2 used their cognate knowledge efficiently.

Word Association

Recent studies have been used as support for the word association model, which has to do with cognates as a useful tool to learn a second language. One of the studies mentioned before by Holmes and Ramos (1993) with a group of English and French adult learners says that cognate vocabulary exists when vocabulary items in two languages can be recognized by most users as being the same word. They found, in their study of English cognate recognition, that cognates are a well-used strategy that language teachers can exploit, but that they have to be careful with, due to the fact that one of the results showed that grammatical transposition occurs where verbs are read as nouns, sometimes creating minor misreadings. The other result showed that irresponsible guessing is done with true and false cognates, resulting in an erroneous reading of the text. Clearly, this shows that second language learners, when they finish reading a text, do not always understand it. Learners do not look for the words in the dictionary. Instead they try to guess what the word means. Thus, L2 learners finish reading with an unclear meaning of the text and with a false meaning of the words they translated into their native language.

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In addition, a study conducted by Dijkstra and Van Hell's (2001) with twenty-one participants from the University of Valencia, Spain, revealed that second language learners produced associations to cognates faster than to noncognates. Teachers should be aware of this issue in order to correct students and at the same time make them

conscious of the problem of interpreting each word in the L2 as one similar to the L1.

Positive and Negative Transference

The study carried out by James (1980) with a Chinese population, based on contrastive analysis, showed that the negative transference of L1 was more powerful than the positive one in L2 writing. Also, L1 always interfered in L2 writing, and the way of thinking in L1 influenced the pattern of the text organization in L2 writing (James, 1980). Many other researchers have had similar findings. According to Schumann (1998), L2 writers make many mistakes and 51% of these come from L1 interference. Researchers also believed that differences between languages caused difficulties, which led to errors in L2 learning and writing. The more differences there were between languages, the more the difficulties appeared, and at the same time more errors took place. According to Schumann (1998), similarities and differences between the two languages may result in either positive or negative transference according to different learning stages and language environments.

First Language Role

Jones and Tetroe (1987) found that L2 proficiency constrained the amount of writers' planning while composing in L2. Their observations showed that the amount of L1 use was reduced when written tasks were facilitated by providing relevant vocabulary for the students with a low level of L2 proficiency. However, Cummins (1990) found that there was not any relation between the use of L1 while composing in L2. Nonetheless, these studies all suggest that using L1 can be an efficient and effective strategy while composing in L2. In Duke-Lay's (1982) case study of four native Chinese-speaking ESL writers, the writers' think-aloud data revealed that these writers use their L1 to get a strong impression and association of ideas for the essay. A study performed by Wang and Wen (2002) with sixteen Chinese EFL writers at Nanjing University in China showed that L2 writers were most likely to rely on L1 when they were controlling their writing processes, generating and organizing ideas, but they were more likely to rely on L2 when undertaking task-examining and text-generating activities. Their study indicated that the participants with low English proficiency levels tended to translate from L1 into L2 throughout their L2 composing processes.

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Finally, Schweers (1999), at the University of Puerto Rico, Bayamon Campus, conducted a study with high school EFL students and their 19 teachers in a Spanish context to investigate their attitudes toward using L1 in the L2 classroom. He found that 88.7% of Spanish

students studying English want L1 used in the class because they believe it facilitates learning. Students also wished that up to 39% of the class time be spent in L1 (Schweers, 1999, p. 7). Burden (2001) investigated the attitudes of 290 students and 73 teachers at five universities in the United States. The results showed that both students and teachers believed that L1 explanation of new vocabulary was important when acquiring the L2. Another similar research conducted by Tang (2002), done in a Chinese context with 100 students and 20 teachers, showed similar results. The research showed that the use of the mother tongue in the English classroom does not negatively affect the exposure of students to English, but it can be a support for teaching and learning processes.

As a conclusion, although Schweers, Burden, and Tang previously stated that the role of the first language is an important issue to bear in mind when learning a second language, it is also important to mention that it should not be the most relevant part in acquiring a L2. As bilingual teachers, it is our responsibility to give our students the best environment for them to learn a second language and this includes making students feel comfortable about their learning process. The main goal of this research study was to know what influence L1 written structure had on L2 written structure and to find strategies to help teachers help their students avoid L1 during their writing processes in L2. Most importantly, teachers need to take into account six important aspects about the role of first language when acquiring a second language. These six aspects are: grammar transference, transferability of cognates, word association, interlingual awareness, and positive and negative transference.

