

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



UNDERGRADUATE RESEARCH:

**EFFECTS OF THE INTERFERENCE OF L1 ON L2 CONCERNING SPEAKING
IN FIRST YEAR STUDENTS OF THE FOREIGN LANGUAGE DEPARTMENT**

IN ORDER TO OBTAIN THE DEGREE OF:

**LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS MODERNAS, ESPECIALIDAD FRANCÉS E
INGLÉS**

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Impossible is nothing!

AUTHORS

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INTRODUCTION

This research project has been done to analyze some effects produced by the interference of L1 on L2 concerning speaking in first year students of the Foreign Language Department.

This investigation is divided in five chapters where the gathered information was examined in a deeply way in order to help those students that have interference problems during their target language learning process.

First of all, chapter one, deals with the research topic, objectives, statement of the problem, research question, justification and hypothesis.

Chapter two is the theoretical framework, which is divided in the factors, effects and types of interference, according to the results of different investigations made through the history, by some writers, linguists and professors.

Besides, chapter three is the methodology used during this research process and the method used to gather all the information.

Moreover, chapter four is the analysis of data; in this part of the investigation the data and major findings are shown, based on the results of the surveys which were passed to the first year English students.

Chapter five contains the conclusion and recommendation which will help students and teachers of Foreign Language Department during the teaching and learning process.

Finally, the bibliography, electronic sources and annexes are presented.

CHAPTER I

1. PROBLEM

1.1 Research topic

Effects produced by interference of L1 (Spanish) on L2 (English) concerning speaking in first year students of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective:

- To find strategies to help reduce the effects produced by the interference of L1 on L2 when first year students speak in the target language.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives:

- To investigate some factors that produce interference of L1 on L2.
- To propose a prospective solution to reduce the interference of L1 on L2 in first year students of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department.

1.3 Statement of the problem

Students who start studying the Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza face a big challenge: to communicate both orally and writing. In attempting to do this many of them fall into the temptation of using their L1 which in the long run affects their attempt because they end up being misunderstood, or what is worse: zero communication.

This situation can be seen, when these students try to speak in the target language either inside or outside the class; for them it is difficult to hold a conversation without using the mother tongue (L1), this way it is observed that in a conversation come up phrases like: “she said me”, “I have hungry”, “I have 20 years old”, etc.

The need that students find to resort to the L1 when speaking the L2 is classified as a positive, negative and zero interference or transfer.

It is understood by positive interference or positive transfer the fact that the students use the structures already existing in their mother tongue and that with very slight adjustments they can be transferred to the L2. For example, “This organization is a non-profit foundation”. (In L1 it means: Ésa organización es una fundación no lucrativa). There are 2 words with similarity in both languages, in Spanish and English; “Organisation-Organización” and “Foundation-Fundación”.

In interference or negative transfer, the structures are different in both mother tongue and target language; for example, “Actually, my dear Steven. This one is the exit”. (In L1 it means: De hecho, mi querido Steven, ésa es la salida). There

are 2 words with similarities in writing, but different meaning. In L1 the word “Actually” means “De hecho”. Finally it is the zero interference, when there is not effect between L1 and L2, the switch is spontaneous and natural. For example: “The green apple is mine”. In this phrase the meaning in both language (Spanish and English) there is not interference.

As it is mentioned above the group wishes to raise the following question: What has to be done to avoid the negative effects of L1 on L2 in first year students of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador?

1.4 Research question

How can these Interference problems be solved in the students of first year of the Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador?

1.5 Justification

The importance of investigating the effects produced by the interference of L1 on English Language Learning comes from observing the problems faced by students of first year of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza when they try to communicate effectively in the target language.

Due to this communication failure students are in the need of making use of their native language instead of using the language they are learning. Therefore, the effects mentioned above cause undesirable results such as the frustration when they are not able to convey the message; academic failure, since some students end up giving up their studies; and finally, waste of time and money.

At the same time the problems already mentioned lead to other problems that complicate not only the students and their family economic and social conditions, but they also affect the Salvadoran education system in general because when there are students who drop out their studies, all kind of resources are wasted: teacher's salaries, didactic resources, infrastructure, etc. Yet there is another problem that deserves to be mentioned: Repetitiousness is a phenomenon that deprives other students from having the opportunity to study the major due to this fact that the English class groups must be massive; moreover the teaching and learning quality decreases when the communication is difficult to be carried out and consequently this affects the final product: efficient professionals.

Based on the problems stated above, the researchers ask: How can we avoid the negative interference of L1 on L2?

CHAPTER II

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Previous research in language interference.

Language interference (also known as L1 transfer, linguistic interference, and cross meaning) refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. Dulay et al (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: 256) 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 is 'the influence that the learner's 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. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules (Selinker, 1971, Seligar, 1988 and Ellis, 1997) with the use of their L1 knowledge, but only when they believe it will help them in the learning task or when they have become sufficiently proficient in the L2 for transfer to be possible.

The use of the word "interference" in the field of linguistics dates back to the first half of the twentieth century with the work of Sandfel (1938) and Jakobson (1938) in their submissions in the Fourth International Congress of Linguistics held in Copenhagen in 1936. But it was undoubtedly, Weinreich (1953/1974) who offered

the most comprehensive study of the various forms and causes of interference, he defined as: "Those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language, i.e. as a result of language contact, will be referred to as interference phenomena."(Weinreich 1953).

Undoubtedly, the relationship between the two languages must then be considered. Albert and Obler (1978) claim that people show more lexical interference on similar items. So it may follow that languages with more similar structures are more susceptible to mutual interference than languages with fewer similar features. On the other hand, it might also expect more learning difficulties and thus more likelihood of performance interference at those points in L2 which are more distant from L1, as the learner would find it difficult to learn and understand a completely new and different usage. Hence, the learner would resort to L1 structures for help.

According to Weinrich (1970), there are some factors that cause interference in the learning process of a target language:

2.2 Factors that cause Language Interference

- **Speaker bilingualism background:** Bilingualism is the major factor of interference as the speaker is influenced by both language, mother (Spanish) and the target language (English).
- **Disloyalty to target language:** Disloyalty to target language will cause negative attitudes. This will lead to disobedience to target

language structure and further force the bilingualism to put uncontrolled structure of his/her first language elements to output in practicing words and utterances both oral and written.

