Linguistic interference in the writing production of learners of English as Foreign Language

Interferencias lingüísticas en la producción escrita de estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera

Interferência linguística na produção escrita de aprendizes de inglês como língua estrangeira

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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Linguistic interference, also known as language transfer, occurs when learners of a second or foreign language (in this case, English) apply knowledge, rules, or structures from their native language-L1(in this case, Spanish) while using the target language (L2). This phenomenon can significantly influence writing production among English as a Foreign Language (EFL) learners. Objective: The aim of this piece of research is to develop an inventory of the most frequent linguistics errors made by Ecuadorian speakers during the process of learning English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Material and methods: This inventory has been carried out from the extraction of data from the COREAILE corpus, made up of the narrative production of students belonging to the Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros major (Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages major) of the Universidad Técnica de Manabí (Ecuador). An inventory of linguistic errors has been established that will allow teachers of English as FL to better understand the interlanguage of their students and work on correcting the most frequent errors. Using the participants' narrations in English, formalized in a corpus as a data source, lexical-semantic interference was detected, establishing an error taxonomy. Three types of instruments were designed in order to obtain data from the written interlanguage of the participants: Comic strips, The story of my life and Past experience. The information which has gotten indicates that there is a large recurrence of interference errors in Ecuadorian English learners regarding the tendency to invent words due to the influence caused by their when writing a text in English. The results show that the most frequent errors are due to four main categories: false collocations, false cognates, invented words and literal translation. In conclusion, mistakes made by EFL learners are great indicators of the progress of students' language learning.
Keywords: linguistic interference, lexical-semantic level, corpus de appendices, second or foreign language.

RESUMEN

Introducción: La interferencia lingüística, también conocida como transferencia de lengua, se produce cuando los estudiantes de una segunda lengua o lengua extranjera (en este caso, el inglés) aplican conocimientos, reglas o estructuras de su lengua materna-L1 (en este caso, el español) mientras utilizan la lengua meta (L2). Este fenómeno puede influir significativamente en la producción escrita de los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). El objetivo de esta investigación es elaborar un inventario de los errores lingüísticos más frecuentes que cometen los hablantes ecuatorianos durante el proceso de aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera (ILE). Materiales y métodos: Este inventario se ha realizado a partir de la extracción de datos del corpus COREAILE, conformado por la producción narrativa de estudiantes pertenecientes a la carrera de Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros

de la Universidad Técnica de Manabí (Ecuador). Se ha establecido un inventario de errores lingüísticos que permitirá a los profesores de inglés como LE comprender mejor la interlengua de sus alumnos y trabajar en la corrección de los errores más frecuentes. Utilizando como fuente de datos las narraciones en inglés de los participantes, formalizadas en un corpus, se detectaron interferencias léxico-semánticas, estableciendo una taxonomía de errores. Se diseñaron tres tipos de instrumentos para obtener datos de la interlengua escrita de los participantes: viñetas, historia de mi vida y experiencia pasada. La información que se ha obtenido indica que existe una gran recurrencia de errores de interferencia en los estudiantes ecuatorianos de inglés en cuanto a la tendencia a inventar palabras debido a la influencia causada por ellos al escribir un texto en inglés. Los resultados muestran que los errores más frecuentes se deben a cuatro categorías principales: falsas colocaciones, falsos cognados, palabras inventadas y traducción literal. En conclusión, los errores cometidos por los alumnos de ILE son grandes indicadores del progreso del aprendizaje de lenguas en los estudiantes.

