

UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR  
FACULTAD MULTIDISCIPLINARIA ORIENTAL  
DEPARTAMENTO DE CIENCIAS Y HUMANIDADES  
SECCIÓN DE IDIOMAS



INFORME FINAL DEL CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN:  
EN LINGUISTICA

TÍTULO DEL INFORME FINAL:  
LOS EFECTOS DE LA TRANSFERENCIA NEGATIVA DEL ESPAÑOL EN  
EL USO ESCRITO DE LA GRAMÁTICA INGLESA.

PARA OPTAR AL GRADO ACADÉMICO DE:  
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS MODERNAS: ESPECIALIDAD EN FRANCÉS  
E INGLÉS

PRESENTADO POR:  
MELISSA LISSETTE AGUILAR MARTINEZ N DE CARNÉ AM17095  
SUSANA NOHEMY ALVAREZ AGUILAR N DE CARNÉ AA13050

DOCENTE ASESOR:  
EVELYN YASMIN MARTINEZ BONILLA

OCTUBRE DE 2023  
SAN MIGUEL, EL SALVADOR, CENTROAMÉRICA

## AUTORIDADES



MAESTRO ROGER ARMANDO ARIAS ALVARADO  
RECTOR

DOCTOR RAUL ERNESTO AZCUNAGA LOPEZ  
VICE- RECTOR ACADÉMICO

INGENIERO JUAN ROSA QUINTANILLA  
VICE- RECTOR ADMINISTRATIVO

INGENIERO FRANCISCO ALARCON  
SECRETARIO GENERAL

LICENCIADO RAFAEL HUMBERTO PEÑA MARIN  
FISCAL GENERAL

SAN MIGUEL SAN SALVADOR CENTROAMÉRICA

**FACULTAD MULTIDISCIPLINARIA ORIENTAL**

**AUTORIDADES**



**DECANO**

**LIC. CRISTOBAL HERNAN RIOS BENITEZ**

**VICEDECANO**

**LIC. OSCAR VILLALOBOS**

**SECRETARIO**

**LIC. ISRAEL LOPEZ MIRANDA**

**DIRECTOR GENERAL DE PROCESOS DE GRADO  
LICENCIADO JORGE PASTOR FUENTES CABRERA**

**DIRECTOR DE LA ESCUELA O JEFE DE DEPARTAMENTO  
LIC. MAURICIO ANTONIO LOPEZ CHINCHILLA**

**COORDINADOR GENERAL DE PROCESOS DE GRADO  
LIC. ROXANA JANETH SORTO DE VELIZ**

## AGRADECIMIENTO

Agradecemos a nuestro **Dios** por brindarnos la sabiduría y el entendimiento, en el proceso de aprendizaje desde los inicios de la carrera, reconociendo su omnipotencia para con sus hijos en compartimos la inteligencia y externamos nuestra sincera gratitud por habernos permitido la culminación del camino del estudio, a nuestra **Familia** agradecemos profundamente por su constante apoyo emocional y su comprensión durante las largas horas de estudio y trabajo dedicadas a este proyecto. Su amor y aliento han sido nuestra mayor motivación.

En el proceso de aprendizaje de la carrera y elaboración de este artículo, hemos tenido la fortuna de contar con el valioso apoyo de varios licenciados que han contribuido significativamente a nuestro éxito. Queremos expresar nuestro sincero agradecimiento a todos ellos por su dedicación y asesoramiento.

Agradecemos también con mucho cariño a la Licenciada Evelyn Martínez por su orientación experta y su paciencia. Sus valiosos consejos y dirección fueron cruciales para dar forma a este artículo.

En último, pero no menos importante, a cada una de las personas, amigos, colegas, por compartir conocimiento, comprensión en momentos de estrés y presión académica. Sus palabras de aliento y sus conversaciones enriquecedoras contribuyeron a nuestro desarrollo académico y personal. Muchas gracias por ser parte del camino y valoramos todo lo vivido.

Melissa Lissette Aguilar Martínez

Susana Nohemy Alvarez Aguilar

## **DEDICATORIA**

Dedicamos este artículo primeramente a Dios, nuestra Familia y a todos aquellos que se encuentren inspirados por este artículo para sus propios estudios.

