Trabajo Fin de Grado

The Role of the Mother Tongue in the Learning of English as a Foreign Language: Transfer

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0. **Abstract and Resumen**

**Abstract:** This project presents a bibliographical revision of some general issues in Applied Linguistics, such as *Contrastive Analysis* (CA), *Error Analysis* (EA) and *Interlanguage Analysis* (IA), which will help us understand the role of the mother tongue in the learning of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), as well as the different perspectives from which the concept of transfer has been viewed. Then, different levels of language will be introduced in order to describe how positive transfer and negative transfer (or interference) affect each particular level. Some methodological implications are also contemplated, to emphasize that the use of the mother tongue in the foreign language classroom should not be totally neglected, but that we can make use of it and it can be quite profitable.

**Key Words:** transfer, interference, Contrastive Analysis, Error Analysis, interlanguage analysis, second language, mother tongue, fossilization, methodological implications, strategies, phonetics and phonology, morphology, syntax, lexis, true friends, false friends, pragmatics, culture, Spanish speakers, English speakers, learners.

**Resumen:** Este proyecto presenta una revisión bibliográfica de algunos aspectos generales de la Lingüística Aplicada, tales como el análisis contrastivo (AC), el análisis de errores (AE) y el análisis de la interlingua (AI), que nos ayudan a entender el papel de la lengua materna en el aprendizaje del inglés como lengua extranjera, así como las diferentes perspectivas tenidas en cuenta para el concepto de transferencia. Después, se introducirán los diferentes niveles de la lengua para así describir cómo la transferencia positiva o negativa (o interferencia) afectan a cada uno de los niveles. Se tendrán en cuenta algunas implicaciones metodológicas para enfatizar que el uso de la lengua materna en la clase de lengua extranjera no debería rechazarse totalmente sino que se puede hacer uso de ella, y puede ser muy útil.

**Palabras Clave:** transferencia, interferencia, análisis contrastivo, análisis de errores, análisis de la interlingua, segunda lengua, lengua materna, fosilización, implicaciones metodológicas, estrategias, fonética y fonología, morfología, sintaxis, léxico, amigos verdaderos, falsos amigos, pragmática, cultura, hablantes de español, hablantes de inglés, aprendices.
1. Introduction

This project, as the title itself suggests, is aimed at describing the concept of transfer, an issue which is related to Linguistics and, more precisely, to Applied Linguistics. The two languages on which we are going to focus are Spanish and English, the former being the mother tongue, and the latter the learned foreign language. Transfer, as it will be described below, may be positive or negative, and in both cases it may be useful for methodological implications, especially positive transfer.

Several reasons made me think of this topic for my final assignment. First of all, transfer is an aspect which I really find interesting as it is a decisive point for the learning of languages. Moreover, it is curious, how depending on your mother tongue, the acquisition of the second language will undergo different problems (negative transfer or interference) or it will provide a basis which could be beneficial for the student’s learning (positive transfer).

If transfer is fascinating in itself, even more when this transfer is applied to the two languages around which your life goes, that is, Spanish and English in our case. Furthermore, my choice has to do with the fact that I would like to become an English teacher. In this line, a good way of coping with those problematic areas which could arise is to have certain knowledge about the issue in order to help the students in their learning, or even taking advantage of positive transfer in the teaching of English.

Two different subjects of my degree helped me decide transfer as topic of my final degree project. These subjects are “Applied Linguistics” and “Contrastive Linguistics”. Both introduced different theoretical concepts that will be discussed throughout this project and aroused my curiosity for researching on this field. This project is basically theoretical so that a wide range of bibliographical references have been employed for the discussion of the previous key words, which will be presented on the “References” section.

Of course, language learners will have to face other problems such as individual factors (aptitude, attitude, cognitive style, personality, etc.) and external ones (context, methodology, teacher, and so on). Nonetheless, as mentioned above in this essay I will concentrate on that particular point, transfer.
2. Objectives

It is important to present the different objectives considered when developing this project. Mainly, the project is aimed at discussing the role of the mother tongue in the learning of English as a Foreign Language, as the title of the project itself suggests. Nevertheless, a number of sub-objectives should be enumerated:

- To discuss some theoretical concepts and theories such as Contrastive Analysis (CA), Error Analysis (EA), Interlanguage Analysis (IA) or fossilization.
- To present common difficulties among Spanish speakers in the learning of English.
- To relate the concept of transfer with some methodological implications.
- To change the vision of transfer, as it may be positive as well.
- To make teachers be aware that errors/mistakes may be useful for their teaching and for anticipating problems.
- To make people be conscious that transfer may appear at all levels of language.