RESUMO

Introdução: A interferência linguística, também conhecida como transferência de língua, produz-se quando os estudantes de uma segunda língua ou língua estrangeira (neste caso, o inglês) aplicam conhecimentos, regras ou estruturas de sua língua materna-L1 (neste caso, o espanhol) ao utilizar a língua-alvo (L2). Este fenômeno pode influenciar significativamente a produção escrita dos estudantes de inglês como língua estrangeira (ILE). O objetivo desta pesquisa é elaborar um inventário dos erros linguísticos mais frequentes cometidos por falantes equatorianos durante o processo de aprendizagem do inglês como língua estrangeira (ILE). Material e métodos: Este inventário se realizou a partir da extração de dados do corpus COREAILE, composto pela produção narrativa de estudantes do curso Pedagogía de los Idiomas Nacionales y Extranjeros (Pedagogia dos Idiomas Nacionais e Estrangeiros) da Universidad Técnica de Manabí (Universidade Técnica de Manabí) (Ecuador). Estabeleceu-se um inventário de erros linguísticos que permitirá aos professores de inglês como LE compreender melhor a interlíngua de seus alunos e trabalhar na correção dos erros mais frequentes. Utilizando como fonte de dados as narrações em inglês dos participantes, formalizadas em um corpus, detectaram-se interferências léxico-semânticas, estabelecendo uma taxonomia de erros. Desenvolveram-se três tipos de instrumentos para obter dados da interlíngua escrita dos participantes: quadrinhos, histórias de minha vida e experiência passada. A informação obtida indica que existe uma grande recorrência de erros de interferência nos estudantes equatorianos de inglês quanto à tendência de inventar palavras devido à influência causada por eles ao escrever um texto em inglês. Os resultados mostram que os erros mais frequentes se devem a quatro categorias principais: falsas colocações, falsos cognatos, palavras inventadas e tradução literal. Em conclusão, os erros cometidos pelos alunos de ILE são grandes indicadores do progresso da aprendizagem de línguas dos estudantes.

Palavras chave: interferência linguística, nível léxico-semântico, corpus de apêndices, segunda língua ou língua estrangeira.

INTRODUCTION

The English language is taught as a foreign langue (FL) in all the educational levels (elementary, secondary and tertiary education) in Ecuador. Currently, this foreign language is essential in the Ecuadorian curriculum, since English is considered as a global language (Crystal, 2003).

This research is focused on tertiary education, specifically on Ecuadorian university students. Some studies state that writing in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) is one of the most difficult skills for Spanish learners. Considering that this skill is a productive one, learners face some troubles when producing any piece of writing. In this regard, Cabrera et al. (2014, p. 41) mention that "writing is a skill that demands great effort and commitment. For this reason, it is often difficult for students to master this skill in a foreign language".

The biggest challenge that Spanish-speaking learners of English face is the influence of their mother tongue (L1). Cabrera et al. (2014, p. 41) state that "research on L2 interference has shown that foreign language learners tend to be highly dependent on L1 structures and vocabulary, especially when producing suitable responses in the target language". This phenomenon is also called linguistic interference, cross linguistic influence or language transfer.

Linguistic interference causes that students use L1 linguistics patterns when writing an English text. "This interference problem is evident when using productive skills, especially in conveying written messages"

(Cabrera et al., 2014, p. 40). Of course, Ecuadorian learners use to transfer some lexical-semantic patterns from their L1, causing interferences such as invented words or literal translations, among others.

This paper outlines an inventory of the most frequent lexical-semantic errors made by native Spanish speakers during the process of learning English as a Foreign Language. Four research questions are considered: (1) What types of lexical-semantic categories emerged from the error tagging procedure? (2) Do different instruments (types of narration tasks) affect the frequency and the categories of errors? (3) Does a higher language proficiency involve a lower number of errors? (4) Does the participants' sex have an impact on their errors (types and frequency)? To clarify these questions, data are based on a written corpus of Ecuadorian learners of EFL (COREAILE) (Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020), made up of more than 200 narratives and 44,000 words. After an error-tagging procedure, the result is a record of lexical-semantic interferences of Spanish-speaking learners of EFL, which can be a guide for teachers to be aware of recurrent mistakes and improve the students' learning process.

Theoretical framework
The error

The concept of error became relevant with Corder's (1967) first ideas on the subject and its influence in foreign language acquisition, that is to say that Corder's findings about error would be beneficial for academics thanks to the scientific bases given to the topic. An error is understood as the lack of knowledge a language learner can have to produce the target language in an accurate way. Even though the idea of error can be seen as negative, Barbasán (2016) mentions that the systematic process of errors serves as a very necessary resource to perceive the nature of its origin, establish relationships between the types of speakers and the errors they make in the communication process and, of course, as an ultimate goal, improve the teaching practice. According to Ellis (1994) the main error is a deviation from the rules of the FL. For the reader to see the difference on what has been said, this will be exemplified with two sentences taken from Londoño (2008, p. 143).

- Example of an overt error: * I runned all the way.

- Example of a covert error: It was stopped, which is apparently grammatically correct, but knowing that it refers to "the wind", the sentence would no longer be correct according to what the speaker actually wants to mean.