MELISSA LISSETTE AGUILAR MARTINEZ

SUSANA NOHEMY ALVAREZ AGUILAR

## **The effects of Spanish negative transfer on the written use of English grammar**

### **Los efectos de la transferencia negativa del español en el uso escrito de la gramática inglesa.**

#### Abstract

Learning a foreign language is a complex cognitive process influenced by various biological and social factors. The mother tongue of the learner often plays a pivotal role in shaping the learning experience and language proficiency outcomes. This phenomenon, where the mother tongue negatively impacts the target language, is known as negative transfer. This study explores the impact of negative transfer on the grammar of advanced English students utilizing a quantitative approach and a questionnaire as the research instrument. The primary objective is to describe the effects of negative transfer on the grammar proficiency of advanced English students. The research findings reveal three main categories of negative transfer effects: Interlingual errors, overextension of analogy, and structural transfer. Interlingual errors refer to instances where elements from the Spanish language are inappropriately applied to English, resulting in grammatical mistakes. Overextension of analogy occurs when students generalize rules or structures from Spanish to English, leading to linguistic inaccuracies. Structural transfer involves transferring sentence structures from Spanish into English, often causing syntax errors. Notably, the key finding of this research is that negative transfer contributes to approximately half of the errors identified in the learning process of advanced English students, who may face more subtle but persistent challenges in achieving grammatical accuracy in their written English. Understanding and addressing negative transfer is

crucial for language educators and learners alike, as it provides insights into the specific areas where students struggle and where this can guide targeted interventions to enhance grammar proficiency in the target language.

El aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera es un proceso cognitivo complejo en el que influyen diversos factores biológicos y sociales. La lengua materna del alumno suele desempeñar un papel fundamental a la hora de configurar la experiencia de aprendizaje y los resultados del dominio de la lengua. Este fenómeno, en el que la lengua materna influye negativamente en la lengua meta, se conoce como transferencia negativa. Este estudio explora el impacto de la transferencia negativa en la gramática de estudiantes avanzados de inglés utilizando un enfoque cuantitativo y un cuestionario como instrumento de investigación. El objetivo principal es describir los efectos de la transferencia negativa en la competencia gramatical de los estudiantes de inglés avanzado. Los resultados de la investigación revelan tres categorías principales de efectos negativos de la transferencia: errores interlingüísticos, ampliación excesiva de la analogía y transferencia estructural. Los errores interlingüísticos se refieren a casos en los que elementos de la lengua española se aplican de forma inadecuada al inglés, dando lugar a errores gramaticales. La sobreextensión de la analogía se produce cuando los alumnos generalizan reglas o estructuras del español al inglés, lo que da lugar a imprecisiones lingüísticas. La transferencia estructural consiste en transferir estructuras oracionales del español al inglés, lo que a menudo provoca errores sintácticos. En particular, el hallazgo clave de esta investigación es que la transferencia negativa contribuye a aproximadamente la mitad de los errores identificados en el proceso de aprendizaje de los estudiantes avanzados de inglés, que pueden enfrentarse a retos más sutiles pero persistentes para lograr la precisión gramatical en su inglés escrito. Comprender y abordar

la transferencia negativa es crucial tanto para los profesores de idiomas como para los estudiantes, ya que proporciona información sobre las áreas específicas en las que los estudiantes tienen dificultades y donde esto puede guiar intervenciones específicas para mejorar la competencia gramatical en la lengua meta.

**Key words: negative transfer, written production, Interlingual error, translation, reading English grammar.**

## Introduction

This research discusses the phenomenon of interlanguage transfer and negative transfer in foreign language learning. The investigation team aims to investigate the effects of Spanish negative transfer on the students of English as a second language majoring in Modern Languages at the University of El Salvador. The main objective of this study is to describe the types of Spanish negative transfer occurring in the written production of these students, in order to classify the components of written language that are most affected by it.

Therefore, this study used the non-experimental quantitative method. The non-experimental design used in this study has a number of benefits, including allowing researchers to measure variables as they occur naturally, exploring the situation or a specific experience in a specific context, being financially viable and not very time-consuming, allowing data to be collected from a large set of subjects, and being appropriate for identifying patterns or characteristics in a particular population. The instrument that will be employed to collect the statistical-relevant data and plain language material composed by subjects in a translation activity. These



data will be instrumental in revealing the state of things as to the actual effect of Spanish negative transfer on the knowledge of English students and writing skills.

