UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR
SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT



**Universidad de El Salvador**
*Hacia la libertad por la cultura*

"CROSS-LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE IN WRITRING OF THE INTERMEDIATE INTENSIVE ENGLISH I STUDENTS FROM THE BACHELOR OF ARTS IN MODERN LANGUAGES WITH SPECIALIZATION IN FRENCH AND ENGLISH AT THE DEPARTMENT OF FOREIGN LANGUAGES, UNIVERSITY OF EL SALVADOR, SEMESTER II 2015".

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# INTRODUCTION

This research was focused on the cross-linguistic interference in writing by Intermediate Intensive English I students of the University of El Salvador. During the language learning process, learners tend to use their knowledge from their native language in order to express themselves and communicate in their target language.

English is taught as a Foreign Language; thus, teachers and students are exposed to their native language most of the time. This situation causes interference of the mother tongue at the moment of learning the English language. This interference problem is noticeable when using productive skills, especially in conveying written messages. It is also common for students to translate word by word from Spanish into English. As a result, L1 has a negative influence when writing in English.

In addition, it is essential to achieve an effective communication through the integration of all four language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) due to the fact that the main objective of teaching and learning any language is the integration of the linguistic skills that develop communicative competence with an emphasis in real life situations. Among these four skills, writing is often considered an indispensable skill that enables students to develop an appropriate level of linguistic competence. According to Harmer (2004), writing helps students to express their ideas in written form and to achieve a high level of communication.

This research was divided into different parts. Firstly, the statement of the problem that was distributed into 6 sections such as the topic, description of the problem, objectives, research questions, justification, and delimitation. Secondly, it was important to get information about the topic; for that reason, the researchers took into account the literature review and the factors that affect the writing process. Furthermore, the methodology played an important role in this project; that is why, it was split into 5 parts as the research approach, the type of study, the research design, population and sample, and the research instruments. Besides, the data collection and analysis were essential to get the result of this research. Then, the researchers arrived to some conclusions gotten from the study results; besides, they formulated some recommendations for teachers, students and the Foreign Language Department; finally, the limitations of the research and the bibliographic references were also included.

# I. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

## 1.1 RESEARCH TOPIC

"Cross-linguistic Interference in Writing of the Intermediate Intensive English I Students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador, Semester II 2015".

## 1.2 DESCRIPTION OF THE PROBLEM

When 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 or foreign language has been a very important issue for a long time. This project was developed with the purpose of investigating the cross-linguistic interference in written production, which is the use of L1 linguistic rules by native Spanish speakers when they write in the target language (L2).

This research was focused on the writing mistakes made by the Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English in order to identify the differences between Spanish and English in the problematic linguistic areas. Hence, it was necessary that teachers who work in the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador pinpointed some factors that cause cross-linguistic interference so that the researchers could look for possible solutions to prevent any mistakes that might have arisen from it.

## 1.3 OBJECTIVES

### 1.3.1 General Objective:

To determine cross-linguistic interference in terms of writing expressed by Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador, semester II 2015 in order to propose some strategies that could be used to reduce this problem.

### 1.3.2 Specific Objectives:

✓ To detect the most common cross-linguistic errors that students of Intermediate Intensive English I from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English make while writing.

✓ To investigate some factors that cause writing interference of L1 on L2 in Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English.

✓ To propose strategies to overcome the writing interference of L1 on L2 in Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English.

## 1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

### 1.4.1 General Research Question:

How can cross-linguistic interference be determined in terms of writing expressed by Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador, semester II 2015?

### 1.4.2 Specific Research Questions:

- ✓ What are the most common cross-linguistic errors that students make regarding writing?
- ✓ Which factors cause the writing interference of L1 on L2?
- ✓ Which strategies overcome the writing interference of L1 on L2?

## 1.5 JUSTIFICATION

This research seeks to clarify which errors are the most common among students who learn a second language. There are four language macro-skills: speaking, listening, reading, and writing, which are developed in the learning process, but this project was focused on the writing skill only. It was oriented to Intermediate Intensive English I students who commit errors when writing. Furthermore, it was essential to discover the factors which cause that L1 interferes on L2 in the students' learning process. It is known that learning a second language is not easy, but there are students who do their best when writing; for that reason, the linguistic field plays an important role on that process.

Studies on language transfer and research on cross-linguistic influence have shed light on the general view of the processes involved when learning a language different from the mother tongue; in this project, two instruments were administered to students and teachers. In that way, the researchers provided some strategies and recommendations in order to facilitate the students´ learning of a second or foreign language.

## 1.6 DELIMITATION

This research consisted on investigating the learners' cross-linguistic interference in writing. Furthermore, it was focused on delimiting the various boundaries such as time, geographical place, population and sample.

It took one year and three months to find out the most common errors students make while writing. Moreover, the place where the researchers did the project was the University of El Salvador, specifically the Foreign Language Department. It was also important to know the population whom researchers were interested in; in this case, Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages and teachers for those groups were taken into account. Finally, a convenience sample was included with the purpose of selecting some students who were available and prepared to help researchers to answer the instruments.

# II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

## 2.1 LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter is intended to explore areas related to L1 interference on L2 writing. It is also aimed at introducing background information about L1 interference.

Since society is always moving forward, the need of learning a second language has become more crucial in order for people to succeed. Nevertheless, learners have to face different adversities while learning a second language (L2); as a result, students tend to use their mother tongue (L1) as a strategy to back up their effectiveness when using a foreign language, and it is more common for them to mix grammatical patterns or to use resembling words between languages. This situation pushes learners to get into a more confident environment, contributing to cross-linguistic interference.