- **The limited vocabularies of L2 mastered by a learner:** Vocabularies of certain language mostly are about words of surroundings connected to life. Thus, a learner who is willing to master another language will meet new words which differ from his/her native words. In order to be able to speak as natives of L2, vocabularies take a big role. The more vocabularies someone has, the better he/she masters the L2. Foreign language learner will try to put deliberately his native word to state some points when he cannot find the best words of L2.
- **Needs of synonym:** Synonym in language usage plays an important role as word chosen variation in order not to repeat similar word during the communication process (redundancy). Implementing synonym in a language contact will contribute to interference in the form of adoption and borrowing of new words from SL to TL. Thus, need of synonym for certain word from SL to TL is seemingly aimed to intensify meaning.

- **Prestige and style:** Applying unfamiliar words (foreign words) during a communication practice which dominant words are languages of both speaker and receiver is something else. Those unfamiliar words usage is aimed at getting a sense of pride. Interference will appear as there are certain words even though the receiver probably cannot catch the real idea of the speech. The usual unfamiliar words usage will become a style of the user. Unfortunately, the user sometimes does not understand the real meaning whether the meaning is denotative or connotative.

Due to the above, some effects are produced during the target language learning.

2.3 Effects of Language Interference

Flege (1980) states that L1 for learning L2 has advantages and disadvantages. The factor of “universal language” helps in learning. All languages have tense system, number, gender, plural etc. This helps the learner in identifying these areas in the target language. But the interference of L1 on L2 learning leads to errors.

Interference may be viewed as the transference of elements of one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical (Berthold, Mangubhai & Batorowicz, 1997). Berthold (1997) defines phonological interference as items including foreign accent such as

stress, rhyme, intonation and speech sounds from the first language influencing the second. Grammatical interference is defined as the first language influencing the second in terms of word order, use of pronouns and determinants, tense and mood. Interference at a lexical level provides for the borrowing of words from one language and converting them to sound more natural in another and orthographic interference includes the spelling of one language altering another.

The most common source of error is in the process of learning a foreign language, where the native tongue interferes; but interference may occur in the other contact situations (as in multilingualism). In learning L1 certain habits of perceiving and performing have to be established and the old habits tend to intrude and interfere with the learning, so that the students may speak L2 (or FL) with the intonation of his/her L1 or the word order of his/her L1 and so on.

During communication in the target language, a kind of transfer or interference can be faced:

2.4 Types of Interference

Ellis (1997) refers to interference as 'transfer', which, he says, is 'the influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of an L2'. He argues that transfer is governed by the learners' perceptions about what is transferable and by their stage of development in L2 learning. In learning a target language, learners construct their own interim rules.

When an individual's understanding of one language has an impact on his or her understanding of another language, that individual is experiencing language transfer. There can be negative transfer, otherwise known as interference, when the understanding of one language complicates the understanding of another language. Alternatively, there can be positive transfer. Knowing one language can aid in developing skills for a second language. Language interference is the effect of language learners' first language on their production of the language they are learning. It means that the speaker's first language influences his/her second or his/her foreign language.

Language transfer refers to speakers or writers applying knowledge from their native language to a second language. It is most commonly discussed in the context of English Language Learning, but it can occur in any situation when someone does not have a native-level command of a language, as when translating into a second language. It is important to know that there are three types of interference or transfer:

- **Interference or positive transfer:** Its structures resemble each other and accelerate learning. The structures already existing in the mother tongue, with very slight adjustments, can be transferred to the foreign language.
- **Interference or negative transfer:** This occurs when the structures are different in both languages and retard learning.

These are the most difficult and yet the most necessary to address the most difficult and the less obvious change.

- **Interference or zero transfer:** It comes up when there are no similar structures in the mother tongue.

When learners communicate in a target language, they have used some L1 structures to produce appropriate responses in L2, producing semantically acceptable phrases. Subsequently, the learners have also used L1 structures interchangeably with L2 structures, producing inappropriate L2 responses, indicating an interference of L1 on L2. These structures are used to make them understood and reflect the way they arrive at a certain usage at a specific point (Faerch & Kasper, 1983) These structures do not reflect failure in any way but are a means to increase their resources in order to realize their communicative intentions.

In using the L1 structures, the learners have taken some risks that include guessing of a more or less informed kind. They have attempted to use invented or borrowed items, all more or less approximated to the rules of L2 structure as far as their knowledge of L2 allows, when the learners experience gaps in their L2 syntactical structures, they adjust the form of their L2 speaking responses by using syntactical items which are part of their L1.

The analysis of the learners' speaking revealed the extent to which their L2 responses are affected by their L1, the procedures used to express concepts for which L2 syntax is unknown and the extent to which and the manner in which L1 syntax interferes with L2 (Bialystok, 1990).

The L2 errors made are traceable to the learners' L1 and we can conclude that there is definite interference of L1 in L2 as indicated the learners relate L2 syntax to what they already know about language (Ellis, 1997).

CHAPTER III

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Type of Research Study

In this project the researchers had to expose some factors produced by interference between L1 on L2 concerning speaking among the students of first year of Intermediate Intensive English I, from Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador.

As a researcher team it is necessary to take an appropriate method to study the problematic situation through a methodological approach and research design to develop the investigation. The qualitative method was used in order to answer the research question, where the research team highlights the problems that students face when they try to communicate in the target language.

Due to characteristics of the qualitative method as to analyze study and find strategies to know the reality about the object studied, it is needed to describe the investigation with exploratory design, where the appropriate instrument was the survey. This permitted to the research team to gather important data from participants, which is a base for carrying the investigation project giving validity and seriousness to the investigation.

As the term suggests, exploratory research is often conducted because a problem has not been clearly defined as yet. It allows the researcher to familiarize him/herself with the problem or concept to be studied.

Those methods should get in the purpose of this investigation, the questions that were investigated and all the sources available as well.

Finally the sampling, the target population, data collection, instruments and interpretation techniques were described.

In other words, the results were generalized, because they are not representative of the whole population studied.

3.2 Sampling, population of study, instruments and procedure

Our research was carried out at the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador, during semester II - 2013. Below we will present:

- **Sampling:** Since the population of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés, Opción Enseñanza is very large; the researchers took a sample of 62 students from this major. This research involved students from 3 groups of Intermediate Intensive English I courses. The reason why three groups were chosen and not the whole population from the Licenciatura en

Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza was that those groups are specific kind of study about the research topic and that developing the study with the whole population would have meant to spend too much time and the investigation would have disadvantages for research team when developing the study project.

- **Instruments:** This was a survey, which included five closed questions and five opened questions prepared by the researchers. This was a survey due to exploratory study. The survey consisted of open and closed questions which gathered in a certain way some concerns about the problem arising referring to the effects of interference between L1 on L2 concerning speaking.
- **Procedure:** The researchers decided to administer the survey to the participants in order to get representative data. After collecting the information, the data obtained were analyzed qualitatively. It is presented by graphics in a pie chart and its respective image footer where is given percentage and an explanation of each response from each question. In this way this procedure facilitated the data gathered management to validate the research project.