## Methodology

The quantitative approach was used in this study. Students from the degree in modern languages in French and English were selected as the sample for this study, being English the target language, furthermore, their knowledge in grammar and linguistic skill provided important information in the process of this study. Students aimed to provide specific recommendations for decision-makers on improving teaching. These recommendations were focused on key concepts that are crucial for enhancing the educational experience. Moreover, the experience of the students has ample time to observe how methodic education impacts their ability to overcome interference from their first language in their English linguistic system.

In this work, the probabilistic sampling method was employed. According to Seema Singh, this type of sampling "uses randomization to ensure that every element of the population gets an equal chance to be part of the selected sample" (Singh, 2018). Parameters for determining the sample size in this study were as follows: confidence level: 90%; confidence interval: 10%; standard deviation: 0.5; in a total of a population size of 40 people, resulting in a sample size of 25 subjects.

This method is the most accepted scientific method due to the high precision of the measurements and the low margin of interpretative subjectivity. Furthermore, the hypothetico-deductive method, based on theories constructed by empirical generalizations, gives it indisputable robustness, even if it is accepted that not everything, in reality, can be quantifiable.

Indeed, a questionnaire is not exclusive to the quantitative method, but the design of the instrument defined its usability and reliability to obtain quantitative data. The type of questions and scale for responses are fundamental to the questionnaire design. The questionnaire envisioned in this study allows students to produce authentic material in the target language, thereby reducing the number and impact of hindrances.

The instrument consisted of a list of twenty items in the form of sentences in Spanish. Students were asked to translate the sentences into English, with emphasis on the forms. The decision to design the instrument was driven by three reasons:

1. Precision in Investigating Negative Transfer due to the limited availability of authentic material, the necessity to ascertain the presence of negative transfer is emphasized. Lott's work highlights that negative transfer effects can be effectively identified through text translation. By carefully constructing 20 sentences with attention to syntax and vocabulary, a clear understanding of how negative transfer impacts written production was gained.

2. Uniformity and Consistency designing, the instrument offers greater control over maintaining uniformity and consistency across all subjects under study.

3. Facilitated Data Analysis, the structured approach of dividing sentences based on parts of speech streamlines data tabulation and analysis. This division aligns with the Operationalization of Variables, easing the process of data interpretation.

In the data treatment process, error analysis was performed on individual sentences from the texts, categorized according to Lott's Interference Error Analysis System: Transfer of structure; Overextension of analogy; Interlingual.

The data processing procedure involved exporting raw data from an instrument to a spreadsheet document on the Google Spreadsheets platform. Subsequently, a second spreadsheet was created with the same organization of rows and columns, but this time the columns contained the elements resulting from the fragmentation of the sentences into parts of speech. This results in a total of 2698 individual element for observation.

Each sentence in the texts will be individually examined for errors as part of the data treatment, and the findings going to be then categorized into the following groups: transfer of structure, overextension of analogy, and Interlingual error. One table, two bar charts, and eleven pie charts are going to be created based on the statistical data that is received after the processed data will be tabulated in cardinal numbers and percentages. The study's findings will shed light on how Spanish negative transfer affects the written work of students and offer specific recommendations regarding key ideas on which policymakers could concentrate to build up instruction.

## Results

The results presented below were obtained with a quantitative and statistical treatment of the gathered data. A Rectangular Data Matrix (Horber, 2022) was used as a statistical organizer which enabled the analysis of the 2736 elements, resulting from the decomposition of 20 sentences into 144 recurring categories. This was performed by directly observing and assessing the use of the parts of speech in English —pronouns, nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, auxiliaries, determiners, prepositions, and subordinators— in the written production of each subject in the study. Subsequently, the magnitude of negative transfer from Spanish to English was determined numerically, based mainly on the similarity of structure, spelling or semantics of the elements misused in English with the structure, spelling or semantics of Spanish.

This procedure was conducted with each of the 2736 elements, and once the errors caused by negative transfer from Spanish to English were identified and isolated, a new classification was undertaken according to the error recognition system developed by Lott (Lott, 1983). The categories are Overextension of Analogy, Transfer of Structure, and Interlingual Errors, which are presented in detail in section 2.5 of the theoretical framework of this study.