Second language research of the seventies and early eighties directed its attention to uncovering whether, under what conditions, and in what way prior linguistic experience influenced the acquisition route (Zobl 1980; Kellerman, 1978; Gass 1979; as cited by Zobl 1993:176). In the late eighties, researchers were also intrigued by the processes underlying second language learning and its relation to the mother tongue. Ringbom (1987) claimed that the second language learner was constantly seeking to facilitate his/her task by making use of previous linguistic knowledge consisting of what s/he already knew about the target language (L2) and of what s/he knew about the mother tongue (L1). It was clear that the L2

learner did not have to start from zero as s/he could be able to relate a new item or task in the L2, -even if being at the early stages of learning-, to existing previous linguistic knowledge from L1 or possible other languages.

Ringbom (1987) placed crucial importance on the similarities between the languages, suggesting that those similarities should be the core of investigation. He found that the L1 influence could manifest itself in various ways depending greatly on how similarities were perceived by the L2 learner and how those similarities could affect the learning process. Odlin (1989:27) agreed by stating that the influence arises from "a learner's conscious or unconscious judgment that something in the native language and something in the target language are similar", if not actually identical.

In contrast, Kellerman (1983) argued that there were certain conditions on L1 influence that went beyond mere similarity and dissimilarity of the languages in question, thus, involving the learner as an active participant in the learning process. He claimed that the L2 learner was able to make decisions about what could and could not be transferred. All in all, the less the learner knows about the target language, the more s/he is forced to draw upon any other prior linguistic knowledge s/he possesses. This prior knowledge may also include other foreign languages (FL) previously learned and, both the FL influence and the L1 influence would be more evident at the early stages of learning.

Language transfer has emerged as an area of study central to the entire discipline of second language acquisition (Gass and Selinker, 1993). Though a fully adequate definition of transfer seems unattainable without adequate definitions of many other terms, as Odlin (1989) remarks, the term transfer has been defined by various authors and a wide array of studies has been conducted on this matter. However, the concept of transfer has its origins in the Contrastive Analysis (CA) hypothesis which was widely accepted in the 1950s and 1960s. As Koda (1997) points out the CA hypothesis, which was deeply rooted in behaviorism, asserts that the principal barrier to L2 acquisition arises from interference factors created by the L1 system, being the L1 regarded as the primary source of confusion.

Extensive research has already been done in the area of native language interference on the target language. Dulay and Burt (1982) define interference as the automatic transfer, due to habit of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language. Lott (1983), defines interference as *'errors in the learner's use of the foreign language that can be traced back to the mother tongue'.* Ellis (1997: 51) refers to interference as 'transfer', which he says *'the influence that the learners' L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2'.* He argues that transfer is governed by learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. Transfer is a psychological term that is used to describe a situation where one learned event influences the learning of a subsequent learning event.

The assumption that most difficulties the second language learners face are due to his or her first language was first proposed during the post-war years and continued strongly until the 1960's. The need for contrastive analyses was justified early on through claims such as: "The most efficient materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner. (Fries, 1945: 9)

Due to pedagogic needs, contrastive analysis was developed to enable the identifying of predicted difficult areas on teaching. The idea was to compare certain native languages and target languages and identify points of similarities or differences. According to Lado (1957), the contrastive analysis hypothesis was based on the following assumption: "The student who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements that are different will be difficult". Lado proposed a contrastive model, which step-by-step compared two systems, their sound systems, grammatical structures, vocabulary systems and so on. The classical contrastive analysis statements did not cater for careful descriptive and analytical studies of learners under specified conditions (Ellis, 1994).

Contrastive analysis, according to Dulay and Burt (1973, 1974), has been criticised for inaccuracy in predicting learner errors, and cases where cross-linguistic comparisons fail to predict difficulties or where difficulties predicted do not occur have been emphasised. It is difficult to make precise predictions and

generalizations as every learning process is individual; therefore, learners may pursue different options. In the 1970's, Error Analysis gained more interest, eventually replacing Contrastive Analysis. It was not a new development but largely thanks to the work of Corder it became recognized as a part of applied linguistics. Corder (1974) suggested that Error Analysis should start off by collecting samples of learner language and then proceed to identify, describe, explain and evaluate the errors found.

Corder argues that error analysis should be restricted to the study of errors arising as a result of lack of knowledge and should not cater for mistakes occurring when learners fail to perform their competence, as mistakes are a performance phenomenon also found in native language production. Corder (1974) goes on to describe three types of errors: **presystematic errors** occurring when the learner is unaware of the existence of a particular rule in the target language, **systematic errors** occurring when the learner uses the wrong rule and **postsystematic errors** occurring when the learner knows the correct target language rule but uses it inconsistently making a mistake; both Corder (1967, 1971) and James (1980) reveal a criterion that helps us to do so: it is the self-correction criterion. A mistake can be self-corrected, but an error cannot.

As stated in Doughty and Long (2003), a further division of errors was made by Lott (1983), who identified transfer errors such as overextension of analogy, transfer of structure and interlingual or intralingual errors. Lott considers overextension of analogy to occur when the learner misuses an item because it

shares similar features with an item in the learner's native language. Transfer of structure is what is generally meant by transfer and it occurs when the learner makes use of an L1 feature instead of the target language one. When a particular distinction does not exist in the first language, the error arising is likely to be interlingual/intralingual and while it is not always easy to distinguish between intralingual and transfer errors, previous research suggests that a large number of errors are of intralingual origin rather than cross-linguistic.

Studying learner language by errors has been criticized for its interest on what the learners do wrong and lack of acknowledgement for what the learners do right. Error Analysis does not cover for avoidance of difficult structures and words and therefore is not fully comprehensive.

Learners develop strategic skills in order to compensate for their lack of knowledge or availability. One of these strategies is to avoid using words and constructions the learner does not know. Scovel (2000) describes avoidance as the tendency for L2 learners not to use grammatical structures that native speakers would normally use in that context because those L2 structures contrast significantly with the grammar of their mother tongue. Avoidance is often also classified as a communication strategy, where the use of structures which have not yet been acquired is avoided. Because avoidance results in fewer errors being made by learners in speech and writing, it is obviously difficult for second language acquisition researchers to accurately measure this phenomenon. Although it is

somewhat possible to trace avoidance in translation tasks, it can be extremely difficult to measure avoidance in free production.