CHAPTER IV

4. ANALYSES OF DATA

4.1 Data gathering

The data were gathered during Intermediate Intensive English I semester I-2013 courses. The researchers directed the focus population in order to answering the questions from survey. Then later the information was collected.

The survey was administered to three groups of Intermediate Intensive English I of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador. The process was developed in three days. The sample population was 62 students.

4.2 Data analyses process

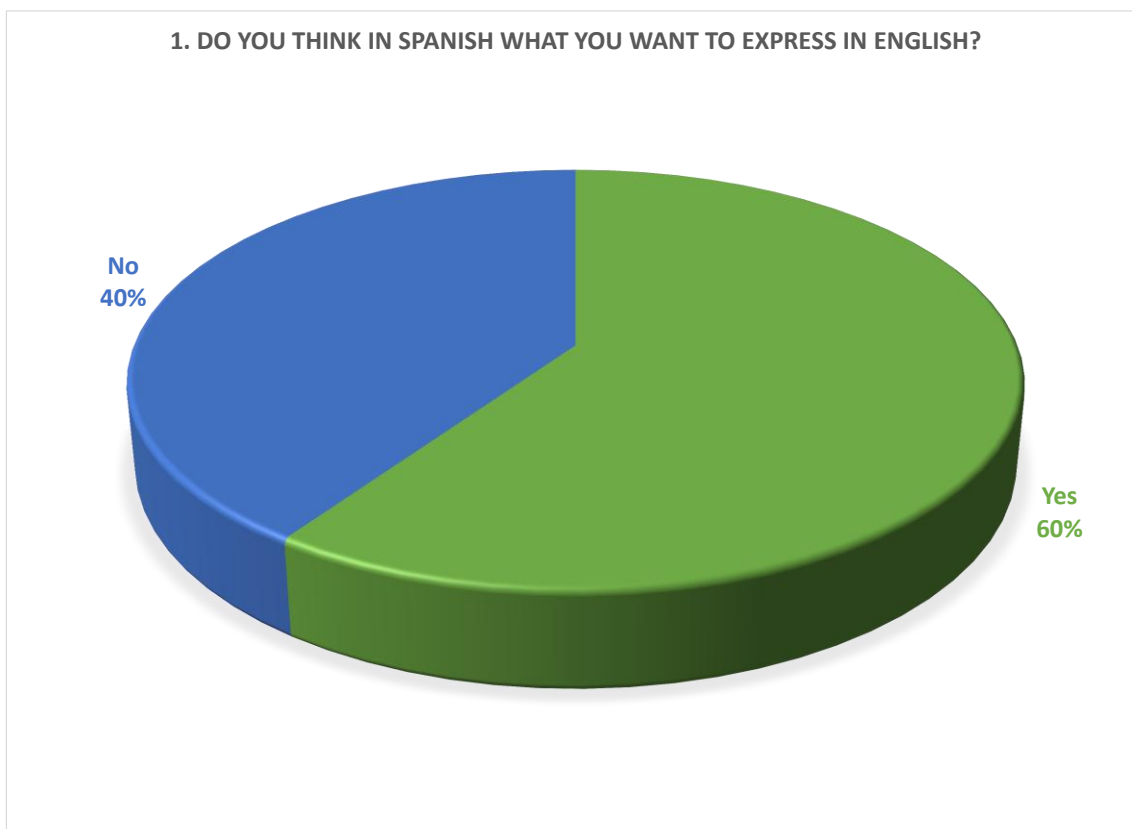
The process of evaluating data using analytical and logical reasoning to examine each component of the data provided.

As an important procedure, the data for this research were obtained through surveys which, were administered to first year students of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador.

4.3 Analyses of Results

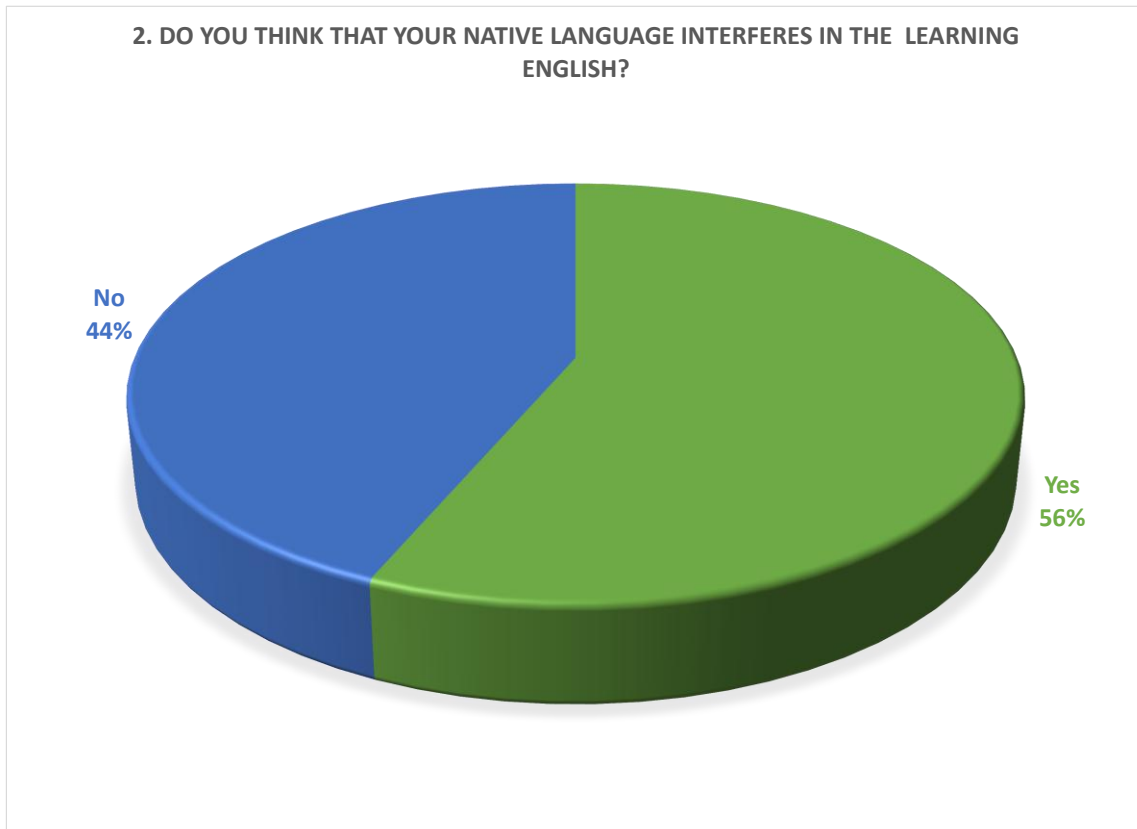
According to the data gathered through the research project: “Effects produced by interference of L1 on L2 concerning speaking in first year students of the Foreign Language Department” at the University of El Salvador the following information was obtained

Question #1:



The results showed that from a total of 62 students from the 3 groups of Intermediate Intensive English I, 60% recognized to first think in Spanish before expressing themselves in English. Meanwhile 40% of the students said that they did not think in Spanish before expressing themselves in English. This fact tells us that most students very often try to translate from L1 to L2 what they want to communicate.

