

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



INFORME FINAL DEL CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN:
CURSO DE ESPECIALIZACIÓN LINGÜÍSTICA

TÍTULO DEL INFORME FINAL:
THE INFLUENCE OF SYNTAX AFFECTS THE WRITING SKILL OF THIRD-YEAR
STUDENTS OF MODERN LANGUAGES MAJOR

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

PRESENTADO POR:
MARIA DE LOS ÁNGELES AYALA ARGUETA N° CARNÉ AA18044
MAYRA MARGARITA VILLATORO BENITEZ N° CARNÉ VB15011

DOCENTE ASESOR:
MTRA. ROXANA JANETH SORTO DE VELIS

OCTUBRE DE 2023

SAN MIGUEL, EL SALVADOR, CENTROAMÉRICA

UNIVERSIDAD DE EL SALVADOR
AUTORIDADES



RECTOR

MSC. ROGER ARMANDO ARIAS

VICERRECTOR ACADÉMICO

PHD. RAÚL ERNESTO AZCÚNAGA LÓPEZ

VICERRECTOR ADMINISTRATIVO

ING. JUAN ROSA QUINTANILLA

SECRETARIO GENERAL

ING. FRANCISCO ALARCÓN

DEFENSOR DE LOS DERECHOS UNIVERSITARIO

LICDO. LUIS ANTONIO MEJÍA LIPE

FISCAL GENERAL

LICDO. RAFAEL HUMBERTO PEÑA MARÍN

FACULTAD MULTIDISCIPLINARIA ORIENTAL

AUTORIDADES



DECANO

LIC. CRISTÓBAL HERNÁN RÍOS BENÍTEZ

VICEDECANA

LIC. OSCAR VILLALOBOS

SECRETARIO

LIC. ISRAEL LÓPEZ MIRANDA

DIRECTOR GENERAL DE PROCESOS DE GRADO

LIC. JORGE PASTOR FUENTES CABRERA

DIRECTOR DE LA ESCUELA O JEFE DE DEPARTAMENTO

LIC. MAURICIO ANTONIO LÓPEZ CHINCHILLA

COORDINADOR GENERAL DE PROCESOS DE GRADO

MTRA. ROXANA JANETH SORTO DE VELIS

The influence of syntax affects the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major

La influencia sintáctica afecta la habilidad de escritura de los estudiantes de tercer año de la Licenciatura de Lenguas Modernas

Abstract

The present work: The influence of syntax affects the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major was conducted with the aim to establish how the syntax affects the writing skills of the students from Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental. The investigation used quantitative approach research with a hypothetical deductive method and a descriptive design to find out the relationship between the two variables to demonstrate the influence of syntax affects the writing skills of the third-year students. The variables under study: syntax and writing skill. The former is an important branch of linguistics that helps to have an accurate writing production. And, the latter refers to the ability to transmit a message in a written form. The set of categories included are: coherence, cohesion, word order, part of the sentence, and use of writing rules. The question to be answered was: Does the influence of syntax affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major? The technique applied was a survey, and an instrument was used as a questionnaire with ten questions. It was administered to twenty-five students of the third year as a sample. The findings revealed that the students showed a high level of knowledge of syntax. That is coherence (80%) with the highest level of knowledge and use of writing rules (56%) as the lowest level. In this way, based on the results it can be inferred that the influence of syntax did not affect the writing production of students since the most unfavorably affected was the use of writing rules, as long as the less affected one corresponded to coherence. Furthermore, it can be deduced the written output of the students is adequate and understandable because the results were favorable in relation to the level of syntactic they reached. Therefore, the influence of syntax did not affect the writing skills of students.