It is important to know which factors trigger the interference of L1 on L2. Language-based factors are those ones the learner cannot largely affect, features typical for each language and features influencing the learner's mental picture of the target language.

✓ Language level relates to the common belief that cross-linguistic influence appears more frequently and noticeably at the levels of phonology, lexis and discourse than grammar. Ellis (1994) considers the above to be one of the main findings in explaining learner errors. Learners' more developed metalingual awareness of grammar could be one of the main reasons why cross-linguistic influence does not seem to be as frequent at grammatical level. In a classroom environment, learners are often exposed to grammatical rules and it seems that grammar is the area of language learning, which is given the most attention. Although Ringbom (1987) states that some errors in written production occur due to different pronunciation in the two languages, he points out that learners do not invariably transfer the phonological features of their first language.

✓ Markedness is defined by the terms "marked" and "unmarked". In linguistic terms, marked features are seen "special" in relation to the more "basic" unmarked ones. For example, the present tense is unmarked for English

verbs while the past tense is marked. Kellerman (Kellerman and Sharwood Smith, 1986, Ellis, 1994) suggests that a definition of markedness or prototypicality can be provided by investigating native speakers' judgements of similarity and taking into account that learners, irrespective of their level of second language proficiency see some features as being more transferable than others. Idioms, for example, tend not to be transferred.

✓ Psychotypology (also known as typology) appears to be the most important factor in determining the likelihood of language transfer. Kellerman (1978) refers to the perception of the second language and distance from the first language as psychotypology. According to him, transferability depends on the perceived distance between the first language and the second language and the structural organization of the learner's first language. Hence, the perception of linguistic distance and the perception of transferability can prove to be more important than actual objective linguistic distance. Language distance can be regarded as linguistic, meaning the actual degree of difference between the languages, or as psycholinguistic, meaning the learners' assumption of the degree of difference (Ellis, 1994).

✓ Production; researchers seem to agree on the existence of negative and positive transfer. While positive transfer seems to occur when the first language or other previously acquired languages aid the acquisition of the target language, it has not been given as much attention as negative

transfer. Odlin (1989) identifies four types of negative transfer, namely, underproduction, overproduction, production errors and misinterpretation. Underproduction is what is often seen as avoidance due to language distance and occurs when the learner produces very few or no examples of a target language structure. Experiments by Schachter (1974) among Chinese and Japanese students of English showed they systematically avoided using relative clauses in English, largely due to this feature being absent or structurally very different in their native language. Overproduction is what can often result from underproduction, namely relating to our previous example the avoidance of relative clauses leads into the use of too many simple sentences. As production errors Odlin (1989) names substitutions, calques and alternations of structures. According to him, substitutions involve the use of native language forms in the target language production, and are therefore what is often seen as borrowing. Calques are errors that reflect a native language structure and often do so very closely and alternations of structures are seen for example in hypercorrections, which can be overreactions to a particular influence from the first language. Misinterpretation is what Odlin (1989) sees as the influence of the first language structures in the interpretation of target language messages. This may also occur when word order patterns of the two languages differ.

Odlin (1989) defines borrowing transfer as referring to the influence a second language has on a previously acquired language, which usually is the first language. Ringbom (1987) distinguishes between borrowing and lexical transfer.

According to him, borrowing covers hybrids, blends and relexifications as well as complete language shift, which is what is often meant by borrowing. Unlike in complete language shift, where an item is taken to the target language production in an unmodified form, hybrids, blends and relexifications occur when an item is modified morphologically or phonologically to a target language-like norm. Lexical transfer then again occurs when the learner assumes an identity of semantic structure between his first language and the target language word. According to Ringbom (1987), lexical transfer can occur in forms of loan translations, semantic extensions and cognates, which are often also called false friends.

The term 'Interlanguage' was first proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972, and has been revisited again in 1992 by the same author (Selinker 1972; 1992). Later on, works by Corder (1981) and Mitchell and Myles (2004: 156) among others have done a revision on the topic of Interlanguage. It was analysed the way foreign language learners dealt with L2 linguistic systems. Interlanguage could be defined as an intermediate stage between a learner's L1 and L2, in which s/he uses rules from both linguistic systems in order to produce sentences in L2. Following a constructivist approach, Interlanguage is the measurable proof of students' construction of their learning progress; Interlingua indicates the different linguistic stages the learner undergoes. As Piaget pointed out in his learning theory, those various stages go from a more controlled phase to an abstract and creative thinking process (Williams and Burden 1997: 21-22). Interlanguage is the transitory and always changing linguistic state of SL users. It evolves towards the best SL

state possible for that user, and it is directly influenced by individual cognitive skills and contextual pushing factors.

Foreign language writing is a continuous flow of cross-linguistic influences. This language and culture transfer has a double purpose: on the one hand, it is a social identity builder, bringing sociocultural and sociolinguistic issues together; on the other hand, linguistic transfer works as an individual identifier, since it reveals psycholinguistic parameters within the writer's linguistic behavior. In the case of adult L2 writers, they seem to develop an autonomous English writing system after some years of instruction. Something that brings to mind some shared universal grammar even regarding L2 behavior. Some of the students' discursive features are clearly related to a direct transfer from their L1. However, many others are the result of a mixture of processes and influences combining L1 and L2, together with the student's individual learning rhythm.