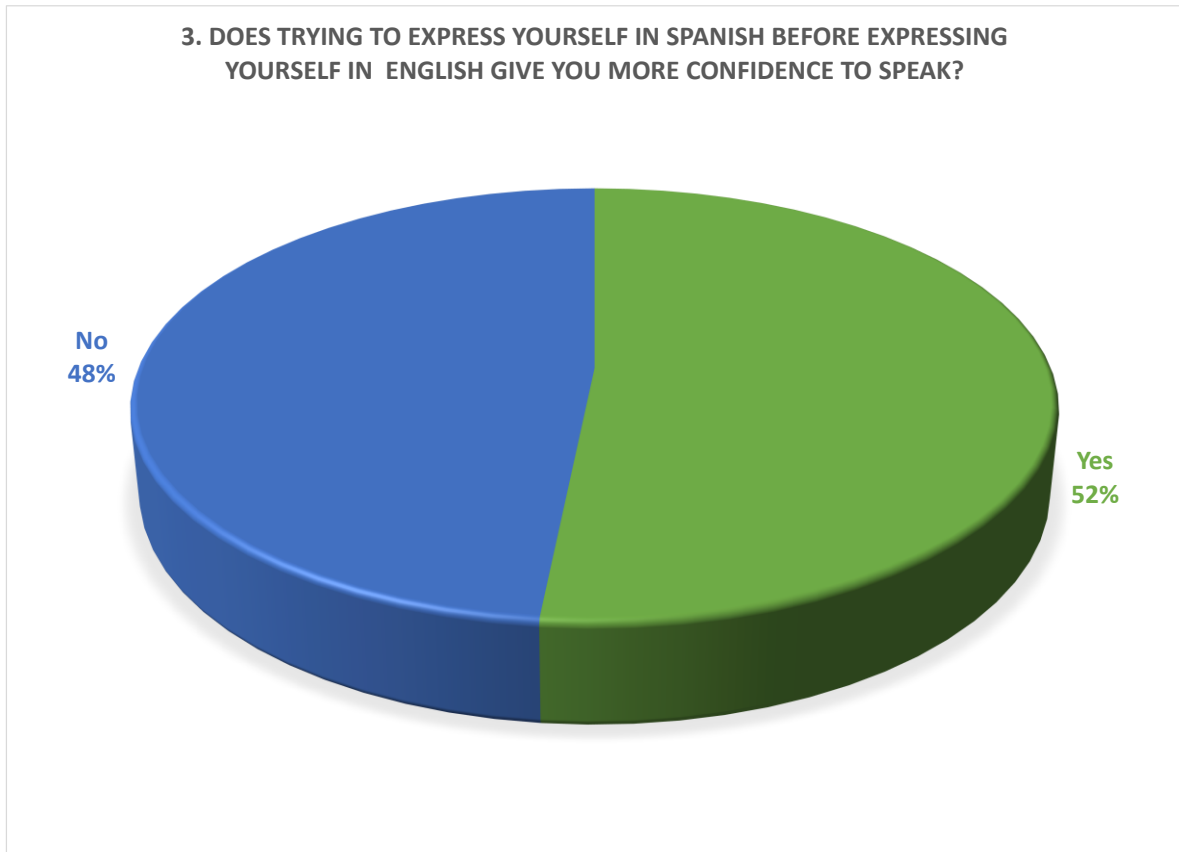
Question #2 :



The results explained that 56% of the Intermediate Intensive English I students pointed out that their native language interferes with their English learning process. However, 44% of the participants said that their L1 (Spanish) did not interfere in such process.

In some cases the native language interferes in learning English, since linguistic structures of L1 lead to make mistakes when they expressed in L2.

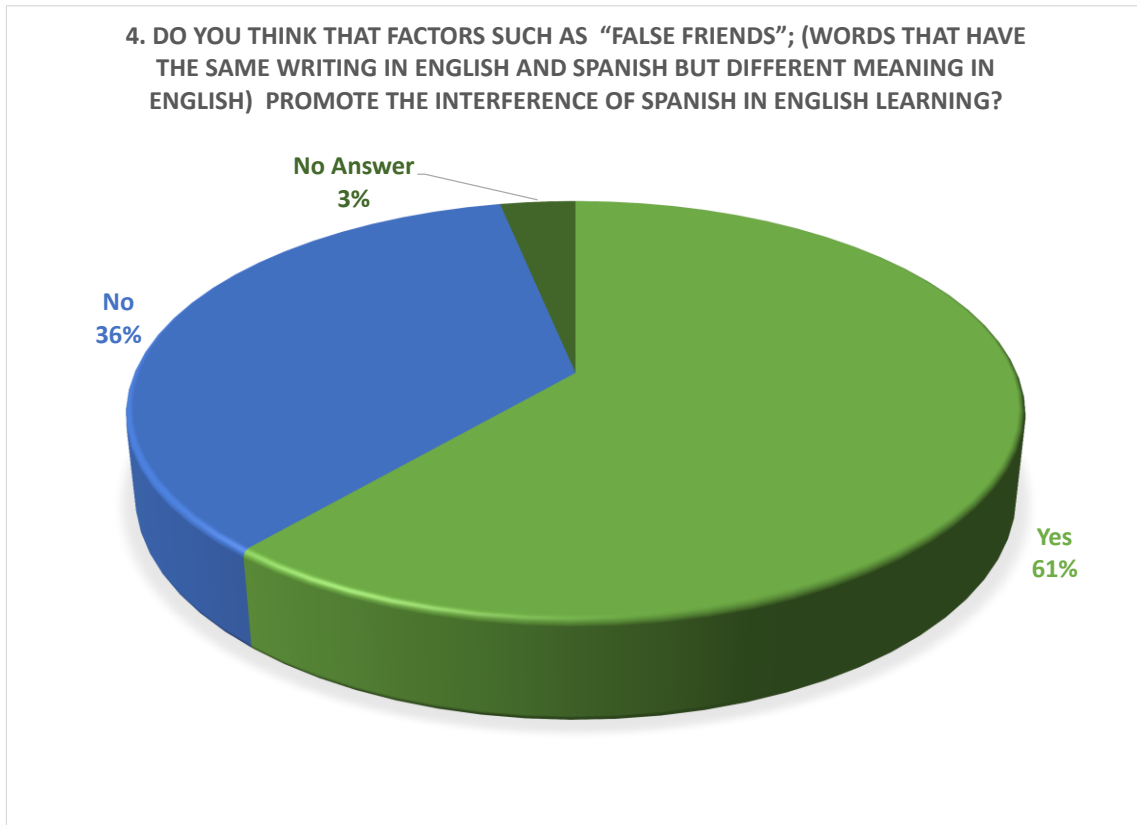
Question #3:



With regards to question number 3, 52% of the Intermediate Intensive English I students reported that they preferred expressing themselves in Spanish before expressing something in English because this situation gives them more confidence to speak. On the other hand, 48% of the population expressed that using their native language orally did not give them confidence when they tried to communicate on L2.

Most of respondents expressed in their mother tongue before expressing in English, since it gives more confidence at the moment of speaking in a correct way or when they try to bring a good conversation on L2.

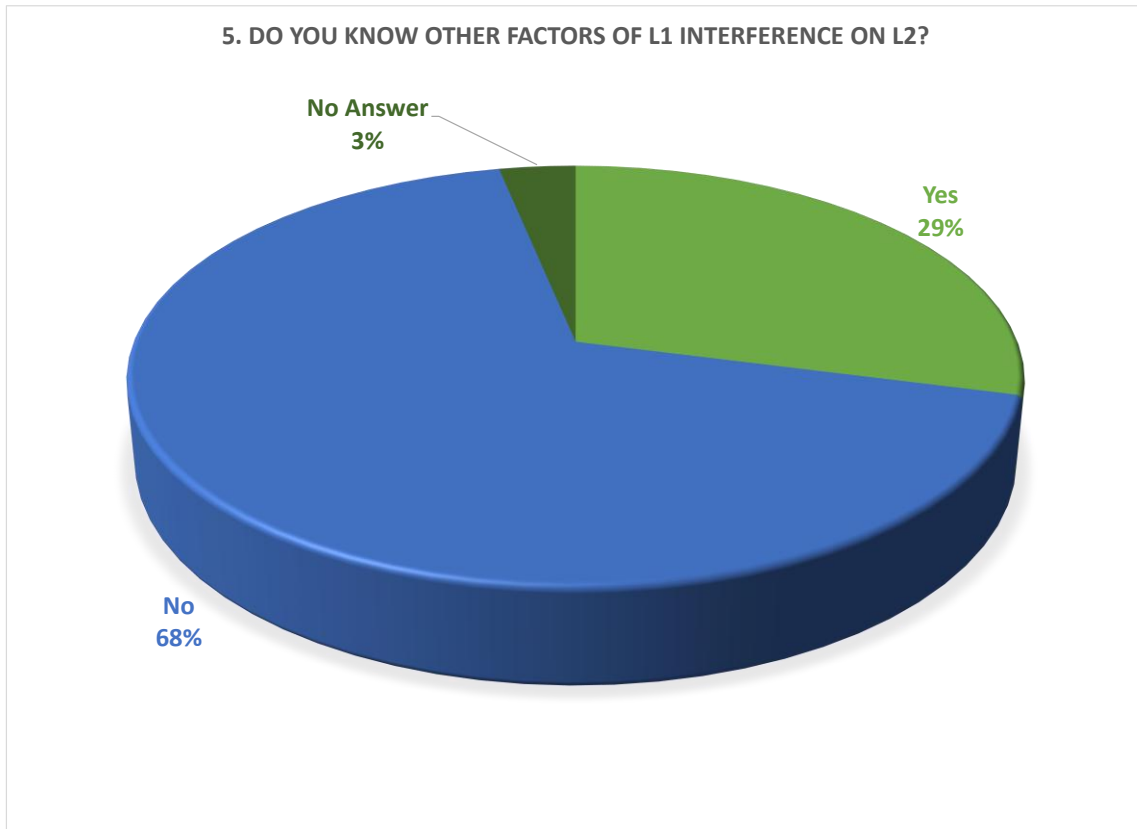
Question # 4:



The results of this question showed that 61% of the population expressed that one of the factors that promoted L1 interference on L2 or the target language is “false friends”, which are words that have the same writing in English and Spanish but different meaning in both language; however 36% of the participants stated that this factor was not related to it. Only 3% of the students did not answer.

Due to the structures in both languages since they are similar but different meaning, this makes confusion between Spanish and English vocabulary when the students expressed on L2, as a result the “false friends” or cognates promote interference of Spanish on English Learning.

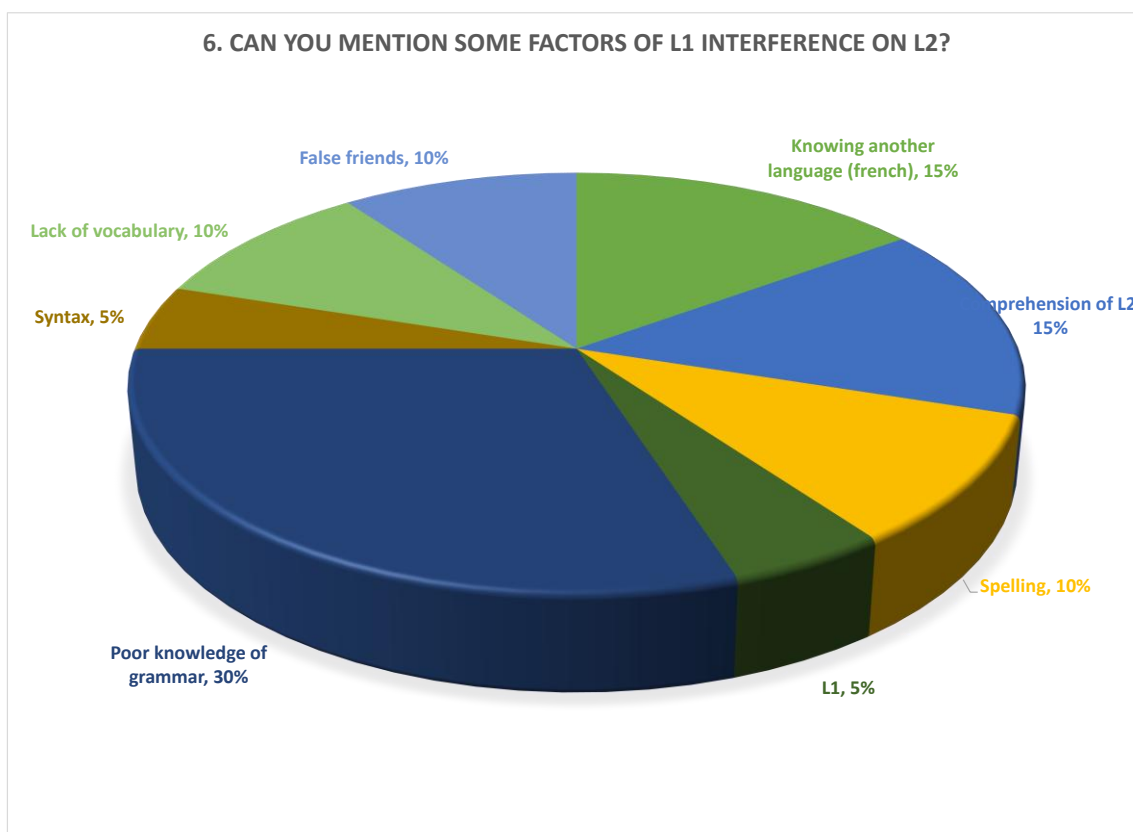
Question #5:



It can be observed that 29% of the students know other factors that produce L1 interference on L2. In contrast, 68% of the participants stated that they did not know other factors which produced the interference on the English Learning Process. Finally 3% of the students did not answer.

Most of participants are unaware about other factors from L1 interference on a target language.

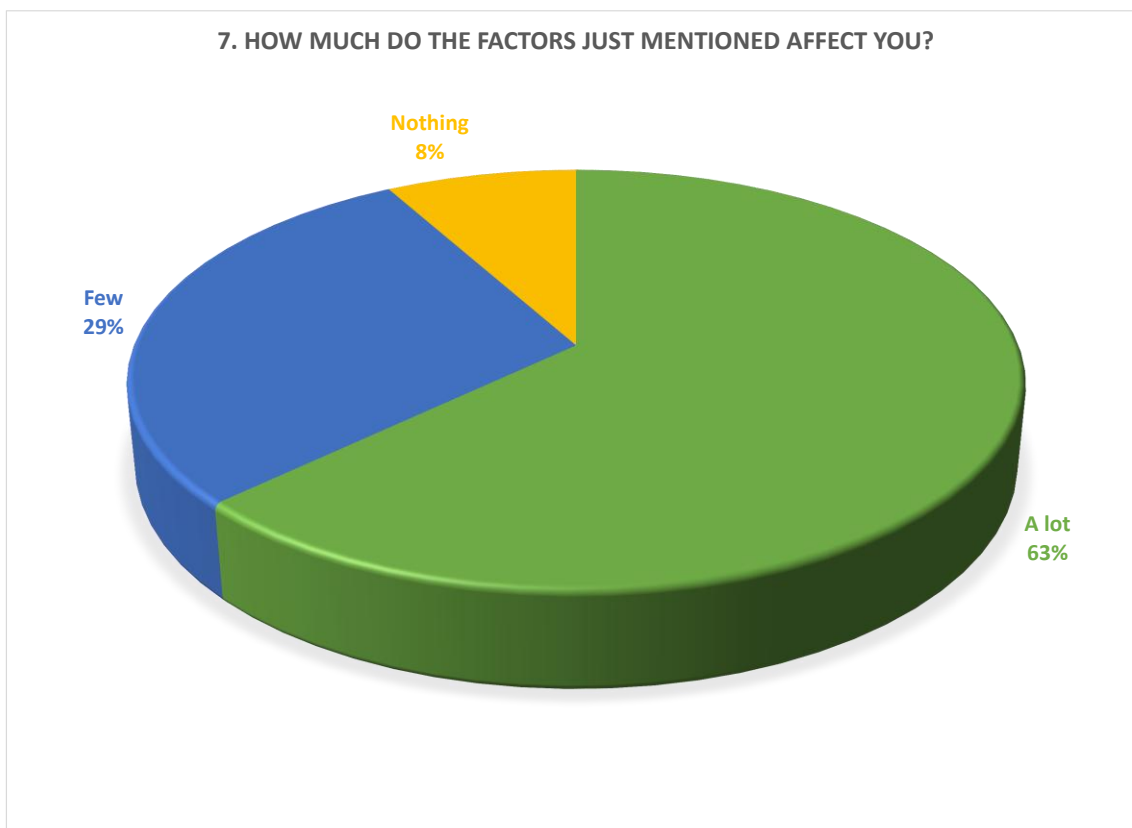
Question #6:



According to students of Foreign Language Department, poor knowledge of grammar represented by 30%, knowledge of another language as French pointed by 15%, the comprehension of L2 with 15%, spelling with 10%, also the “false friends” or cognates as 10%, the lack of vocabulary indicated 10%, finally, syntax with 5% and mother tongue expressed by a 5%, are the factors mentioned as interferences of L1 on L2.

The respondents expressed that all of them produce interference of L1 on L2, since students do not know how these factors work in L2, because of that, the factors could be used improperly and thus interference of L1 on L2.