Key words: syntax, writing skill, coherence, cohesion, word order, part of the sentence, use of writing rules

El presente trabajo: la influencia de la sintaxis afecta la habilidad de escritura de los estudiantes de tercer año de licenciatura en lenguas modernas se realizó con el objetivo de establecer cómo la sintaxis afecta la habilidad de escritura de los estudiantes de la Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental. En la investigación se utilizó un enfoque cuantitativo con un método hipotético deductivo y un diseño descriptivo con el fin de conocer la relación entre las dos variables para demostrar si la influencia de la sintaxis afecta las habilidades de escritura de los estudiantes de tercer año. Las variables del estudio fueron: sintaxis y habilidad de escritura. La primera es una rama importante de la lingüística que ayuda a tener una producción escrita precisa. Y, la siguiente se refiere a la capacidad de transmitir un mensaje de forma escrita. El conjunto de categorías incluidas son coherencia, cohesión, orden de las palabras, parte de la oración y el uso de reglas de escritura. La pregunta de investigación fue: ¿Afecta la influencia de la sintaxis en la habilidad de la escritura de los estudiantes de tercer año de la Licenciatura en Lenguas Modernas? La técnica aplicada fue una encuesta y el instrumento fue un cuestionario que contenía diez preguntas. Éste se aplicó a una muestra de veinticinco estudiantes del tercer año. Los hallazgos revelan que los estudiantes mostraron un alto nivel de conocimiento de la sintaxis de los cuales se resaltan: coherencia con el nivel más alto de conocimiento (80%) y por otro lado, el uso de reglas de escritura con el nivel más bajo (56%). De esta manera, se puede inferir que la influencia de la sintaxis no afectó la producción escrita de los estudiantes dado que la más afectada fue el uso de reglas de escritura y por otro lado la menos afectada corresponde a la coherencia. Por lo tanto, se deduce que la producción escrita de los estudiantes es adecuada y comprensible en relación al nivel sintáctico que obtuvieron.

Palabras clave: sintaxis, habilidad para la escritura, coherencia, cohesión, orden de las palabras, parte de la oración, uso de reglas de escritura

Introduction

This research: The influence of syntax affects the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major arises from the need to establish if the syntax competence decreases directly the written production. This study was carried out in the Facultad Multidisciplinaria Oriental at the University of El Salvador with twenty-five students of the third year of the Bachelor Degree of Modern Languages specializing in French and English 2021.

In the process of learning a foreign language there are usually some linguistic problems that affect the writing skills. According to (Sarwat, 2021), most students who have difficulty in understanding syntax, face writing issues such as: The correct use of tenses when writing essays and stories, communication problems by not structuring sentences well, grammatical errors, issues connecting ideas and often have trouble understanding English sentence structure.

The importance of this work emerged when students who were doing their social hours in teaching assistant practice in English observed that students of the third year presented difficulties in their writing production. And, the teamwork decided to find out the influence of syntax over the writing skill.

Taking as its main objective to establish the influence of syntax affects the writing skills of students, a question was set: Does the influence of syntax affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major?

This article presents its methodology, results, discussion, conclusions, and references.

Methodology

The method applied for this investigation was the hypothetical deductive method with a descriptive design in order to find out the relationship between the two variables to demonstrate the influence of syntax affects the writing skills of the third-year students of Modern Languages Major. And the approach used for this study was the quantitative approach.

Regarding the variables of this work were the syntax field and writing skill, it can be said: According to (Vappingo, 2011), syntax is a branch of linguistics that is concerned with how a sentence is ordered, structured and involves the type of statement used. And the other was writing skill is an extremely complex cognitive activity in which the writer is required to demonstrate control of variables simultaneously. At the sentence level, these include control of contents, format, sentence structure, vocabulary, spelling and letter formation (Nunan, 1991).

Moreover, five categories were considered to evaluate the knowledge of syntax in the writing skill process of students and to identify the different difficulties in the writing skill; they were: word order that according to (Merriam-Webster, n.d.) is defined as: “the order or arrangement of words in a phrase, clause, or sentence”. The second one was part of the sentence in which the (Oxford, n.d.) defines it as “a set of words expressing a statement, a question or an order, usually containing a subject and a verb”. The third one was coherence which, based on (Cambridge, n.d.) definition: “it is the situation when the parts of something fit together in a natural or reasonable way”. Likewise, the fourth one was cohesion, for this the (Melbourne, n.d.) restates: “it refers to the way we use vocabulary and grammatical structures to make connections between the ideas within a text”, and lastly, use of writing rules, according to (Mardijono, 2004) the productive task is also given to construct sentences following certain syntactic patterning of subject and predicate, which can be carried out either individually or in groups to apply what they have learned about sentence components and their patterns.