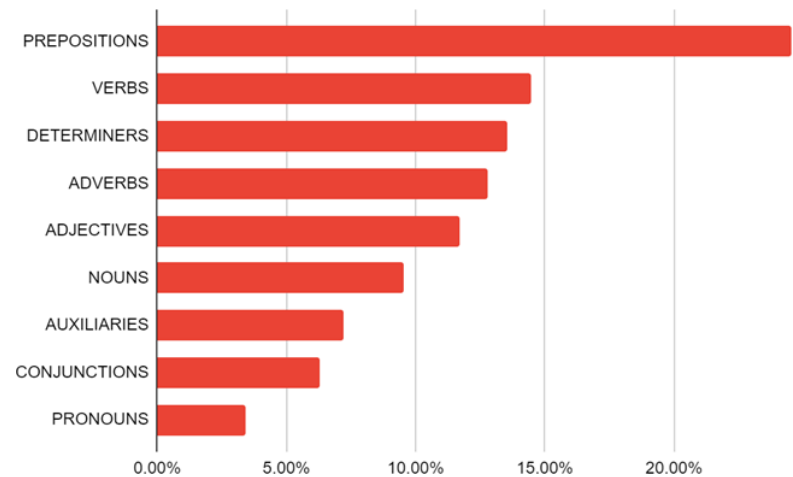
Each element was evaluated and labeled as either an error (E) or transfer (T) under each part of speech. A binary coding system (0/1) indicates error presence. A second column under 'T' contains numbers 0-4: 0 for no transfer, 1 for Overextension of Analogy, 2 for Transfer of Structure, and 3 for Interlingual transfer.



**Table 1.** Analyzed Elements and Identified Errors as per Part of Speech.

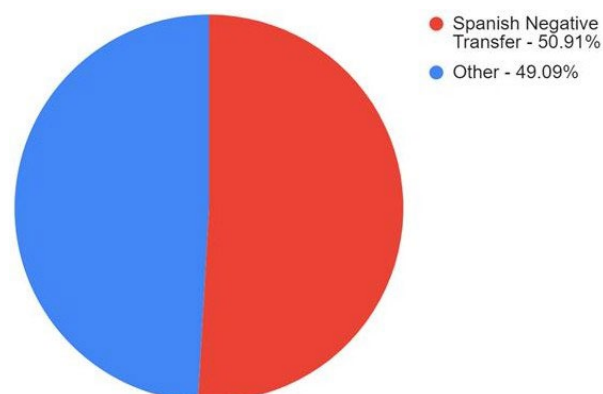
<b>Part of speech</b>	<b>Number of elements</b>	<b>Number of Errors</b>	<b>Number of errors caused by Spanish Negative Transfer</b>
<b>Nouns</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>Pronouns</b>	<b>380</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Adjectives</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Determiners</b>	<b>266</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Verbs</b>	<b>608</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>29</b>
<b>Auxiliaries</b>	<b>152</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Adverbs</b>	<b>133</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Prepositions</b>	<b>285</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Conjunctions</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>2698</b>	<b>319</b>	<b>164</b>

Table 1. displays the aggregate data on the absolute count of items analyzed and the number of errors found through individual observation. As explained above, a total of 2698 items classified into the eight parts of speech in English were analyzed, as can be seen in the second column. The third column under the heading of Number of Errors lists the number of errors that were identified in each category, but without correlating them yet with their origin or cause.



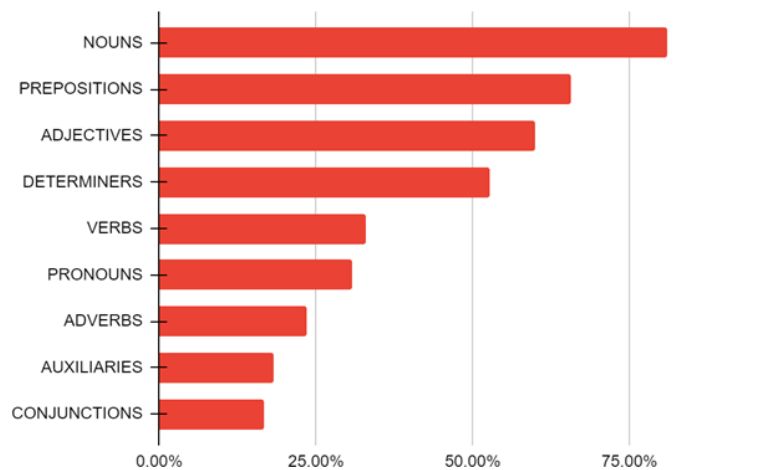
**Figure 1. Error incidence according to part of speech.**

Prepositions are the most problematic for the students, being unable to use them correctly in a quarter of the occurrences (24.56%). This is followed by a descending incidence of 14.47% for verbs, followed by determiners with 13.53%, adverbs with 12.78%, and adjectives with 11.70%. The parts of speech affected by errors in less than one tenth of the occurrences are nouns with 9.54%, auxiliaries with 7.24%, and conjunctions with 6.32%. Finally, the part of speech with the fewest errors is conjunctions, in which there were only 3.42% errors in the proportion of occurrences.