3. Methodology of the project

Regarding the methodology followed in the project, firstly a theoretical framework will be provided, in which all the theories which have to do with transfer will be described. In this way, the evolution of this concept through different theories will be understood.

After that, the body of the essay will be developed, that is, transfer, both positive and negative. This will be divided into several subsections corresponding to the different levels of language, that is, Phonetics and Phonology, Grammar, Lexis and Pragmatics; and another subgroup concerning the use of the mother tongue in the English Language Teaching (ELT) classroom. Culture would be also considered within Pragmatics, as both are intimately related. This organization will allow us to concentrate on the foretold concept, Transfer, in a more detailed manner, and to see some instances and practical parts of each subgroup.

Finally, a conclusion with the main ideas, concepts and suggestions will be given. This will be followed by all the bibliographical references employed for the development of the essay.
4. Some general issues in Applied Linguistics

Before focusing on the theory which gave rise to the concept of transfer, several theories and models should be considered, as basically those theories appeared as second thoughts or reactions to the previous ones. It is important to take into account the concept of acquisition of the first language, for the learning of the second language- And two theories are worth commenting on: Conductivism or Behaviorism and Mentalism or Nativist theories.

According to Bueno González (2001: 157), conductivists based on Pavlov’s experiments (1927), and the doctrines of Skinner (Verbal Behaviour, 1957) thought of language acquisition as a response to stimuli, what they called the Operant Conditioning. Chomsky opposed this theory and in 1965 proposed what is called LAD (Language Acquisition Device), which is a device which enables human beings to acquire a language, and makes us be predisposed to speak. This innate capacity of human beings also entails a hypothesis in which human beings construct surface structures based on deep ones.

Chomsky also presented other aspects which are relevant not only for the L1, but also the L2, such as Competence and Performance or Linguistic Universals. Competence and Performance are significant because children can understand (Competence) more than they can produce (Performance). And Linguistic Universals are relevant here in the sense that Chomsky believed there are universal structures shared by all languages – which, considering the aim of the essay, could favour positive transfer. Additionally, Linguistic Universals can be employed to predict which differences will entail difficulties, and which not. Thus, these studies have implied the consideration of the theory of transfer, and consequently, of interference.

It is also worth establishing a distinction between L1 (First Language or Mother Tongue), L2 (Second Language) and FL (Foreign Language). The L1 or Mother Tongue is the language we learn from our parents and the world around us since we are just babies. For the distinction between L2 and FL, the definition given by Stern (1983: 16) will be put forward:

In contrasting ‘second’ and ‘foreign’ language there is today consensus that a necessary distinction is to be made between a non-native language learnt and used within one country to which the term ‘second language’ has been applied, and a non-native language learnt and used with reference to a speech community outside national or territorial boundaries to which the term ‘foreign language’ is commonly given. A ‘second language’ usually has
official status or a recognized function within a country which a ‘foreign language’ has not.

In the seventies, functional theories appeared and linguists such as Piaget (1968) asserted that children acquire the language by interaction, and what they learn is determined by the world presented around them.

The above-mentioned idea gave birth to The Hypothesis of Linguistic Relativism. It has to do with the relation between language and thought. Language imposes a particular vision of the world, particular thoughts; and as we can suppose, this leads to some methodological implications in the learning of the L2.

As stated by Bueno González (2001: 159), from the study of L1 acquisition advantageous data can be obtained, such as:

- The importance not only of imitation but also practice.
- The natural order of linguistic elements: sounds, words, sentences…
- Listen first; then speak.
- The natural order of the skills: oral comprehension, oral production, reading, and writing.
- Lack of translation and formal study of grammar.

(My own translation)

Regarding the role of the mother tongue in the learning of another language, the followers of the conductivist theories viewed the mother tongue in negative terms, as interference in students’ learning. This resulted in several ideas and conceptions of the so-called Contrastive Linguistics.

4.1. Contrastive Analysis and Error Analysis

In the sixties and seventies, the need to create materials for foreign language teaching aroused a debate between two models, Contrastive Analysis (CA), mentioned above, and Error Analysis (EA), which will be described in detail below.
Contrastive Linguistics or Analysis is defined as “The systematic comparison of two or more languages, with the aim of describing their similarities and differences” (Johansson, 2007: 1).