The question to be answered by doing this research was: Does the influence of syntax affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major?

The population for the collection of the data was about 40 students of the third year of Modern Languages from which 25 were chosen randomly by applying the probability sampling.

The technique used was a survey with an Online Questionnaire as the instrument. This was elaborated in Google Forms, and it contained three questions about personal information: DUE (Documento Único Estudiantil), Institutional e-mail, age, and gender. Also, it had ten questions with three multiple choice answers. The first and second questions were evaluating the word order category. The questions three, four and five were presented to recognize the knowledge of the part of the sentence category. The questions six and seven were for the coherence category. The questions eight and nine were related to the cohesion category and at the end question ten was added to evaluate the use of the writing rules category. So, the researchers provided the instructions and the link of the questionnaire to the teacher in charge of that group of students on how to fill it out.

In order to gather the information from the students, it was necessary to open and close a certain period of time. The research team monitored each of the results as they were uploaded into the Google Form system to keep control of the number of students and whether they had successfully completed the instrument. All the results obtained were saved by Google Forms.

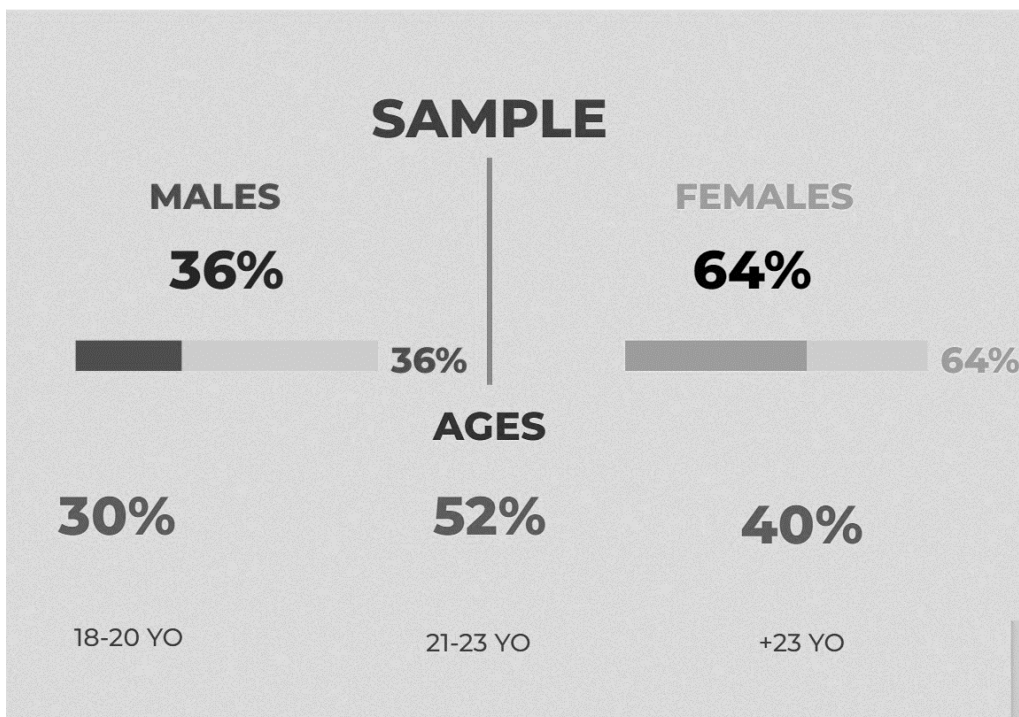
To tabulate the answers from the questionnaires, the research team elaborated a table of results that organized them in three columns. The first column presented the number of the question related to its corresponding category. The second column showed the number of correct answers over the number of total answers. And the third column demonstrates the number of incorrect answers over the number of total answers.