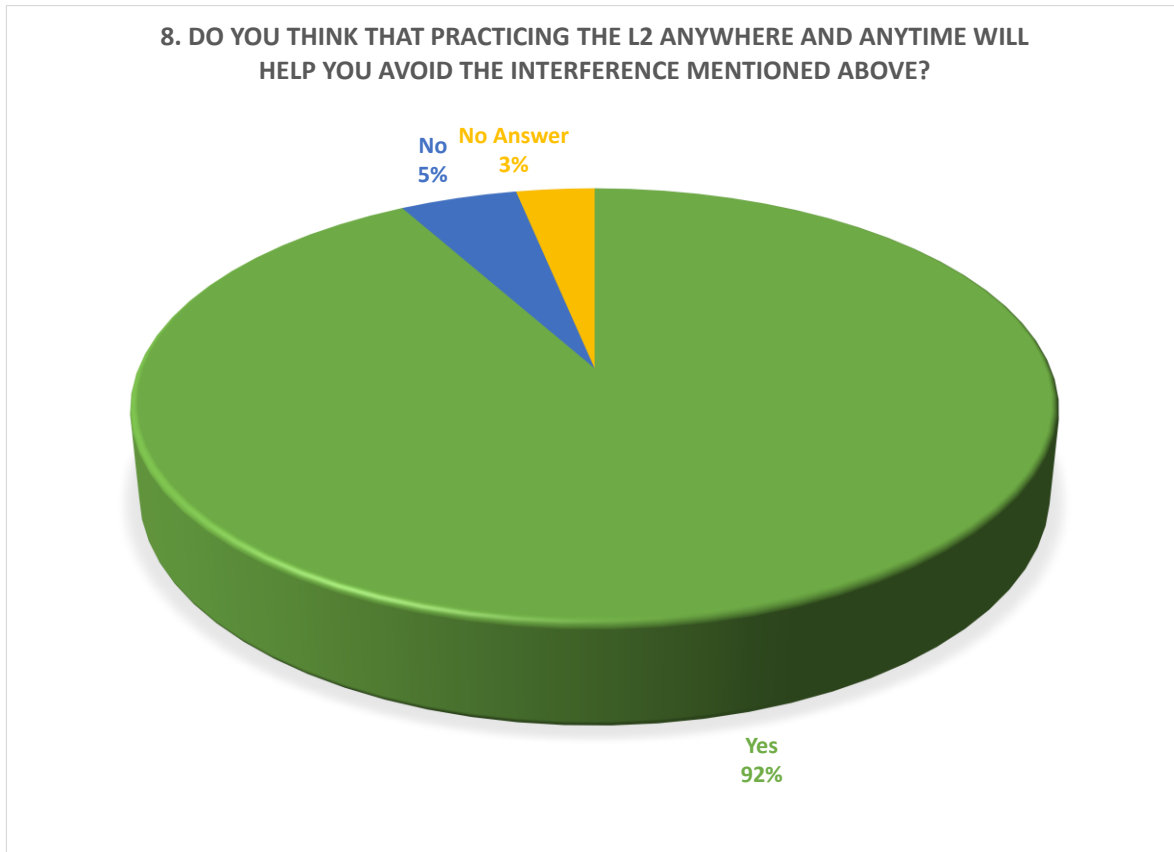
Question #7:



The results shows 63% of students said that the factors before mentioned affect them a lot when they express something in L2, on other hand, 29% of the participants reported that those factors affected them a few when they tried to communicate in English. Finally, 8% of the population pointed out that no factor affects them at all.

The factors just mentioned (in question number 6) affect students a lot, due to the interference of L1 on L2 is an important cause of errors during the English learning process.

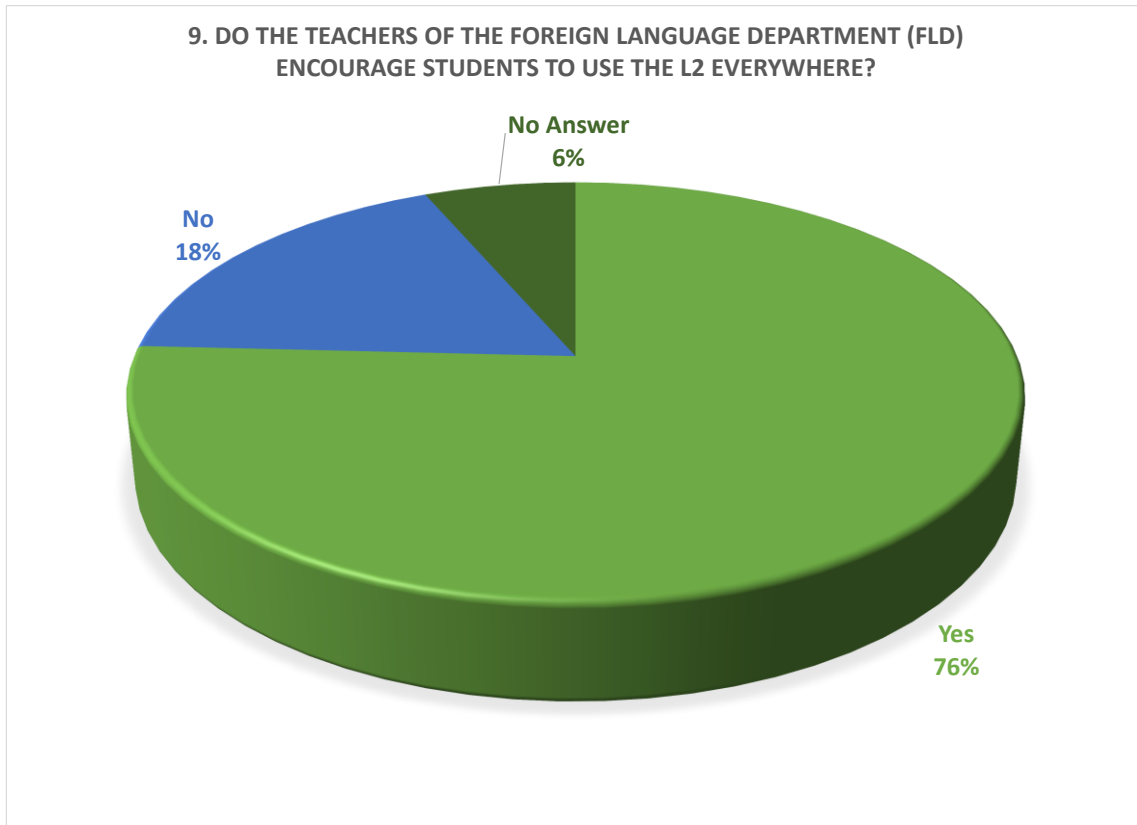
Question #8:



Concerning question number 7, 92% of the students said that practicing the L2 would help them avoid the interference of L1 with L2 learning, while the 5% said that practicing would not help them. Only 3% of them did not answer.

Practicing L2 anywhere and anytime, would help students for real communicative situations and not just for specific educational purposes. This is a valuable way to develop the L2.