Brown (2007) explains that the types of overt expressions are unquestionably ungrammatical on the sentence aspect; in turn, covert expressions (which are not covert by itself, if the surrounding speech is covert, whether observed before or after the sentence) are grammatically well-formed.

Errors can show the linguistic system that the learner uses to communicate, which contains rules of the FL and the L1, but also other rules that do not belong to either language, which are properly idiosyncratic, that is, it is the phenomenon of interlanguage, described below (Santos Gargallo, 1993).

The terms error and mistake are technically two very different phenomena (Brown, 2007); however, there is the need of differentiating them in order to avoid confusion (Keshavarz, 2012). Corder (1967) mentions that unsystematic errors and performance failures will be called mistake, while the systematic imprecisions of the student that at the same time are errors of competence will be called error, which allows to reconstruct the learners´ target language knowledge.

According to Erdoğan (2005), students can self-correct mistakes when they notice or are aware of them. On the contrary, it does not occur the same with errors; errors are derived from linguistic elements of the language, so the native or non-native speaker will not consider them to be erroneous learning, due to their ignorance; therefore, they cannot be self-corrected.

The advantage that teachers have, as they are the only ones who see faults as such, it is that errors, but not mistakes, offer important evidence that allows teachers to provide their students with corrections and select the most appropriate teaching materials to support their learning, (Nonkukhetkhong, 2013).

The Error Analysis

The Error Analysis (EA) theory focuses on the identification, description, classification, explanation, and evaluation of errors. It studies the errors made by foreign language learners (Gass & Selinker, 2008; Richards & Schmidt, 2010; Tavakoli, 2012; Yildiz, 2015). Thinkers and promoters of this theory, such as Corder (1971) and Darus & Subramaniam (2009), recognize that it is linked to the language studies of foreign language learners.

On his behalf, Tavakoli (2012) highlights that the EA includes a set of procedures that serve to identify, describe and explain the linguistic errors made by the students (pronunciation, grammar, vocabulary, style, etc.), in order to attribute the causes of such errors to particular sources, as well as the application of conventions and rules of learning L1, that is to say, their interference or, also the erroneous application of the FL rules.

This theory plays an important role in the treatment of error within the learning of a foreign language. By using of the EA and applying correct techniques, the teaching-learning process of a FL can be improved more effectively (Darus & Subramaniam, 2009; Kırkgöz, 2010), decreasing in a considerable extent the production of errors by the learner. Likewise, the use of the EA sheds light on the areas which the teacher should devote more attention and emphasize the teaching; therefore, research carried out in this field of study is necessary.

Santos Gargallo (2004) rebuilt these procedures or stages and gave them a clearer and more specific nuance, which seems more in line with the three stages offered by Corder (1971) with respect to idiosyncratic dialects (interlanguage errors) that the student carries out in his attempt to communicate in his target language. Such procedures or stages that the EA must follow as a methodology in the study of errors are the following:

i.   Compilation of the data corpus

ii.   Identification of errors

iii. Description of errors

iv.   Classification of errors according to a taxonomy

v.   Explanation of errors

vi.   Evaluation of errors

vii. Discussion of results

viii. Didactic or pedagogical implications to implement the teaching-learning process

(Santos Gargallo, 2004, p. 397).

The Interlanguage

Within linguistic application, it has been a highly controversial point of discussion since Selinker (1969, 1972) coined the term interlanguage in his studies to explain certain circumstances that occurred in the learning of foreign languages. In the linguistic context, the term interlanguage refers to the errors produced by the learner due to the interference of his/her mother tongue when trying to learn a foreign language. "Interlanguage (IL) is the final stage of a line of research in the learning of foreign languages that began with the CA, followed by the EA, to finally reach the IL" (Perea Santos, 2014, p. 34).

After Selinker (1969) introduced the term interlanguage, whose reformulation occurred three years later (Selinker, 1972) within applied linguistics, the word has received several meanings. Firstly, Nemser (1971) defined it as an approximate linguistic system; followed by Corder (1971), who conceptualized it as idiosyncratic dialects or unstable, fragmentary language. Later, Selinker himself (1972) described it as the intermediate language system of learners.