Method

In order to collect data for this research study, qualitative data techniques were used. It is important to mention, first, that I was actively involved in the process of data collection. Second, I participated as an observer of the students' writing process throughout the English classes during the semester. Third, teachers and students were interviewed and their responses were then compared with students' English papers, in order to see if there existed any similarity between what they all answered and what students wrote. Finally, I made three interventions with students in which grammar lessons were taught.

In order to categorize and analyze data, the main sources used were quantitative surveys, informal interviews with students and teachers, and observation (with analysis) of intro students' papers. Through these

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sources, I could identify the influence L1 written structure has on L2 written structure and how L1 affects students' written papers positively or negatively. The interviews related to how students use Spanish when writing in English, how much they use English-English and Spanish-English dictionaries, and how much knowledge students have about the different written structures in both languages, L1 and L2. The analysis is about students' English texts during the semester. I analyzed how much students use Spanish (L1) written structures and words in order to compose in English (L2). The amount of papers collected depended on the written tasks assigned by the teacher during the semester. These tasks (students' English papers) were analyzed based on how students write in their mother tongue. The papers showed whether or not any influence from L1 to L2 existed in the area of writing.

Interventions

Three interventions took place during grammar classes. One of these interventions took place at the beginning of the semester, one in the middle of the semester and one at the end. The aim of these classes was to make students realize that Spanish written structures are not the same as English written structures. They have different grammatical compositions that disallow literal translations. In this part of the process, I collected students' papers every two weeks. I analyzed them, gave feedback and made note of examples of how students used their native language (Spanish) during their second language (English) writing process.

Identifying Themes

Students' written work was analyzed. In this part of the process, I looked for patterns that emerged from students' papers. These patterns were selected based on the influence the L1 has in the L2 writing, such as literal translations, Spanish structure (word order), missing verbs, invented words, and cognates.

Interviews

These interviews gave me a better idea of how influential L1 was in L2 writing. Teachers were asked about students' writing processes, their use of Spanish structures in their papers, and the frequency of Spanish-English and English-English dictionaries. Teachers' answers in the interview were analyzed and compared to the data collected from students' papers. The teachers' responses gave an overview of how Spanish influences students' written tasks. This overview was then triangulated with students' written work in order to see whether or not teachers agreed on the idea that L1 influence in L2 is so large that it helps or hinders students' learning process.

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The following triangulation matrix states what kinds of sources were used to answer each of the research questions. Three questions were designed in order to answer the main hypothesis. It is important to highlight that in order to answer each of the three questions, it was necessary to use at least four sources as the following chart displays below.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS	Survey	Informal interview with teachers	Informal interview with students	Intervention (exercise) with students	Observation of students' papers
1 What are the most frequent mistakes, related to L1 students make when writing in the second language?	X	X	X	X	X
2 What literal translations do students make when they write in the second language?	X	X	X	X	X
3 How does a grammar lesson influences students' writing in the L2?		X	X		X
4 How do Spanish-English and English-English dictionaries influence L2 students' writing?	X	X	X		X

Results

The following results are organized according to the analysis done for each of the three questions stated below, the surveys, the informal interviews with teachers and students, and the observation of students' papers.

In the surveys, all the students stated that Spanish use was necessary to support English learning, but it also interfered by the time students wrote texts in the second language. On the contrary, teachers affirmed that Spanish was not necessary because this would delay students' learning processes. All students responded that they had

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realized the L1 was useful when gaining new concepts and expressions in the L2, but it was not helpful when they wrote texts in the L2. The next chart shows students' and teachers' agreement about the use of L1 in L2 contexts.

English learning is easier when using Spanish to support it	# of students who agreed	# of teachers who agreed
Speaking	24 out of 24	0 out of 3
Gathering new concepts	24 out o 24	0 out of 3
Writing	8 out of 24	0 out of 3
Spanish-English dictionaries	24 out of 24	0 out of 3

24 out of 24 students agreed that their use of Spanish is close to 90 percent average, because they did not understand most of what their teachers told them. Students also concurred in saying that they felt English learning was easier when they used Spanish to support it. 24 out of 24 students had the same opinion about the use of Spanish-English and English-English dictionaries. They all agreed in saying that they preferred to use Spanish-English dictionaries, due to the fact that their knowledge of the second language was limited, while teachers agreed with the idea of using only English-English dictionaries in order to strengthen English learning.

Furthermore, regarding the writing processes, 16 out of 24 surveyed students agreed that Spanish usage, although a good tool when learning English, most of the time generated problems when writing in the L2. In a similar manner, all the teachers agreed that L1 really affected L2 writing. From the survey, teachers stated that most of students' texts had L1 influence, which made texts not clear and full of mistakes. Thus, according to the chart of agreement with regard to Spanish use when learning English, all the teachers consented that L1 did not work well to write in the L2.