Moreover, the phenomenon of linguistic transfer seems to occur only in some specific L1/L2 features, without affecting the whole linguistic system. This explains the varied and chromatic nature of Interlanguage. As Krashen and Scarcella (1978, in Mitchell and Myles 2004: 45) state: "language knowledge acquired or learnt cannot become integrated into a unified whole". Therefore, cross-linguistic transfers affect L2 learners in all their learning stages; they do so in very different ways, not being a negative influence at all. Because writing is a complex and challenging activity for many students, teachers should focus on the grammatical concepts that are essential for the clear communication of meaning.

Research conducted since the early 1960s shows that grammar instruction that is separate from writing instruction does not improve students' writing competence (Braddock and others, 1963; Hillocks, 1986). In addition, research indicates that the transfer of formal grammar instruction to writing is not applicable to larger elements of composition. Through detailed studies of students' writing, Shaughnessy (1977) concludes that the best grammar instruction is that which gives the greatest return for the least investment of time. Shaughnessy advocates four important grammatical concepts: the sentence, inflection, tense, and agreement. She recommends that teachers encourage students to examine grammatical errors in their own writing. She also cautions teachers not to overemphasize grammatical terminology to the detriment of students' ability to understand and apply the concepts.

Weaver (1998) proposes a similar approach to teaching grammar in the context of writing. She writes, "What all students need is guidance in understanding and applying those aspects of grammar that are most relevant to writing." According to Krashen, the study of the structure of the language can have general educational advantages and values that high schools and colleges may want to include in their language programs. It should be clear, however, that examining irregularity, formulating rules and teaching complex facts about the target language is not language teaching, but rather is language appreciation or linguistics.

The only instance in which the teaching of grammar can result in language acquisition (and proficiency) is when the students are interested in the subject and the target language is used as a medium of instruction. Very often, when this occurs, both teachers and students are convinced that the study of formal grammar is essential for second language acquisition, and the teacher is skillful enough to present explanations in the target language so that the students understand. In other words, the teacher talk meets the requirements for comprehensible input and perhaps with the students' participation, the classroom becomes an environment suitable for acquisition.

The filter is low with regard to the language of explanation, as the students' conscious efforts are usually on the subject matter, on what is being talked about, and not the medium. This is a subtle point. In fact, both teachers and students are deceiving themselves. They believe that it is the subject matter itself, the study of grammar, that is responsible for the students' progress, but in reality their progress is coming from the medium and not the message. Any subject matter that held their interest would do just as well.

According to Chomsky, Universal grammar is the system of principles, conditions, and rules that are elements or properties of all human languages. Cook (1997) gives a few examples of rules that supposedly belong to this universal grammar:

✓ Structure dependency. All operations on sentences are defined in terms of phrase structure, rather than e.g. linear sequence. This is probably the least controversial of all the proposed rules of universal grammar, being strongly supported both by all available data, and by most people's linguistic intuition.

✓ The Head parameter. Each phrase contains a head (main word), and all phrases in a given language have the head in the same position. The head position is, however, different from language to language, which introduces the important concept of a parameter-governed rule. Unfortunately, it is not too difficult to find exceptions to this rule — for example, the two English noun phrases *high court* and *court martial* have the heads at opposite ends — weakening the case for including it in a universal grammar.

✓ The Projection principle. Properties of lexical entries project onto the structure of the phrases of which they are the head. This rule ensures e.g. that a verb gets the appropriate number and type of objects. The universality of this rule is far from self-evident — it is strongly dependent upon a particular grammatical theory, in which the lexicon carries much of the linguistic information that could otherwise be expressed as phrase structure rules. Some equivalent of the projection principle may be needed, but it might look completely different if another theory of grammar were used. There are several more universal-grammar rules proposed by Chomsky,

and presumably the full set of rules required by the innateness hypothesis is rather large.

Morphosyntax studies the function of the **linguistic signs**. It is useful to remember that the **meaning** is studied by semantics and lexicology, the **form** is investigated by phonology, whereas **substance** is studied by phonetics. Furthermore, morphology studies the **word formation** of two types: **inflectional** and **derivational**.

**Inflectional morphology** is concerned with changes to an individual lexeme for grammatical reasons. **Derivational** is concerned with the formation of one word from another. In derivational morphology learners have to deal with concepts like **morpheme** (free and bound), **morph**, **allomorph**, **root** and **base**.

The smallest unit in syntax is called **the word**. The word has three types: open categories, close categories and lesser categories (enumerators and interjections).

And what possibilities can be found in English to build new words? One of them is the addition of **affixes**. These affixes usually come from Latin, Saxon, or Greek. We also have the **conversion** (an item changes its word-class without the addition of an affix, for example: to doubt-doubt), **compounding** (it is the word formation process in which two or more lexemes combine into a single new word. Compound words may be written as one word or as two words joined with a hyphen. For example: *noun-noun compound: note + book → notebook),* **back-formation** (it is the formation of a word by a removal of affixes as *typewrite* from

*typewriter*), **clipping** (it is the word formation process in which a word is reduced or shortened without changing the meaning of the word. Clipping differs from back-formation in that the new word retains the meaning of the original word. For example: *advertisement – ad*), **blending** (it is the word formation process in which parts of two or more words combine to create a new word whose meaning is often a combination of the original words. For example: *breakfast + lunch → brunch*), **acronyms** (alphabetism or abbreviations and proper acronyms. For example: *TESOL – Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages*), **word-manufactured/coinage** (it is the word formation process in which a new word is created either deliberately or accidentally without using the word formation processes and often from seemingly nothing. For example: *aspirin, kleenex, or nylon*).

Opposite to the word, **the sentence** is mentioned, which is the largest unit of syntax. Learners have to distinguish between simple and compound sentences. The simple ones can be defined by the predicate and the subject (attributive and predicative) and defined by the speaker's attitude (statements, questions, orders, requests, exclamations and interjections). Compound sentences are juxtaposed**,** coordinated (copulative, disjunctive and adversative) or subordinated (nominal, relative clauses and adverbial clauses). There is another classification for compound sentences which takes into account the verb-complementation patterns: intransitive, copulative, complex-transitive, prepositional, transitive prepositional, phrasal, phrasal transitive, phrasal prepositional and phrasal prepositional transitive.