Balenović (2017) argues that the interlanguage is that complex dynamic system that the learner unconsciously performs in the communicative process through the use of the native language and the language to be learned. According to this author, it is the language created by the student of a FL. Before Balenović, Corder (1977), Nemser (1971) and Richards (1971) held the same theory by affirming that there was a complex interlinguistic dynamic between the L1 and the FL in the teaching-learning process that the student faces; therefore, it is eminent for this psycholinguistic phenomenon called interlanguage to happen. Furthermore, it should be pointed out that interlanguage goes beyond what a combinatorial system between the L1 and the FL can mean, since it tries to reflect the possible linguistic difficulties of the student when facing certain irregularities in their own language (Selinker, 1972; Liceras, 1992; Corder, 1967).

Santos Gargallo (1994, p. 172) also expresses that: "interlanguage is the system that the L2 learner uses to communicate and contains L2 rules, rules of their native language and others that neither belong to the first nor to the second language and that they are properly idiosyncratic".

In short, the linguistic system of the interlanguage is, in a certain way, separated from the native language and the target language of the learner, but, at the same time, it is linked by some interlingual patterns created by the

students themselves Tarone (2006). Liceras (1992) recognizes that efforts are made to explain these IL structures based on the L1 of the learners in the studies that are carried out. She also accepts that EA is undoubtedly the path to discover the idiosyncrasy of interlanguage, that is, that existence of non-native systems.

Linguistic interference

The interference is a phenomenon that takes place from what we already know as linguistic patterns, around the communicative process that the FL learner carries out. This is reflected in the idea that learners transfer what they previously knew in their L1; in this way, a similar task in the target language is executed (Dongjin, 2011). Positive and negative situations occur in this game of linguistic contexts, which are sometimes in favour of or in disadvantage for the FL learning.

The notion of interference or transfer has been analyzed with greater relevance from the EA approach (Myers-Scotton, 2006), with the aim of being able to discuss the differences and similarities and, even more, the sources that could cause such phenomenon. In this respect, Ringbom (2007) argues that the transfer has been mainly discussed in relation to the analysis of errors because of the syntactic deviations that occurred in the FL as a consequence of the learner´s L1: these are the easiest ones to detect. On the contrary, it is more difficult to notice how the knowledge of the L1 has provided the learning of the FL.

All negative transfer or interference errors influence in one way or another the production of the student. When a foreign language learner writes in the target language, some of the characteristics of his/her L1 appear in the writing. FL students can produce written texts that contain correct grammatical structures, as well as appropriate vocabulary elements and content. However, many times these written productions make more sense in the native language of the students than in the FL due to the direct translation (Bennui, 2008).

Isurin (2005, p. 115) assures that: "transfer is a traditional term from psychology of learning which means imposition of previously learned patterns onto a new learning situation". Due to the need to communicate, the non-native speaker, consciously or unconsciously, transfers certain aspects of their mother tongue to the foreign language at all linguistic levels (Galindo, 2005). Similarly, Galindo (2005) believes that, as it is a universal phenomenon, this particularity in learning a foreign language has received various names such as interference, transfer, influence of the mother tongue, among others.

According to Marin (2013), the lack of competence in the target language causes the student draws on his knowledge of the mother tongue, resulting in interferences or negative transfers in his speech in the foreign language.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of L1 transfer, including the idiosyncratic and non-universal characteristics of the L1, is a phenomenon that language teachers observe every day (Rosen, 1991). Therefore, the task of the teacher is even greater, since he/she must search, from these strategies, which apparently are not so negative in the teaching-learning process, the way the student realizes and is capable to discover, from his own mistakes, the correct language to use in communication; and thus, improve his performance in the FL.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Participants

To conduct this piece of research, a total of 104 students were sampled. All the learners belonged to the Pedagogy of National and Foreign Languages major at Universidad Técnica de Manabí, Ecuador. All of them had Spanish as their mother tongue and they were enrolled in different language proficiency levels, from 1 to 5 (corresponding to the CEFR A1, A2.1, A2.2, B1.1 and B1.2), coming from different professional majors. That is, they did not study English in order to become English teachers, but they have English in their academic curriculum as a mandatory subject. The participants' sex was balanced (52 female and 52 male) and the age range was from 17 to 30 years old, with a mean of 21 years old.