In the interviews, students highlighted that they knew little about English and Spanish structures, which made them write in the same way in both languages. Students emphasized that their use of Spanish-English dictionaries was the source they used rather than looking for synonyms in an English-English dictionary. They also said that Spanish-English dictionaries gave them clear and direct concepts within the language they already know, which is Spanish. Students pointed out that their use of English-English dictionaries was lower, due to the fact that students were afraid of understanding new words incorrectly. This is one of the reasons why, according to some interviewed students, they

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used Spanish-English dictionaries with the clear idea of not giving way to misunderstandings about the meaning of the words.

In addition, students realized that by the time they wrote English texts, they wrote them in Spanish first and then they translated them into English. Some of them said they used a translator and some others said they took their time translating unknown words with their Spanish-English dictionaries and tried to use those words in the correct way. They also realized that when they received their papers back, they were asked to write them again, changing some structures and also writing missing things such as subject pronouns. 24 students out of 24 highlighted that the use of their first language, Spanish, hindered their writing in the L2 because when they used it, their texts had more mistakes.

In a similar manner, students recognized that the grammar lessons given were completely useful. Not only did the lesson help reduce grammar and structure mistakes during the next papers, but they also helped the students realize why their first papers had mistakes.

On the other hand, interviewed teachers stated that the most frequent mistakes made by students had to do with the order of structures and words, and the lack of personal pronouns. The teachers said students made those kinds of mistakes at least ten times in a hundred-word paper. Some other mistakes that teachers pointed out had to do with capitalization and punctuation, followed by a few spelling mistakes.

Moreover, teachers emphasized that students tend to translate literally from Spanish to English during their first semesters. Most of the corrections they made showed students' reliance on their first language. This reliance showed that L1, in some way, hindered students' L2 writing. Furthermore, students` most common translations, according to one of the teachers, had to do with false cognates in which students took one English word with similar spelling in Spanish but with different meaning in English and wrote it in the text with no sense. Teachers indicated that this strategy of transferring words from their first language is the result of students' lack of vocabulary.

In addition, all the three interviewed teachers emphasized that English-English dictionaries should be students' first source once they find an unknown word. Teachers agreed to say it is important for students to know whether the word is a noun or a verb or perhaps an adverb. English-English dictionaries give examples of the correct use of each word, which is not likely to be found in a Spanish-English dictionary. Teachers believe that by using English-English dictionaries, students would strengthen their English learning. 3 out of 3 interviewed

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teachers disagree with the idea of using Spanish-English dictionaries during the first semesters.

Regarding the usage of both types of dictionaries, students believed they spent too much time looking for words in both dictionaries. They said they preferred to use only one dictionary (Spanish- English one) or use a translator instead. Teachers, on the other hand, said that the use of both dictionaries at the same time made no sense because they disapproved of the use of Spanish-English ones and because students wasted time searching for words in two different dictionaries.

Teachers considered the grammar lessons, or interventions, to be very important. One of the teachers pointed out that writing becomes more difficult for students when they are asked to write a text with no basis of how to do it. Teachers declared that they spent at least fifteen minutes of the class explaining grammar before inviting students to write in the L2. These three teachers also figured out that after my interventions, students improved remarkably in their following papers, not only reducing the number of mistakes regarding order but also increasing the number of words within the text.

The next chart shows the analysis done to five of the students' papers. This chart illustrates the most common mistakes with regard to L1 influence students made when writing English texts and the number of total mistakes among the whole class in each paper.

Regarding the observation of five students' papers, four kinds of mistakes related to L1 were viewed to have influence on the students' written texts in the L2. It is important to mention that the following mistakes are presented in order, starting from the one the students made the most to the least. The first one, word order, refers to the syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence, clause, or phrase. According to the analysis made on three papers of each of the 24 observed students, it was possible to identify that 24 out of 24 students had at least four mistakes with regard to the order of the sentences in the written texts done with little instruction on grammar. That makes a total of at least 137 word-order mistakes in each of the three papers analyzed in the whole class. Furthermore, 65 implicit-subject mistakes (the ones in which the main subject is dropped, leaving the sentence incomplete and unclear: for example, "is mine") is the average in the first three papers analyzed. 19 out of 24 students dropped the subject in a sentence at least one time, which makes a total of a 65 mistake average in the whole class where the main subject was left out. Moreover, concerning the third most common mistake, wrong use of the article "the", (the one in which the article is used incorrectly in L2 because some students