When referring to syntactic transfer, some categories can be determined in order to quantify the errors produced in the writing of learners according to Ja Park et all (2003). These categories include: **Ellipsis** according to Corbett and Connors (1998), refers to continuous exclusion of clausal elements in a sentence like subject, verb and object which are already implied by the context. Ellipsis is commonly seen in spontaneous speech, given the need to reduce syntactic complexity and the need to communicate in less time. Additionally, Wolfson (1988) claimed that when people sped up communication, it was a matter of avoiding unnecessary repetition of words.

Nevertheless, Ellipsis differs from Semantic Ellipsis to Syntactic (grammatical) Ellipsis. Syntactic ellipsis deals with such instances of elision in which the omitted words are not related, or such instances in which certain expressions are non-expressed in the surface structure of the sentence although they are necessarily (obligatorily) present for grammatical and semantic reasons.

**Articles** are a group of determiners that are placed before nouns which are used to standing alone and have little meaning; however, when they are used with a noun they can indicate whether the noun refers to a specific one or ones of its type, or whether it refers to its type in general. In Spanish, the articles also specify the noun's gender, plural and mass nouns; and in English, they refer to specific or particular nouns, and non-specific or non-particular nouns. It is counted as omissions of articles all nouns that in the target language would have required an article. This means that for English, particular nouns or non-particular nouns addition, omission or misuse of an article, are considered ungrammatical and

syntactically wrong only in those contexts in which the use of an article is or is not obligatory.

Cohen (1998) claims that errors of articles seen in writing are derived from a deep misconception of the article system and this area of syntax has been considered a major problem for L2 learners.

**Tense** is a grammatical category of verbs used to express distinctions of time of a verb's action or state of being, such as past, present, or future which are one of the important things when constructing a sentence; given that without using good tenses, our speech or writing will not be understood by other people. According to Wexler's (1998), language learners go through a stage where developmental omissions errors in the use of tense are frequent.

**Word order** could be defined as the syntactic arrangement of words in a sentence, clause, or phrase. In other words, it is the order in which words occur in sentences that in many languages, including English, plays an important part in determining meanings expressed and if such an order is not used correctly, it leads to ungrammatical writing or loss of acceptability. Moreover, it is related to the different ways in which languages arrange the constituents of sentences relative to each other (O'Grady. Et al, 1996).

**Prepositions** are considered some short explanatory words that indicate things such as location, direction and possession. The selection of prepositions is dependent on the presence of other specific words in the context. When we compare the prepositional uses in Spanish and English, we find prepositions in

English that have equivalents in Spanish and others that do not. There are structures that are equivalent in both languages and others that are not. As Pittman (1966) describes, prepositions "have received certain reputation for difficulty if not a downright unpredictability". Takahaski (1969) adds that the correct usage of prepositions is the greatest problem for learners of English.

In English, **the plural system** is greatly over-represented by regular forms, showing only a handful of irregular alternatives. It means that when marking plurality in English, people may add an extra syllable (-s suffix) to the word which is the regular form, whereas in other cases may change the vowel in the existing final syllable or change some syllables of the word which is considered irregular. Additionally, at the beginning of each noun item, a cardinal number or a quantifier such as "some" "many" or "several" unambiguously indicate plurality too. Marcus (1995) suggests that the rate of over regularization of English irregular plural nouns is not substantively different from that of English irregular past tense verbs in English, and that in most of the cases, it leads to errors in the L2.

**The order of clauses** in a sentence is not the only factor affecting the acquisition of complex syntax. In the case of relative clauses, another crucial factor is the grammatical role of nouns and pronouns. Keenan (1985) defines restrictive relativization as a construct usually having a "domain noun" and invariably having a modifying clause. Characteristics of relative clause structure, as pronoun retention, pose an interesting problem for second language acquisition researchers. On the one hand, the implicational hierarchy posited by Keenan and Comrie (1979) may somehow reflect language universals. On the other hand, there is considerable

cross-linguistic variation in relative clause structures, and such variation may occasion language transfer.

**The study of negation** in second language acquisition has sometimes been regarded as simply a question of word order. Negators may precede a verb phrase, as in Spanish "Juan no va" (Juan is not going). The use of preverbal and postverbal negation is indeed an important clue to relations between transfer and universals in second language acquisition. English verb-phrase negators are often neither preverbal nor postverbal, strictly speaking, since in negative constructions the verb phrase usually has both an auxiliary and a main verb (Alice hasn't come).

Transfer affects many areas of language like those of semantics, syntax, phonology, pragmatics, and morphology. Researchers like Kellerman (1995) claimed that syntax and morphology were resistant to any kind of transfer effects. Nevertheless, this is nothing but assumptions given that there is no considerable evidence that warrants this issue. Zobl (1992) claimed that Syntactic transfer includes not only the study of transfer in language forms and structures such as word order, but also plenty of constraints that have been found in reception and production tasks by learners. Research into syntactic transfer has been useful for a better understanding of detailed factors affecting second language learning.

## 2.2 GLOSSARY

The unfamiliar terms and their meaning are presented with the purpose of facilitating to the readers the understanding of significant words in this investigation.

- ✓ Borrowing: It is when a second language learner is under pressure, he or she will borrow or substitute words from the mother tongue to the target language (Corder, 1983).

- ✓ Calque: The L2 word is the result of literal translation from the L1.

- ✓ Coinage: A type of lexical transfer error that occurs when there is insufficient awareness of intended linguistic form and so a modified form of an L2 word is used (Ringbom, 2001).

- ✓ Contrastive Analysis: It is a set of procedures for comparing and contrasting the linguistic systems of two languages in order to identify their structural similarities and differences.