Subsequently, when all the data was tabulated, the information was processed in the Microsoft Excel tool in order to obtain the absolute frequency's results. So, two graphs in percentage value were obtained. The first graph showed the percentage of correct and incorrect answers per question and the second one presented the statistical results showing the average of correct and incorrect answers by syntactic variable.

Results

In order to describe the sample: 36% of the students were males, and 64% were females. 30% of the students were between eighteen and twenty years old. The 52% were from twenty-one to twenty-three years old. And, 12% were older than twenty-three years old.

Table 1. SAMPLE DESCRIPTION



According to the data collected per category, it can be stated: The word order category, question one was answered correctly by 76% of the students and 24% gave an incorrect answer. The second question 44% answered correctly, and 56% incorrectly. So, the average of the students that managed the information of this indicator was 60% of students who answered correctly and 40% incorrectly.

Moreover, the category of the part of the sentence, question three was answered correctly by 64% of students and 36% answered incorrectly. Then, in the question four 56% of the students answered correctly and 44% incorrectly. In question five 56% of the students answered correctly and 44% incorrectly.

Therefore, the average of the students that provided the right answer was 59% and, 41% answered incorrectly.

The coherence category represented in question six was answered correctly by 76% of students and incorrectly by 24%. Question seven obtained 84% of correct answers and 16% incorrectly. Hence, the average of the students that properly answered each question of this part was 80% answered correctly and 20% incorrectly.

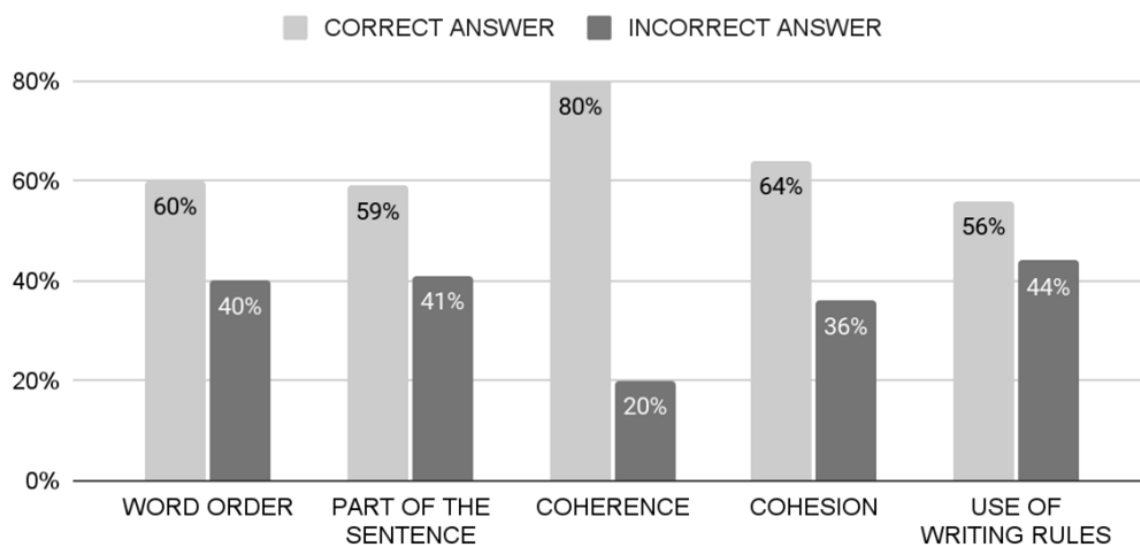
The cohesion category in question eight 44% were correct answers and 56% were incorrect ones. Question nine had 84% of correct answers and 16% of incorrect ones. Then, the average of the students that supplied the right answer were 64% and 36% answered incorrectly.

The last category the use writing rules in question ten obtained a result of 56% of correct answers and 44% of incorrect answers. As a result, the average of the population that managed the information of this indicator was 56% answered correctly and 44% incorrectly.