Instruments

This study is based on a linguistic corpus named COREAILE (Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020), designed and compiled for research purposes. Three types of instruments were designed in order to obtain data from the written interlanguage of the participants: Comic strips, The story of my life and Past experience. The first instrument consisted of a succession of six bullets (images) without text, from which the participants had to create a story based on what they observed in the images. The second instrument required the participant to narrate a text

based on the title The story of my life. The third instrument consisted in writing a past event or experience, similar to the second instrument, but with fewer suggestions and, therefore, more freedom to produce. Learners should write the essays including 150 to 200 words following the indications in each document.

Procedure

The 104 essays were classified and digitalized (typed using a text editor), maintaining the originality of the written production carried out by the students, including their punctuation errors, sentence structure mistakes and any other erroneous aspects. The codification process was executed using the qualitative analysis program Atlas.ti, in which the interference errors found in each document were coded. The coding process was based on the guidelines of the grounded theory (GT) by Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), who take as a reference the guidelines presented by Strauss and Corbin (2002). Four linguistic categories were obtained at the lexical-semantic level: false collocation, false cognate, invented word and literal translation L1.

For the description, interpretation and analysis of the results, the next section is divided into two parts: (1) global results and analysis of the linguistic interferences coded in the corpus and its subcategories; (2) results and analysis of the three socio-educational variables (instrument, language proficiency level and sex) in relation to the lexical-semantic level. That is, first, the global analysis of the linguistic categories and subcategories that emerged from the error analysis in the COREAILE corpus will be shown, to know in which linguistic category the learners present the highest recurrence of errors due to interference from the L1 (Spanish variety of Ecuador) to the FL (English) in texts written in the latter language. After that, an analysis will be carried out on the three socio-educational variables.

In addition, examples of the interferences identified by exemplification with textual quotes containing errors will be exposed. Quotes will have a two-digit numerical identification provided by the Atlas.ti program, used for the analysis and labelling of the corpus. The first digit indicates the primary document number in which the citation is located, and the second digit shows the quotation number according to the order of its creation. This analysis intends to explain the bases and possible causes of the interference errors.

RESULTS

As we have said previously in this part which corresponds to the analysis of the three socio-educational variables (instrument, level of study and sex), we want to demonstrate the frequency of the interference errors in relation to these variables and prove if the data differ significantly.

The results show that at the lexical-semantic level (Figure 1, absolute and relative figures, respectively) there is a high similarity in the number of errors by composition, since the 305 of the total errors in this category are divided into: 100 errors for Comic strips, 96 errors for The story of my life and 109 errors for Past experience. If we analyse the results by category, we find that the differences are also minimal between one instrument and another, with the exception of the category invented word, where The story of my life composition has only 20 recurrences, which is equivalent to less than 50% in relation to the Comic strip composition and the Past experience composition, which record 51 interference errors each. This finding gives an answer to research question 2: Do different instruments (types of narration tasks) affect the frequency and the categories of errors?
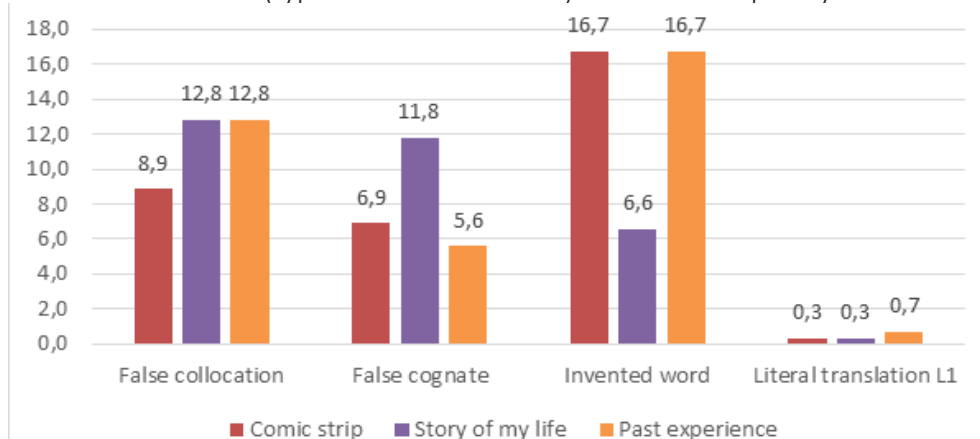

Figure 1: Total of interference errors in the variable 'instrument'
Source: (Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 215).