This trend is part of applied linguistics and emerged from different studies developed by linguists such as Fries (1945), Weinreich (1953) and Lado (1957). According to these authors, and similarly to contrastive linguistics, errors result from the transfer, or more concretely, from the interference of the mother tongue in the second language. Moreover, errors can be predicted if differences between both languages (L1 and L2) are previously identified.

Fries (1945: 9) proposed the following: “The most efficient materials are those that are based upon as scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learners.”

Contrastive Analysis distinguishes two versions named Strong and Weak. The former considered the influence of the mother tongue as always negative, Interference. The latter recognized that negative transfer occurs more in adults than infants, and that the mother tongue could be positive on certain occasions (Bueno González, 1992).

Contrastive Analysis was developed by a structural model and was based on Conductivism, or Behaviorism; so that this model, according to Celce-Murcia and Hawkins (1985: 60 -61), presents the following assumptions:

(1) a language is a set of habits; (2) old habits (i.e., the native language) are hard to break while new habits (i.e., the second or foreign language) are hard to acquire; (3) the native language will of necessity interfere with the learning of a second or foreign language; (4) the differences between the native language and the foreign language will be the main cause of errors; (5) a linguistic CA can make these differences explicit; (&) language teachers and textbook writers must take the linguist’s CA into account when preparing teaching materials.

Therefore, three basic assumptions are taken for granted: on the one hand, learning is produced by transference of habits from the first language to the foreign one; on the other hand, if both languages have similar structures, the transfer will be positive. By contrast, if the linguistic systems of both languages present differences, the transfer will be negative, that is to say, interference may appear.
However, many of the foretold errors did not appear, and the previous idea was more reliable at the phonological level than at the grammatical and lexical ones. CA had several shortcomings, for instance, CA is pedagogically useful only if all the students in the class, or at least most of them, share the same mother tongue. Moreover, Stockwell et al. (1965) established a *Hierarchy of Difficulty*, as differences among language entailed different levels of complexity in learning. All these limitations gave rise to the evaluation of the theory, and different criticisms were made about its validity, such as the one by Wardhaugh (1970: 123):

> It [CA] exists in strong and weak versions, the strong one arising from evidence from the availability of some kind of metatheory of CA and the weak from the evidence from language interference. The strong version of the hypothesis is untenable and even the weak version creates difficulties for the linguist. Recent advances in linguistic theory have led some people to claim that the hypothesis is no longer useful in either the strong or the weak version.

Error Analysis originated as an alternative to the previous habit-formation theory. This new theory consisted in analyzing the errors produced by students and explaining the origin or causes of them, among them, interference. Besides, this theory based their errors on the actual speech of the students, whereas contrastive analysis was grounded on the formal description of both languages. As a consequence, the first language is an important factor in the development or acquisition of the second language; nevertheless, as soon as the student develops the system of the second language, this first language does not play such an important role.

We should also take into account the date for Error Analysis. According to Corder (1974: 125), “controlled productive material is error-provoking, whereas spontaneous production is error-avoiding” (italics in the original). And different strategies, as we will see, could be used for the avoidance of those errors.

The main objective was to study students’ mistakes, classifying them and using them for planning the lessons and materials so that students overcome errors. Lee (1957) proposed to classify them in stages (i.e. Beginners, Intermediate and Advanced); and this could be considered as the basis for the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFRL) classification, although undoubtedly from a completely different perspective, since the CEFRL does not classify students by their mistakes/errors, but for what they can do.
From the previous aim, we can establish an important distinction between the two above-mentioned theories (CA and EA), that is, the vision of the error. While errors in Contrastive Analysis are seen as something that should be avoided above all because they can involve the transfer of bad habits, in Error Analysis they are considered as useful elements for teachers because they give them an idea of students’ learning stage. So, according to Corder (1981), errors show that the learner is engaged in a creative process. This usefulness of Errors in Applied Linguistics and methodology was found in three different ways by Corder (1967): (1) errors tell the teacher what the students know and what they must learn; (2) errors provide evidence of how language is learned, for instances, the use of strategies; and (3) errors allow learners to test the hypotheses they formulate about language learning. Also, Corder (1974: 124) explains:

If we regard a language as a code, a set of rules for generating syntactically, phonologically and semantically well-formed sentences, then a breach of the code, i.e. a use of wrong rules of misuse of right rules may, but not necessarily, result in superficially ill-formed sentences.