**Figure 2. Absolute influence of Spanish negative transfer on errors in composition subjects.**

This is the most crucial fact of the present study because it has determined the absolute influence of Negative Spanish Transfer on the compositions of the students who are attending Advanced Intensive English II. It can be clearly observed that Negative Transfer is responsible for causing roughly half (50.91%) of the errors found in the written samples obtained through the instrument.

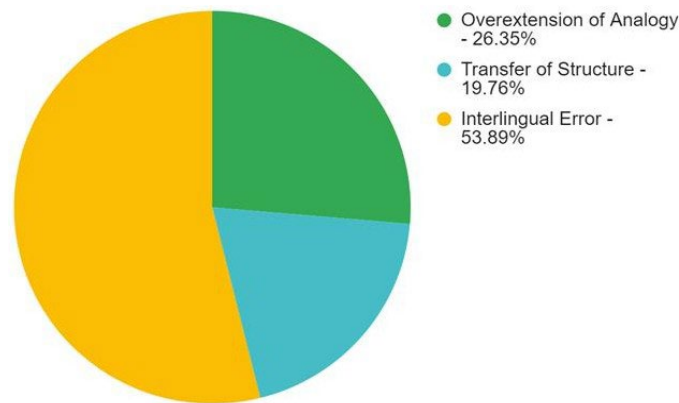


**Figure 3. Spanish negative transfer as the Cause of Errors per each Part of Speech.**

Figure 3 illustrates in descending order the absolute proportion of errors which are directly produced by Spanish negative transfer against the aggregate of errors, according to each part of speech. The striking finding in Figure 2 is that the negative transfer is the main cause of errors in four parts of speech, notably nouns with 81.03%, followed by prepositions with 65.71%, adjectives with 60%, and determiners with 52.78%. The Spanish negative transfer is also relevant in explaining



the errors in one third of the occurrences in verbs with 32.95%, and pronouns with 30.77%. The parts of speech least affected by Spanish negative transfer were adverbs with 23.53%, auxiliaries with 18.18%, and subordinators with 16.67%.



**Figure 4. Classification of errors caused by Spanish negative transfer in composition on students.**

Figure 4. Illustrates the errors that were classified into three categories: Interlingual Errors, Overextension of Analogy, and Transfer of Structure. In the first case the Interlingual Errors were the most common type of transfer error, accounting for 53.89% of occurrences. Overextension of Analogy accounted for 26.35% of occurrences, while Transfer of Structure accounted for 19.76% of occurrences. Interlingual Errors occur due to the lack of reference in the distinction of a grammatical or lexical aspect that does not exist in the mother tongue.

On the other hand, Overextension of Analogy occurs when some part of speech is used according to conventions and usages in the native Spanish language not corresponding to the usage and convention in English, causing unnatural or Hispanicized sentences, or directly an incorrect use of the linguistic resource.

Transfer of Structure is mainly related to the syntax of a language, based on the fact that Spanish has flexibility in the order of words, phrases or clauses within a sentence, whereas English tends to be more syntactically codified.

In the case of nouns, the errors caused by Spanish negative transfer are relatively evenly distributed in the three categories applied, with the Interlingual error being the most common error with 38.30%, followed by the overextension of analogy with 34.04%, and the transfer of structure with 27.66%.

Contrastingly, in the case of the errors produced by the Spanish negative transfer in adjectives, most of them correspond to an overextension of analogy with three quarters (75%) of the total. The next type of error is the transfer of structure with 16.67% of the occurrences, and the Interlingual type with 8.33%

Similar to pronouns, in the case of adverbs, the errors caused by Spanish negative transfer have been evenly distributed in two halves, with 50% corresponding to the overextension of analogy, and the other 50% to the transfer of structure. No occurrence of the Interlingual factor was observed in the case of adverbs.

In the case of auxiliaries, errors caused by Spanish negative transfer have been classified exclusively as Transfer of Structure (100%). No occurrence of the Interlingual factor or the overextension of analogy were observed in the case of auxiliaries.