By considering the investigation question: Does the influence of syntax affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major? It can be established from the results that the students showed a high level of knowledge of syntax. That is coherence (80%), cohesion (64%) word order (60%), part of the sentence (59%), use of writing rules (56%).

The following graph shows the categories evaluated with the corresponding percentages of the correct and incorrect answers.

GRAPH 1. CORRECT AND INCORRECT ANSWERS PER CATEGORIES



The table 2 presents the statistical data of correct and incorrect answers.

Table 2. DESCRIPTIVE DATA

<i>correct answers</i>		<i>incorrect answers</i>	
Media	16	Media	9
Error típico	1.2018504	Error típico	1.2018504
Mediana	15	Mediana	10
Moda	14	Moda	11
Desviación estándar	3.8005848	Desviación estándar	3.8005848
Varianza de la muestra	14.444444	Varianza de la muestra	14.444444
Curtosis	-1.5044379	Curtosis	-1.5044379
Coefficiente de asimetría	0.0758993	Coefficiente de asimetría	-0.0758993

Discussion

For the purpose of expressing the theory established in this research work, the gathered data and the researchers' point of view, it is done as follows:

According to (Yule, 2010) The word "syntax" comes originally from Greek and literally means "a putting together" or "arrangement."

This explanation refers to syntax as a way in which words are grouped together in order to produce well-structured sentences. This term focuses directly on the rules and principles that govern the structure of the sentence and describe the type to which it belongs.

As to the writing skill, (Kellogg, 2001) opines that writing is a cognitive process that tests memory, thinking ability, and verbal command to successfully express the ideas, because the proficient composition of a text indicates successful learning of a second language.

(Piña, García, & Govea, 2009) say that for the student to develop this skill, the teacher should promote the constant practice, taking into account factors such as syntax, related to the element order of the sentence; punctuation, related to the organization of the discourse and the different elements that compose it; orthograph, related to the correct spelling of words, and the coherence related to the logical order of the ideas so that the reader can interpret and understand the sent message.

The concept of writing skill is sometimes a difficult ability to master when learners study a foreign language, it can be considered a challenge; however, if they practice the previous elements recommended by Harmer, it can be learned and produced effectively.

Referring to the category of coherence (Smith, 2015) states: The study of syntax in linguistics is quite challenging since the learner has to know how to put words in a sentence to make it sensible and avoid ambiguity. As it is in the results obtained, the students achieved the highest level of percentage in this aspect among

the other categories. That is 80%. So, as researchers, it is considered that this field of coherence is necessary to be developed in order to produce logical, complete and meaningful ideas.

Subsequently, according to (Connor, 2009) cohesion is concerned with the ways in which the components of text are connected. The results showed that this element is the second-best score presenting 64% to correct answers. As researchers, it is considered the cohesion as a key factor to produce a comprehensible text. Furthermore, in writing it is necessary to connect the ideas in a fluent way and avoid repetition by using grammatical mechanisms with a relationship between one element and the other one.

Additionally, (Dryer, 2000) word order refers more generally to the order of any set of elements, either at the clause level, or within phrases, such as the order of elements within a noun phrase. The findings showed that this component is the third best answer that is 60%. As researchers, this category can be considered as a fundamental aspect for mastering the language, since students who learn a second language often fail in this case because they compare the patterns of the mother tongue with the patterns of the target language. In this way, focusing on improving word order will greatly help to have more fluent conversations.

For part of the sentence category, (Yule, 2010). The syntax helps people to analyze a sentence effectively in order to know if a statement is correctly structured or not; when learners concentrate on it, they are studying the syntax of a language. The results obtained in this part determined that 59% of the students answered correctly. The teamwork opines this aspect is important to consider because analyzing the parts of the sentence allows one to understand more quickly and easily the effectiveness of the message to be transmitted. If it has a correct grammatical structure to determine whether the sentence built is coherent and correct, as a result a clear message will be transmitted to the reader.