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think these can be used in the same way as in Spanish: for example, "in the 2010", referring to the year). 19 out of 24 students made this kind of mistake at least one time per paper, with a total of a 60 mistake average among the group. The fourth most common mistake was the omission of the verb "be" (in which some students forget to write the verb "be" in continuous actions: for example, "I playing soccer"), 15 out of 24 students made that mistake at least two times. On average, these 15 students had a total of 32 missing-be mistakes. Additionally, the individual average of students' mistakes in each of their papers was 13. Some students made more mistakes than others, but none of them was higher than 20 or lower than 9 mistakes in a paper. That makes a total of 300 mistakes among the whole group, of the four kinds of mistakes related to L1 in L2 writing mentioned above.

In a similar manner, after being given the three grammar lessons, students improved remarkably in all the four aspects in the next papers. Two papers were analyzed after the interventions were made and the mistakes were reduced dramatically. Word order mistake decreased in the whole class from 137 to 78 mistakes in the fourth paper and to 68 mistakes in the fifth one. The second most frequent mistake, implicit subject, went from 65 mistakes on average in the first three papers to 21 mistakes in the fourth and 17 in the fifth paper. The third mistake related to the L1 influence on L2 writing, the wrong use of the article "the", decreased from 60 mistakes average during the first papers, to 19 and 14 mistakes in the fourth and fifth papers respectively. The number of mistakes of the missing verb "be" decreased from 32 in the first three papers to 10 in the fourth and 6 in the fifth. In addition, the total number of mistakes in the first papers reduced from 300 to 128 in the fourth and to 104 in the last one analyzed, which concurs with what was said by teachers. The grammar lessons really helped students improve L2 writing and avoid Spanish usage in it.

Mistakes	# of Ss	1st Paper # of Ss' mistakes	2nd Paper # of Ss' mistakes	3rd Paper# of Ss' mistakes	4th Paper# of Ss' mistakes after interventions	5th Paper # of Ss' mistakes after interventions
Word order	24 out of 24	140	138	137	78	68
Implicit subject	19 out of 24	67	64	65	21	17
Wrong use of "The"	19 out of 24	62	64	60	19	14
Missing the verb "be"	15 out of 24	38	35	32	10	6

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Conclusions

As the results showed in this current study, students tend to use L1 written structure in the L2 texts and to translate word-by-word from L1 to L2. In a similar way, Cummins (1989) said that lower L2 proficiency writers rely more heavily on their L1 during the writing process in order to maintain the process and prevent a complete breakdown in language. Linking this current research study and this theory, it can be concluded that first semester students do use their L1 in order to produce texts in the L2. Another conclusion is that the influence that L1 written structure has on L2 written structure is large. Based on the findings, I conclude that L1 influence was negative when using it to write texts in the L2. Many mistakes regarding L1 were found in all the texts students were asked to write in English. Based on what was found in this research study, the data analysis, the interviews, surveys and students` papers, it is also concluded that L1 hinders L2 writing. On one hand, using Spanish to learn English makes the process longer, due to the fact that students have to translate everything to their language and then, once they have realized what the meaning of the words is, students have to write the words in English again. On the other hand, by translating from English to Spanish and vice versa, most of the time students forget essential things which in the end become mistakes.

Similarly, although students agreed about using Spanish-English dictionaries, this study showed that they negatively affect students writing process in the L2 and that it is important to avoid their overuse in class. They can be used only when it is extremely necessary but not all the time. Instead, English-English dictionaries can be used more frequently in order to avoid reliance on L1, and also to avoid students getting to a higher English level in more advanced courses while still depending on Spanish-English dictionaries.

In a similar way, in a study carried out by James (1980), it is shown that the negative transference of L1 was more powerful than the positive one in L2 writing. According to Krashen (1988), it is maintained that L1 interference is one of the several sources of errors learners make. Concerning this study, 100 % of the studied population made more mistakes when translating literally from L1 to L2. Some students tend to write L2 texts with L1 structure, making word-order mistakes. As a conclusion, based on these authors and this study, it is concluded that L1 negatively affects L2 writing.

Furthermore, findings in this research study aim to show the importance of grammar lessons during the first semesters of English learning. Students in this research had a large decrease in mistakes in L2 after having been given the grammar lesson, which shows the

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effectiveness of studying grammar before asking students to write by themselves with no preparation.

Finally, although most of the studies presented in this work showed positive results when using the L1 to learn the L2, this work indicated negative results of transference at the beginning stages of L2 writing.

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