It is observed (Figure 1) that the false collocation errors have the same percentage (12.8%) in The story

of my life and in the Past experience composition and a lower amount of errors (8.9%) in the Comic strip; however, the false cognate errors present greater differences from one instrument to the other: in fact, the largest number of errors is found in The story of my life composition. The invented word category has, on the other hand, the same number of errors (51) and therefore the same percentage (16.7%) both in the Comic strip composition, and in The story of my life, values much higher than those registered in The story of my life composition, where only 6.6% is reached. The literal translation L1 category is exactly the same in the Comic strip composition, and The story of my life composition, with a percentage of 0.3%, but errors are doubled in the Past experience composition, which registers a percentage of 0.7%.

The results show that the proficiency language level (from 1 to 5) with the highest recurrence of errors is level two, with a percentage of 28.2%, and that the level of studies with the lowest recurrence of errors and a percentage of 14.1% corresponds to level five. The percentage difference in errors between the second and the last level of studies is 14.1%, the highest of all, when it was expected to find much wider differences in the number of errors between the first and last levels of study (research question 3). It is important, however, to indicate that the last level of studies is the one that registers the lowest percentage of errors, which indicates a greater linguistic competence of the students.
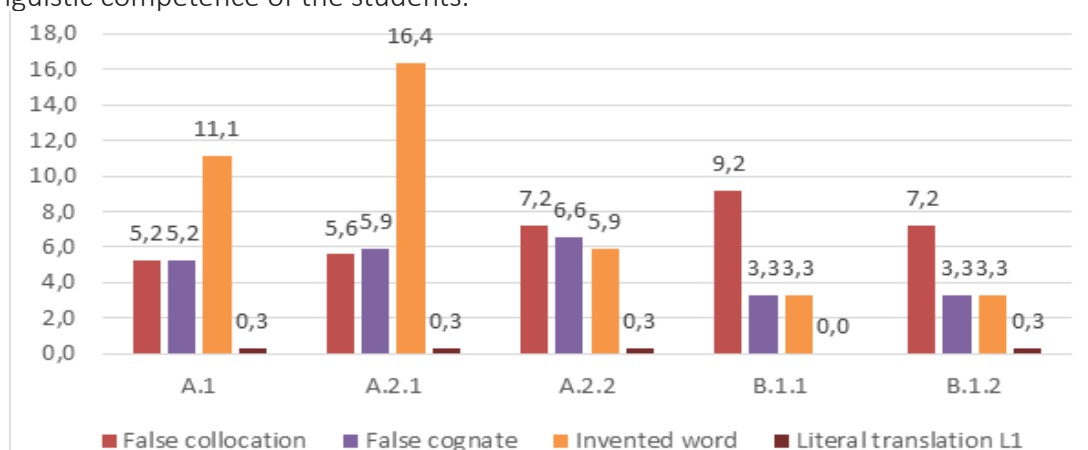

Figure 2: Total of interference errors in the variable 'language proficiency'

Source: (Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 215).

Figure 2 shows that the category invented word has the highest percentage in the first two levels, 11.1% and 16.4% respectively. It is interesting to realize that these percentages fall significantly in levels three, four and five, with only 5.9%, 3.3% and 3.3% respectively. Another important result is that the false collocation category registers the highest percentages of errors in the last three levels of study (7.2%, 9.2% and 7.2%), and the lowest in the first two levels of study with 5.2% and 5.6%, respectively. On the contrary, we find the false cognate category, which shows higher percentages in the first three levels of study with 5.2%, 5.9% and 6.6% respectively, but only 3.3% on the last two levels of study. Finally, the literal translation L1 category shows similar percentages of less than 1% at all levels of study.

The total distribution of interference errors in Figure 3 shows that out of the 305 errors found in the COREAILE corpus, 157 correspond to the variable men and 148 to the variable women, which means that there are minimal differences between the two variables, which represents only a 2%, that is, no significant relationship between interference error and the sex of the participants is observed in these results. Therefore, research question 4 (Does the participants' sex have an impact on their errors (types and frequency)?) is answered negatively.
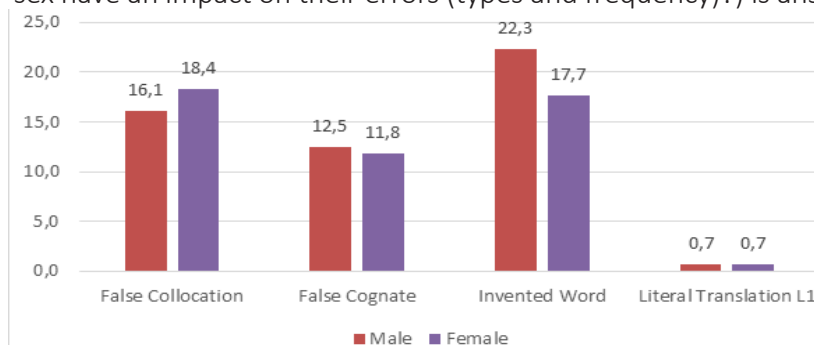