Finally, use of writing rules (Khan, 2015) this skill is based on appropriate and strategic use of language with structural accuracy and communicative potential. The

results determined that the grammar rules category was the last best scored by students getting 56% of correct answers. As investigators, the application of these rules can help students to master them a better visualization of the errors that can be committed when writing a text. For that reason, having knowledge of grammar rules gives the writer a clear framework in which to work, thereby correcting the grammatical errors make a way to convey an adequate and understandable message.

This research was based on knowing how syntax influences the students' writing skill which is one of the basic competences when learning a language. To answer the investigation question: Does the influence of syntax affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major? From the obtained results, it can be determined that the students showed a high level of knowledge of syntax. That is coherence (80%), cohesion (64%) word order (60%), part of the sentence (59%), use of writing rules (56%). So, it can be inferred by the researchers that the written output of the students is adequate and understandable due to the favorable results in relation to the level of syntactics they achieved. Therefore, the influence of syntax did not negatively affect the writing skill of third-year students of Modern Languages Major.

Conclusions

- The research was conducted with an aim of establishing the influence of syntax affects the writing skills in third-year students of Modern Languages Major. It can be concluded that the influence of syntax did not affect the writing production of students.
- According to the evaluation process of each category was affected by the influence of syntax, it can be said: The most unfavorably affected was the use of writing rules, as long as the less affected one corresponds to coherence.
- In a general way, it can be established that the students who were surveyed showed that they had an acceptable level of syntax in their writing skill.
- This study enhances the significance of the development of the syntax component over the writing skills process when learning English as a foreign language from the first years of the career.

References

- Cambridge. (s.f.). *Cambridge Dictionary*. Obtenido de Cambridge Dictionary: <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/coherence#>
- Connor, U. (2009). A study of cohesion and coherence in English as a second language students' writing. vol 17. *Language & Literature Journals*.
- Dryer, M. S. (2000). *word order in tibeto-burman languages*. University of Melbourne, Australia: La Trobe University.
- Kellogg, B. (2001). Improving the writing skills of college students. *Psychonomic Bulletin & Review*.
- Khan, D. &. (2015). ESL Learner's Writing Skills. *Journal of Education & Social Sciences*.
- Mardijono, J. J. (2004). The Holistic Approach to Teaching Syntax vol 6. *Petra Christian University*.
- Melbourne, U. o. (s.f.). *The University of Melbourne*. Obtenido de The University of Melbourne: <https://students.unimelb.edu.au/academic-skills/resources/editing-your-writing/improving-cohesion>
- Merriam-Webster. (s.f.). *Merriam-Webster*. Obtenido de Merriam-Webster: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/word%20order#dictionary-entry-1>
- Muhammad Fareed, A. A. (2016). ESL Learners' Writing Skills: Problems, Factors and Suggestions.
- Nunan. (1991). *Language Teaching Methodology. A textbook for teachers*. Macquarie University, Sydney: Prentice-Hall International.
- Oxford. (s.f.). *Oxford Learner's Dictionaries*. Obtenido de Oxford Learner's Dictionaries: https://www.oxfordlearnersdictionaries.com/definition/american_english/sentence_1
- Piña, E., García, F., & Govea, L. (2009). Teaching strategies based on a wiki for the development of the written skill in students of English as foreign language. vol 8. *Revista Electrónica de Estudios Telemáticos*.
- Sarwat, S. (2021). Examining the academic writing challenges faced by university students in kfueit. *PaArch s Journal of Archaeology of Egypt* .
- Smith, J. (2015). What students say about linguistics: why study syntax? *Centre for languages linguistics & area studies*.

Studley, S. G. (2002). Predictive validity and differential impact of the SAT I and SAT II at the University of California vol 2. *Educational Assessment* .

Vappingo. (27 de october de 2011). *What is Grammar and Why is It Important?*
Obtenido de vappingo: <https://www.vappingo.com/word-blog/what-is-grammar-and-why-is-it-important/#:~:text=While%20grammar%20is%20basically%20a,ensuring%20that%20we%20are%20understood>.

Yule. (2010). *The Study of Language*. United Kingdom, England: Cambridge University Press.