- ✓ EFL: English as a Foreign Language. An EFL environment is where the learners do not speak English as their first language.

- ✓ ELL: English Language Learner; students whose first language is not English and who are in the process of learning it.

- ✓ Elision: It is the omission of a vowel, consonant, or syllable in pronunciation.

- ✓ Error: It reflects gaps in the learner's knowledge; it occurs because the learner does not know what it is correct.

- ✓ Error Analysis: It studies the types and causes of language errors.

- ✓ FL: Foreign Language.

- ✓ <u>First language acquisition:</u> it is the natural process in which children subconsciously possess and develop the linguistic knowledge of the setting they live in.

- ✓ <u>Innateness hypothesis:</u> It is the theory that humans are biologically equipped with a knowledge of certain universal elements of language structure that is brought into play in the course of native-language acquisition.

- ✓ <u>Interference:</u> it refers to the speakers or writers applying knowledge from their mother tongue to a second language.

- ✓ <u>Intralingual errors:</u> errors resulting from the learner engaged in a literal translation from L1 to L2.

- ✓ <u>L1:</u> language 1 (mother tongue).

- ✓ <u>L2:</u> language 2 (second language).

- ✓ <u>Markedness:</u> It relates to the degree to which a form, feature or structure is marked, special, atypical, or language-specific versus being unmarked basic prototypical, or universal.

- ✓ <u>Mistake:</u> It reflects occasional lapses in performance; it occurs because, in a particular instance, the learner is unable to perform what he or she knows.

- ✓ <u>Morphology:</u> It is the study of the forms of words, and the ways in which words are related to other words of the same language.

- ✓ <u>Negative transfer:</u> cross-linguistic influence resulting in errors, overproduction, miscomprehension, and other effects that constitute a divergence between the behavior of native and non-native speakers of a language.

✓ Phonology: it is the study of how sounds are organized and used in natural languages.

✓ Positive transfer: any facilitating effects on the acquisition due to the influence of cross-linguistic similarities. It results in a convergence of behaviors of native and non-native speakers of a language.

✓ Psychotypology: It indicates that it is the learner's perception of language distance that is relevant factor and not the linguist's classifications. It is still remains to be seen to what extent the notion of psychotypology is of value in areas outside lexical semantics, for example in grammar (Kellerman, 1979).

✓ Relexification: It refers to the replacement of vocabulary of a language, especially a pidgin with words drawn from another language, without changing the grammatical structure.

✓ Self-correction: it is when learners correct themselves instead of a teacher doing it. Teachers can involve learners in self-correction to different degrees, by giving learners more or less guidance as to the location and nature of their errors, and examples of good use of language to compare their own to.

✓ Second language learning: it is the process in which students learn the foreign language consciously.

✓ Syntax: It is the grammar, structure, or order of the elements in a language statement.

✓ Translation: It is the communication of the meaning of a source-language text by means of an equivalent target language text.

# III. METHODOLOGY

This chapter discusses the research approach, the type of study, the research design, population and sample, and the research instruments.

## 3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

A qualitative approach was used for this research. Denzin and Lincoln (2000) describe a qualitative research as involving "an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of or interpret phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring them".

The qualitative approach was chosen in order to analyze and interpret the participants' environment. For this reason, the researchers observed and described what really happened to the participants' natural settings. Thus, this contributed to the credibility through which the results of this research are real or believable from the perspective of the participants.

## 3.2 TYPE OF STUDY.

The purpose of this research is to explore and describe the problematic of cross-linguistic interference in the language learning process.

By using exploration, the researchers sought to know and understand more about a specific issue. In this case, the investigators wanted to know more about cross-linguistic interference in writing. To make the word "exploration" a little more understandable, imagine you are blindfolded or placed into a room without light. You are not told if something is in the room, but you have a suspicion there is something in there. You shuffle out slowly into the room, exploring with the tips of your fingers until you find something. Once the groundwork is established, the newly explored field needs more information. This is where research tries to describe what is happening in more detail, filling in the missing parts and expanding our understanding.

In this study, it was necessary to get in contact with the people involved in the phenomenon to collect the information that would facilitate the solution to the problem of the research.

## 3.3 RESEARCH DESIGN.

This is a non-experimental research. It is based on a cross sectional design in which information is collected at one point in time. Thus, the aim is to describe a

population or a subgroup within the population with respect to an outcome and a set of risk factors.

## 3.4 POPULATION AND SAMPLE.

Population refers to an entire group or elements with common characteristics. In this research, 3 out of 6 groups (50% of the whole population) were taken into account from the Intermediate Intensive English I students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English at the Department of Foreign Languages. Moreover, 4 out of 5 teachers were involved.

Sample refers to the small subgroup which is thought to be representative of the larger population. A convenience sample was used with the aim of finding learners who wanted to participate in this study. Hence, 8 students from each of the 3 groups mentioned above were involved in order to help the researchers to find out the most common errors students make when writing. Also 4 teachers were taken into account with the aim of clarifying some doubts regarding the phenomenon that was being studied.

## 3.5 RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS.

In this research, two instruments were administered. They are a written sample and a questionnaire.

### WRITTEN SAMPLE:

In writing, students begin by learning letters, then words, and finally sentences. In time, students learn how to write a paragraph by taking those sentences and organizing them around a common topic.

This instrument was administered to some students in order to do a further analysis of the phenomenon. Therefore, it helped the researchers to figure out if students commit errors when writing.

### QUESTIONNAIRE:

This instrument was used to ask five open questions to the four teachers who were in charge of the Intensive Intermediate English I groups from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages. Hence, it helped the researchers to get the teachers' opinions about the interference of students' mother tongue in their English writing skill in the foreign language.

# IV. DATA ANALYSIS

## 4.1 DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

During this project, the researchers applied different techniques in order to determine various aspects that are involved in English writing interference.