Figure 3. Interference errors for in the variable 'sex'

Source: (Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 215).

The results show that the false collocation category in the male variable is 16.1% and that there is a slight increase in the female variable (18.4%). The false cognate category, with differences in errors of only two cases, records percentages of 12.5% in males and 11.8% in females. We find the highest difference in males for invented words (22.3%), compared to the female group, which registers a percentage of 17.7%. In the case of the literal translation L1 category, both groups, both men and women, present the same percentage.

DISCUSSION

The results obtained in this research show that at the lexical-semantic level, four generic linguistic interference categories emerged: false collocation, false cognate, invented word and literal translation L1. From these groups, the one with the highest frequency was the invented word (122 cases, 40.0%). Secondly, we find the false collocation, with 105 occurrences (34.4%), followed by the false cognate (74 occurrences, 24.3%) and, finally, with a residual value, the literal translation L1 (4 cases, 1.3%). The following examples illustrate some of the categories above discussed:

(1)   a) *My life is divert.

b) *enfermed.

c) *After the mechanic is restored my car.

(Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 236).

The information we have gotten indicates that there is a large recurrence of interference errors in Ecuadorian English learners regarding the tendency to invent words (example 1, a-c) due to the influence caused by their L1 (Cabrera et al., 2014; López Urdaneta, 2011) when writing a text in English.

Another of the linguistic categories that has been quite affected by the interference of the L1 of the participants in this study is the false collocation. Learners tend to make this mistake because certain compound words in Spanish do not follow the same semantic regime in English and, therefore, the student mistakenly selects a collocation (O'Dell & McCarthy, 2017).

(2)   a) *they were so happy and with a radiant sun.

b) *I usually arrive at my house at 5: pm.

c) *the mother and the father pass the time swimming together.

d) *the food was very rich.

(Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 261).

The data reveal that learners tend to make a higher percentage of interference errors about collocations regarding the incorrect choice of the adjective. In the example 2d "* the food was very rich", extracted from our COREAILE corpus, it can be observed how the learner has used the word rich to refer to "rico" in Spanish. Although the word rich does mean "rico", for the context observed, this word is incorrectly used; the student has chosen this word wrongly with the intention of saying delicioso or rico, but when talking about food delicious or tasty are appropriate, for example.

Another of the existing categories at the lexical-semantic level is the false cognate linguistic category. This category is on the third place in the frequency of errors that learners have made at this linguistic level. According to Cecovniuc (2017, p. 30) "In the teaching of foreign languages the problem of false friends has motivated greater attention, especially regarding the transfer-interference question".

In the examples (3 a-f) can be observed that the Ecuadorian learners have used a word that is not appropriate for that specific context, since, although they are similar in their form in the two languages, they have different meanings (Richards & Schmidt, 2010).

(3)   a) *when I finished of listen his history! he appear and said me, "thanks for listen".

b) *And this was the end of history, returned home with good memories.

c) * Hi! My name is Juan. In this history went with my family of travel for the camp.

d) *In the actuality study the major the enginner in the Universidad Técnica de Manabí.

e) *In the actuality study in the University technical of Manabí.

    f) *In the actuality not have girlfriend.

<div align="right">(Macias Loor & Garrote, 2020, p. 233).</div>

In example (3b) the learner chose history instead of story, which would be correct according to the context of the example shown.

CONCLUSIONS

Language transfer or linguistic interference is a language user strategy to solve the absence of certain linguistic knowledge that the FL student often uses to communicate orally or when writing. According to Mahmoud (2000), the student uses this strategy in order to create hypotheses about the target language and as a communication strategy to test them. However, despite the fact that this is a tool that the student uses to communicate, it is considered that "language interference is one of the current problems in foreign language teaching (Lekova, 2010, p. 320). Most foreign language learners use this strategy in a specific way in order to develop and produce their target language.