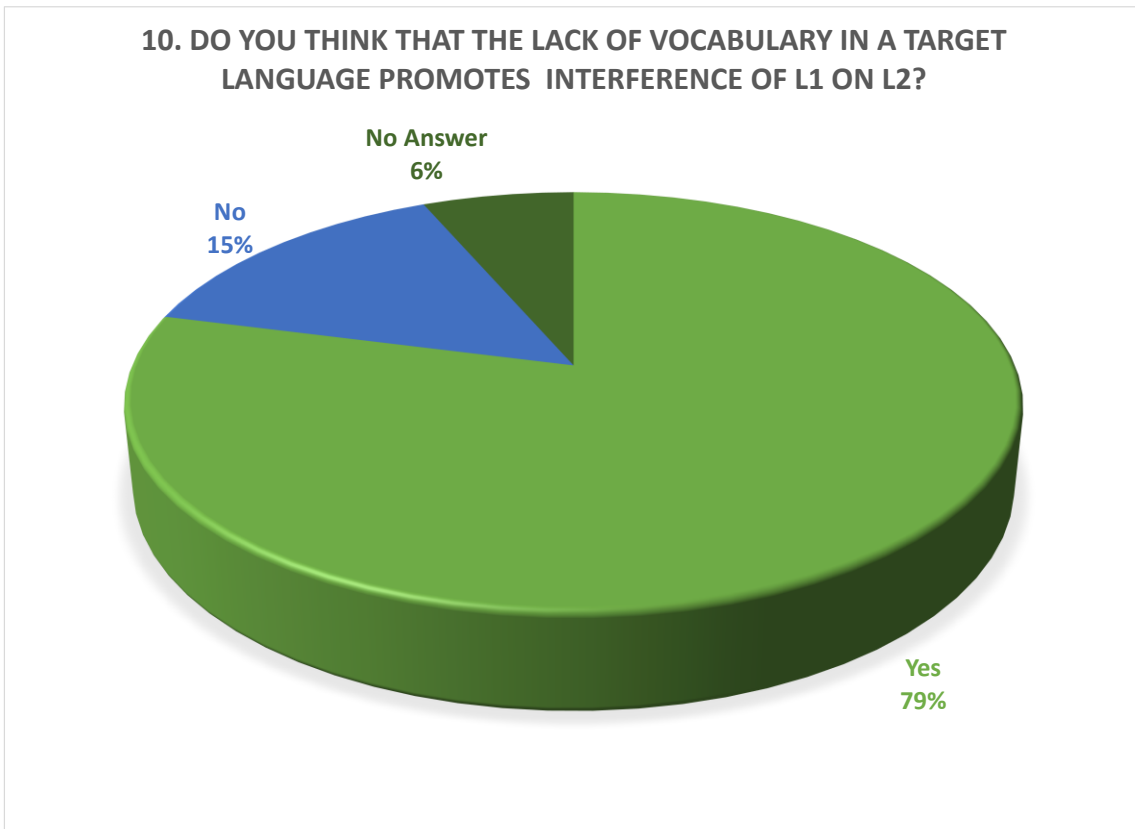
Question #9:



It can be observed that 76% of the students expressed that teachers from the Foreign Language Department encouraged them to use the L2 everywhere. Meanwhile 18% of the participants said that teachers did not encourage them to use it. Finally, just 6% of the students did not answer.

The majority of students was pointed that teachers encourage them to use the L2 everywhere, given that, students learn more and a better way the L2, and this can only be developed through the practice.

Question #10



Concerning the last question, 79% of students was pointed that the lack of vocabulary in a target language produced the interference of L1 on L2. While 15% of the participants expressed the opposite. Just the 6% of students did not answer.

The lack of vocabulary promotes the interference of L1 in L2 when they try to communicate in English, since they do not have enough knowledge in L2 vocabulary and they resort to L1.

4.4 Major findings

According to the results from the survey, this research presents as major findings the following:

1. 52% of the participants expressed that their native language (Spanish) interferes with the English learning process. At the same time, they recognized that expressing something in Spanish instead of expressing it in English gives them more confidence when they try to convey communication.
2. 29% of the students pointed that other factors like false friends, lack of vocabulary, lack of grammar rules, knowing another language (e.g. Spanish, French) greatly interfere with their learning of the target language. This situation which affects the command of such skills such as grammar, listening, writing, and reading, thus producing mistakes in the learning of English.
3. 92% of the respondents reported that practicing the target language continuously helps them to avoid interference at the moment of communicating in the L2.
4. 76% of the participants expressed that teachers at the FLD encourage their students actively to use L2 everywhere to improve the speaking skill.
5. 79% of the students reported that the lack of vocabulary affects them when they try to communicate in L2.

CHAPTER V

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Conclusions

Through the development of this research project and according to the analysis of the information gathered by the researchers and some background information, the following conclusions are reached:

- Language interference in learning target language, it has positive and negative effects.
- Most English students have difficulty at the moment of communicating in the target language because they come to basic courses without any knowledge about Target Language that they try to learn.
- The lack of vocabulary, phonology, syntax and grammar of L2 are some difficulties that make students produce L1 interference on L2.
- Students of Intermediate Intensive English I consider that cognates or “false friends” are the most common problem of interference that they have to deal with at the moment of communicating due to the fact that the words sometimes have the same spelling in both L1 and L2.

➤ 5.2 Recommendations

As a result of this research project, these are our recommendations:

1. Advisory courses must be opened at the beginning of the major of English in order to introduce knowledge about phonology, syntax and grammar to new students.
2. To include a specific subject which help students to clear the analysis of contrast between L1 on L2 or vice versa.
3. To provide students with authentic material in order to prevent mistakes during the learning process of a target language.

5.3 Limitations

During the investigation project, the following difficulties were faced:

1. At the moment of applying the instrument, three of the students were reluctant to cooperate.
2. It was necessary to explain some questions, because they did not know about the meaning of some words used in the survey.
3. During the data gathering process, some classes were suspended, affecting the courses which were chosen as a sampling for the instrument of this research; this situation delayed the process of investigation.

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ANNEXES



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

Topic: Effects produced by interference of L1 on L2 concerning speaking in first years students of the Foreign Language Department at the University of El Salvador.

Objective: To find out some effects produced by the interference of L1 on L2 concerning speaking in first year students of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza.

Directions: Answer the following questions based on your own experience as students of Licenciatura en Idioma Inglés Opción Enseñanza.

1. Do you first think in Spanish what you want to express in English?

Yes _____

No _____

2. Do you think that your native language (L1 or Español) interferes on the English learning (L2)?

Yes _____

No _____

3. Does trying to express yourself in Spanish before expressing yourself in English give you more confidence to speak?

Yes _____

No _____

4. Do you think that factors such as “false friends” (words that have the same writing in English and Spanish but different meaning in English) promote the interference of Spanish (L1) on English Learning?

Yes _____ No _____

5. Do you know other factors of L1 interference on L2?

Yes _____ No _____

6. Can you mention some factors of L1 interference on L2?

7. How much do the factors just mentioned affect you?

A lot _____ Few _____

8. Do you think that practicing the L2 anywhere and anytime will help you avoid the interference mentioned above?

Yes _____ No _____

9. Do the teachers of the Foreign Language Department (FLD) encourage students to use the L2 everywhere?

Yes _____ No _____

10. Do you think that the lack of vocabulary in a target language promotes interference of L1 on L2?

Yes _____ No _____