With the aim of having a specialists' point of view about the topic, the researchers administered a questionnaire to the Intermediate Intensive English I teachers from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English. This questionnaire looked for the teachers' point of view about language interference and also for the techniques they use so as to minimize the influence of the interference.

Furthermore, the Intermediate Intensive English I students were taken into account in order to understand which errors they made when writing. Thus, the researchers found two different ways with the purpose of using the technique "paragraph writing." The researchers requested the teachers to provide writing material already made by students. Besides, the researchers administered an instrument including guidelines for students to write a short paragraph.

## 4.2 RESULTS

### Professors' Questionnaire Analysis

The questionnaire contained five open questions in order to obtain the professors' opinions about the interference of students' mother tongue in their English writing skill.

1. How can you define cross-linguistic interference?

Cross-linguistic interference was defined by the professors as a common problem on the use of the L1 language systems such as sound, spelling, writing, and thinking in L2 in intermediate students.

2. According to your experience, how does the interference of students' native language affect their development of the English writing skill?

According to the professors' experience, students usually mix words from one language and another because they believe that the meaning might be similar due to their spelling resemblance.

3. What writing techniques do you carry out with your students when developing their English writing skill?

The professors carry out some techniques in order to develop students' English writing skill. They use brainstorming, listing, mind-mapping, pre-writing and free-writing. Other techniques are reading books, writing opinions about them and creating summaries.

4. Which mistakes regarding mother tongue interference are the most common in an English composition/writing task made by students?

The professors stated that the most common errors were subject-verb agreement, punctuation, mechanics, tense mixing, adjective pluralization, and false friends. Regarding the last error, students thought that some words had the same meaning in Spanish and in English; for example the word in English "actually" means "de hecho" in Spanish, but students got confused and thought it meant **actualmente.**

5. What strategies or techniques would you recommend to help students deal with the problem of mother tongue interference in the development of the English writing skill?

The professors recommended that students have to read a lot so as to get more vocabulary when writing down summaries about any books. Another recommendation is that students ought to practice the second language in-class and out of class, and check their translation while writing. Finally, they recommended that students should get into the process of writing in order to make a good composition.

### Students' Written Sample Analysis

The written sample was administered to students in order to find out the most common errors that they made when writing. For that reason, the morphological-syntactic (Keshavarz, 2012) and lexical transfer of form and meaning (Ringbom, 2001) errors were selected and studied in this research.

The following part of the research document presents a more detailed overview of the data analysis findings; in this way, the researchers highlight some examples collected from the instruments administered to students.

**Morphological-syntactic errors**

1.     The word order is altered because Spanish native speakers follow their own language pattern and make ungrammatical English sentences in their writing.

**a)**     Incorrect: My mother told me **to not buy that.**

Correct: My mother told me **not to buy that.**

2.     Misplacement of adjectives. Spanish native speakers use nouns and adjectives in the wrong way due to their native language structures.

**a)**     Incorrect: A lot of **things necessary.**

Correct: A lot of **necessary things.**

**b)**     Incorrect: **planet habitable.**

Correct: **habitable planet.**

3.     Misuse of object pronouns and possessive adjectives.

**a)**     Incorrect: The pacaya **for my** is bad.

Correct: The pacaya is bad **for me.**

**b)**     Incorrect: We spoke about **us moment.**

Correct: We spoke about **our moment.**

4.     According to Spanish usage, learners make the adjective agree in number with its noun.

**a)**     Incorrect: **Importants rivers.**

Correct: **Important rivers.**

**b)**     Incorrect: My **favorites foods.**

Correct: My **favorite food.**

5.     Wrong use of superlative and comparative forms.

**a)**     Incorrect: It is **the most easy** way to help our planet.

Correct: It is **the easiest** way to help our planet.

**b)**     Incorrect: This planet helps us to have things that we use **to make more easy our life.**

Correct: This planet helps us to have things that we use **to make our life easier**.

6.     Subject use. In this case, there is an omission of the subject pronoun because it is not needed in Spanish.

**a)**     Incorrect: I am grateful to God because **gave** me a very good mother.

Correct: I am grateful to God because **He** gave me a very good mother.

**b)**     Incorrect: Maybe **is** the most delicious soup in the world.

Correct: Maybe **it** is the most delicious soup in the world.

7.    A subject-verb agreement error occurs when the subject and the verb of a sentence do not agree in number.

**a)**    Incorrect: …what **people is** going to say about them.

Correct: …what **people are** going to say about them.

**b)**    Incorrect: **…our friendship and relationship is** cool.

Correct: **Our friendship and relationship are** cool.

8.    Tense use. Verbs have tenses which place the action of the verb at a specific time.

**a)**    Incorrect: **There was** a girl who **want** to go out with him.

Correct: **There was** a girl who **wanted** to go out with him.

**b)**    Incorrect: **I was** really hungry and **I take** "tortilla soup".

Correct: **I was** really hungry and **I took** "tortilla soup".

9.    These sentences show an elision of the third person –s in the present indicative.

**a)**    Incorrect: I love the candy but **my friend hate** it.

Correct: I love the candy but **my friend hates** it.

**b)**    Incorrect: Sometimes **she give** some advice and I do the same.

Correct: Sometimes **she gives** some advice and I do the same.

10.     Wrong use and omission of verb particles.

**a)**     Incorrect: People are not **interested about** animals.

Correct: People are not **interested in** animals.

**b)**     Incorrect: I **want** learn how to cook this soup.

Correct: I **want to** learn how to cook this soup.

11.     The double negative is permissible in Spanish, so that an extra negative may frequently be added to an English sentence by a Spanish-speaking student.

Incorrect: She **did not** want **nothing** from me.

Correct: She wanted **nothing** from me. Or She **did not** want **anything** from me.

**Lexical transfer of form**

Misspellings: The conventions for representing phonemes by means of graphemes may be violated due to L1 influence.