Errors made by the learners are good opportunities to work in the classroom, as well as for research about the learning process (Alonso, 2015). Likewise, studies under the guidelines of error analysis allow teachers to identify the learning difficulties that their students can face, which cannot be easily identified through a contrastive analysis (Fallahi, 1991) because the theory of error analysis not only focuses on the comparison of the error between two languages that are being studied, but rather provides a deeper look at its causes and proposes certain solutions for its correction.

As stated by Corder (1973) and Sermsook et al., (2017), mistakes made by EFL learners are great indicators of the progress of students' language learning. They can also serve as feedback for the teacher. Moreover, they help the teacher to know about the effectiveness of the teaching materials and techniques used. In addition, they show the professor the evolution of the study program and if it has been learned or taught in the correct way, or whether it requires a different treatment for improvement.

According to the data in this research, interference errors are one of the main sources that obstruct the effectiveness of the English learners' writing. Based on the above, it is necessary for the foreign language teacher to encourage the learner to read and write more in English. In this sense, reading provides the learner sentence patterns, new vocabulary, among others, that it is likely they may not have experienced yet. Therefore, when writing a text, the learner already has a certain degree of knowledge of the language and can reduce the percentage of errors due to interference in the development of their work. As Sermsook et al., (2017, p. 108) point out "the knowledge of grammar and vocabulary of the target language is needed for a comprehensible piece of writing".

Contrastive studies are a wide-open window to discover the similarities and differences that characterize two languages. Contrastive studies are relevant in many Asian countries such as Thailand, Japan, China, among others, as well as in Europe. In the Latin American context, we can also find very promising studies that present data that help us improve the teaching-learning process of a foreign language. However, in the Ecuadorian background, linguistic studies, specifically studies of errors due to interference from Spanish into English, are very limited.

The analysis of the recurrences of the interference errors allows us to identify the most frequent errors in the interlanguage of the learner. Likewise, it allows "to elucidate the systematicity, consistency or severity of errors" (Ferreira & Elejalde, 2017, p. 534). Through this type of error analysis, the teacher or researcher has the opportunity to deeply categorize the most frequent errors made in a piece of writing, contributing to a more effective correction and improving the written production in EFL.

At the lexical-semantic level, the highest number of recurrences that have been detected occurred in the creation of new words, specifically nouns and verbs. Secondly, the false collocation is another typical error that shows up at the lexical-semantic level. Contrary to the made-up words, where the adjectives had the lowest recurrence, in the wrong placement the highest number of occurrences was cantered on the adjective. Thirdly, the greatest recurrence occurred in some nouns. In summary, it is inferred that the low frequency that has existed at the lexical-semantic level is due to the fact that the vocabulary is adopted in an easier way (Salas, 1998). This means that most learners make fewer mistakes in terms of the lexicon and, therefore, in the semantics.

Considering the final results obtained after having carried out this research, it is observed that most Ecuadorian English learners tend to transfer many lexical words from their L1, because both, Spanish and English have similarities due to their linguistic roots. Both languages belong to the same family, that is, to the Indo-European family, despite the fact that Spanish is a Romance language and English is Germanic (Nilsen, 1977).

It can certainly be said that the analysis of the mistakes our students make is a prominent link towards improving their teaching-learning process of English. Error analysis allows us, as educators, to measure the level of English that our students have acquired. For instance, knowing what error students usually make when writing and what its source would be, allows the teacher to find a way to use and adapt a methodological strategy that helps to reduce such errors, even more if they are due to the influence of the native language of the learner. In short, mistakes, even if they belong to the learning process, must be fought so that the student is able to communicate more effectively in the FL.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

Declaration of responsibility of authorship

We, Miguel Ángel Macías Loor, Martha Elizabeth Castro Quiroz, Martha Narcisa Loor Fernandez, Magdalena Del Carmen Tóala Alarcon and María Eugenia Ampuero Intriago, authors of the indicated manuscript, DECLARE that we have contributed directly to its intellectual content, as well as to the genesis and analysis of its data; therefore, we are in a position to be made publicly responsible for it and accept that our name appears in the list of authors in the indicated order. And that the ethical requirements of the aforementioned publication have been met, having consulted the Declaration of Ethics and Malpractice in the publication.

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