The majority of errors caused by Spanish negative transfer in prepositions have been categorized as Interlingual with 82.61% of the total errors. The remaining portion is equally divided between transfer of structure with 8.70%, and overextension of analogy with another 8.70%.

## Discussion

After having reported the results of the quantitative study through tables and graphs containing statistical information, the empirical evidence will be discussed in order to reach the conclusions. The aim of this study is to determine the types of errors caused by Spanish negative transfer that students make in written production, as well as the part of speech where they occur most frequently.

Initially, as Lott (1983, p.258) used unambiguous categories to identify and discriminate errors caused by the mother tongue's negative transfer in a way that the isolation of these negative transfer errors is possible by three concepts which are defined below:

Interlingual error: Students make an error in grammar when the distinction does not exist in the native language. One example of this is the auxiliary *do* to build yes/no questions in the present tense. Interlingual errors can also occur in lexical items. For instance, the terms *job* and *work* both mean '*trabajo*' in Spanish, so misuses can stem from this lack of reference.

Overextension of analogy: students misuse a lexical item in the target language based on its similarity in phonology, orthography, semantics, or syntax with a term from their mother tongue. For instance, the utilization of the deviant verb form "divorced" instead of "divorced" when a student tries to transform a Spanish verb into English, and partially does so by employing known available morphological models.

Transfer of structure: this is an exclusive grammar error because the student follows the rules from their mother tongue and applies them to the target language. For illustrating, Spanish speakers learning English may say "Is raining" rather than "It is raining", leaving out the subject of the sentence, another example in particular is with the word actually tends to confuse Spanish native speakers since they think that word means "actualmente". (Actualmente is currently in English) Professor Rosa (Alonso, 1997) found out this is the most common Spanish negative transfer in English written compositions. Deviant forms of phrases, sentences, and clauses were abundant. Syntax was affected by wrong placements of phrases within the sentence. Deviant forms or incorrect use of the parts of speech were also observed by Alonso, especially in the case of pronouns, verbs, and prepositions.

## Conclusion

In this research, the results obtained have provided an answer to the question that existed, about the interference of the mother tongue language to the second language, that students want to acquire, in this case Spanish being the mother

tongue language and English the acquired language, the most remarkable thing found in the study is the fact that negative transfers are responsible for about half of the errors identified in the learning process of students, one in four prepositions used by learners in translations was erroneous, which is evidence of a lack of robust knowledge about the use of prepositions in English. Furthermore, it was found that most of these errors were caused by the Spanish negative transfer.

The frequency with which prepositions are used in both Spanish and English results in considerable variability, which prevents a direct correspondence between the two languages. According to the classification of interference errors, 82.61% of them are of the Interlingual type, which means that they occur because the learner lacks the necessary knowledge to use a preposition in one case or another, consequently, they either choose a construction that is specific to Spanish or follow their own logic acquired through experience. As nouns are the part most affected by Spanish negative transfer, special attention should be paid to the development of a wide vocabulary repertoire, and it should be emphasized that knowing a noun does not only imply knowing its meaning in Spanish, but also the appropriate use given to it by native speakers in English.

Although, it is true that negative transfer exists in every learning process whatever the target language is. People are aware that each phase can also be monitored with different learning strategies according to the student, to obtain a positive impact when performing the acquired language. Therefore, this study aims to emphasize the errors occurring in the learning process of the acquisition of English as a second language and allows anybody the opportunity to avoid these kinds of

errors, besides creating the branch for making possible the acquisition of a second language.

## Referencias

- Alonso, P. R. (november de 1997). Obtenido de Interlingual errors in spanish students of English as a foreign language :  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/39441255\\_Language\\_transfer\\_interlingual\\_errors\\_in\\_Spanish\\_students\\_of\\_English\\_as\\_a\\_foreign\\_language](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/39441255_Language_transfer_interlingual_errors_in_Spanish_students_of_English_as_a_foreign_language)
- Horber, E. (2022). Obtenido de Data Matrix:  
<http://www.unige.ch/ses/sococ/cl/stat/concepts/datamatrix.html>
- Lott, D. (3 de july de 1983). Obtenido de Analysing and counteracting interference errors:  
<https://doi.org/10.1093/elt/37.3.256>
- Singh, S. (26 de julio de 2018). Obtenido de Sampling techniques:  
<https://towardsdatascience.com/sampling-techniques-a4e34111d808>