- ✓ **depence** instead of **depend**
- ✓ **importan** instead of **important**
- ✓ **diferent** instead of **different**
- ✓ **corage** instead of **courage**

Borrowing: Insertion of L1 words as complete language shift.

- ✓ **consients** instead of **conscious**

✓ **reciclated** instead of **recycled**

✓ **pronunciated** instead of **pronunced**

**Lexical transfer of meaning**

Calques: The L2 word is the result of literal translation from the L1.

✓ **forms** instead of **ways**

✓ **discontrol** instead of **out of control**

✓ **letters** instead of **lyrics**

# V. CONCLUSIONS

The following conclusions are based on the findings from the two instruments administered to the Intermediate Intensive English I students and professors from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English: a questionnaire for professors and a written sample from students.

- ✓ Learners are inclined to associate their previous knowledge from their mother tongue in terms of structure and ideas in order to produce written material supported by different theories regarding the interference of mother tongue with the foreign language learning process.

- ✓ Students usually tend to use their knowledge of their mother language because they have the conception of a word by word translation having as a fact that every word in Spanish can be translated onto English. Researchers also noticed that not only word by word translation is present in the student's written sample but also, the translation of an idea because students put their complete Spanish expression into English.

- ✓ Interference is a problem that a considerable number of students have to face through the learning process, in which the structure of the mother tongue has a relevant influence on learners´ acquisition and eventual production of the target language.

✓ The use of mechanics plays an important role in the structure of a paragraph. In the students' written sample, the researchers encountered that learners did not use punctuation, capitalization, and the apostrophe very well. Students make this kind of errors because they misuse mechanics in their mother tongue.

✓ Another important thing that the researchers have taken into account is the professors' opinion about this phenomenon. Professors agree that the practice of some techniques in order to write is essential for students to make a better paragraph or composition.

# VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the researchers would like to make the following recommendations:

**To teachers.**

- ✓ To try to understand the logic that the student is using, whether it is properly applied or misapplied; if misapplied, the teacher should point out the alternative system and explain that one is standard in English and one is not.

- ✓ To encourage students to write in English and to try to apply grammar rules in English in order to avoid mixing rules that belong to their native language.

- ✓ To let students know that whenever they make a mistake related to language interference in writing, it has nothing to do with their intellect; instead, they should be aware that they have been using one system of logic where another one is called for.

**To students**

- ✓ To put into practice all the grammatical and syntactic rules as well as writing techniques given in their English courses, so that they get more familiar with the foreign language they are learning. The goal is to minimize the influence of their mother tongue over their second language, especially in writing.

- ✓ To practice speaking in their foreign language. Even though this project focuses on language interference in writing, it has been proved that the way a student speaks in his/her L2 will affect writing. Thus, in order to avoid writing mistakes due to phonetics, it is advised that students should put into practice their foreign language in its spoken form as frequently as possible.

**To the Foreign Language Department**

- ✓ To request support from native English speakers with the purpose of having students be in contact with them and be immersed in the language.

- ✓ To revise the educational curriculum with the aim of adding courses related to the reinforcement of the writing skill.

- ✓ To promote the creation of English tutoring classes with the purpose of improving students' skills.

# VII. LIMITATIONS

In this section, the researchers list the most relevant limitations for the accomplishment of this project.

✓ Due to the period of elections of the administrative authorities, the schedule in which the students attended classes was irregular, affecting the administration of the instruments.

✓ Due the end of the term, most classes were finishing; consequently, the time for the administration of the instruments was short.

✓ For some reasons out of the researchers reach, it was not possible to administer the instrument to the number of students as planned; instead, the researchers asked the teachers in charge of the groups for written material already done by their students, having as a result a more accurate sample because of the fact that students were not aware that the written material could be used for a research project.

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# ANNEXES

**Annex A: Teachers' Questionnaire**

University of El Salvador
School of Arts and Sciences
Foreign Language Department
Undergraduate Project Questionnaire

**Topic:** "Cross-linguistic Interference in Writing of the Intermediate Intensive English I Students from the Bachelor of Arts in Modern Languages with Specialization in French and English at the Department of Foreign Languages, University of El Salvador, Semester II, 2015"

**Objective:** To obtain the professors' opinions about the interference of students' mother tongue in their English writing skill

**Directions:** Answer the questions mentioned below.

1. How can you define cross-linguistic interference?

2. According to your experience, how does the interference of students' native language affect their development of the English writing skill?

3. What writing techniques do you carry out with your students when developing their English writing skill?

4. Which mistakes regarding mother tongue interference are the most common in an English composition/writing task made by students?

5. What strategies or techniques would you recommend to help students deal with the problem of mother tongue interference in the development of the English writing skill?

**Annex B: Students' Written Samples**

University of El Salvador
School of Arts and Sciences
Foreign Language Department
Undergraduate Project Paragraph

**Directions:** Write a short paragraph about music, travels, movies, or any topic you like.

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# Students' Written Sample

One day, in my birthday, I was in a restaurant with my family, I was really hungry, and I take "tortilla" soup. It is was really, really delicious. It is a soup made of tomato, with condiments and tortilla tosted, but you can put avocado in the soup. And I really love the avocado, it is one of my favorites foods. You can put cheese and cream and that it is amazing, maybe is the most delicious soup of the world, I think that it is mexican soup, but I'm not sore. I want learn how cook this soup, because I want made if on my hoose, for my family, I hope do it, I would like invited to you ☺

really?

— No contractions!

Tence use
mispronunciation
subject use

Maybe one of the worst things that I probe, it is frog's leg " It's tosted like chicken, but it is horrible. It is salty and kind of rare. I hope never eat again something like that. I remember like a bad experience, but if one day have the borage, maybe can do it again, I don't know.

calque

tence use

35/50 = 7.0

52