A distinction between error and mistake has been made, and this, in accordance to Bueno González (2001: 162), is really profitable in didactics, and in his words, “la distinción error/ mistake se establece sobre la base de la presente dicotonomía” [competence and performance]. Thus, an error is produced when the student is not able to correct himself/herself, because of lack of knowledge; whereas when a mistake comes out, the student can rectify.

Similarly, Corder (1967 and 1971) distinguishes three kinds of faults: error (an ungrammatical form); mistake (an inappropriate form, socially speaking); and lapse (“a slip of the tongue”). Errors show that the learner has not mastered the L2 yet, for that reason Bell (1981: 172) defines error “as something which arises as a result of the L2 learning and is not, therefore, to be found in the L1 user of language”. By contrast, as Bell (1981: 172-173) points out, Mistakes are found both in L1 and L2, and they may be corrected by means of the so-called “repair strategies”, that is, strategies to put mistakes right. Lapses are the result of face-to-face communication, and both native and foreign speakers make these slips. It is important to take into account that errors are more in need of correction than mistakes and lapses; as mistakes can be corrected by learners themselves, and lapses should be ignored unless they affect communication and understanding.
Richards (1971) suggested the following classification of errors: (1) interlingual errors, (2) intralingual errors and 3) developmental errors. Interlingual errors are those caused by interference or negative transfer from the native language; intralingual errors are produced in the target language itself; and developmental errors have to do with strategies, where transfer also finds its place. Richards (1971: 214) did not reject CA totally, but he presented a weaker version:

Interference from the mother tongue is clearly a major source of difficulty in second language learning […] May errors, however, derive from strategies employed by the learner in language acquisition, and the mutual interference of items within the target language. These cannot be accounted for by contrastive analysis.

As it was proposed by Newmark and Reibel (1968) to explain L2 learners’ errors, “The adult can want to say what he does not yet know to say, and he uses whatever means he has at his disposal […] This seems sufficient explanation of how interference comes about”. Newmark (1966) wrote that errors which seem to be caused by interference, in fact, were consequence of ignorance.

Ellis (1985) presented seven theories to explain the process of acquisition of the second language, among them, the model of Variable Competence. In Bueno González’s (2001: 161) words, “resultado de la adquisición de nuevas reglas de L2 y la activación de las que ya existían, que configura distintos estadios de ‘interlengua’.”

4.2. Interlanguage Analysis

Both CA and EA occupied a second place with the coming of Interlanguage Analysis (IA), although as Celce-Murcia and Hawkins (1985: 60) state, we could say that CA survives in IA as language transfer; “i.e., the source language is one of many causes (or explanations) of the learner’s “systematic deviations” from the target language system”.

The above-mentioned concept interlanguage was introduced by Selinker in 1969, and he (1972) defined it as: “a separate linguistic system whose existence we are compelled to hypothesise, based upon the observed output which results from the (second language)
learner’s attempted production of a TL\(^1\) norm. This linguistic system we will call ‘interlanguage’.

And the science studying interlanguage is Interlanguage Analysis, which in Celce-Murcia and Hawkins’ (1985) words is defined in the following way: “IA is concerned with describing and understanding the total system that the second language learner uses in attempting to communicate in the target language.”

According to Corder (1977: 11), Selinker conceived of interlanguage as a “dynamic system”, and considered it as a process resulting from the interaction between the two languages (the L1 and the TL). Therefore, he regarded it as a “continuum”, that is, a process in which complexity and elaboration increase. This also involves a restructuration of the system each time the student approximates the TL. Dulay and Burt (1972) proposed this restructuring process could be seemed more as a Recreative process, which is similar to the Acquisition of the mother tongue.

In the restructuration or reorganization of the interlanguage in the process of becoming each time more similar to the target language, Selinker (1971) distinguished five processes: (1) language transfer; (2) transfer of training; (3) strategies of second language learning; (4) communication strategies; and (5) over-generalization of target language data.

Sometimes fossilization or stabilization may appear when “speakers of a particular native language will keep certain linguistic items, rules, subsystems in their interlanguage, no matter what amount of instruction they receive in the target language” (Selinker, 1971). The speaker or the language may become fossilized for two major reasons, the removal of the target language or because the speakers have reached a level which allows them to fulfill their communicative needs.

Nemser (1971) also dealt with the process of interlanguage, and he considered it as a sequence of “approximate systems”. Hence, the idea of interlanguage implies a connection between the two languages in the learning of a FL. Corder (1967), Richards (1971) and Nemser (1971) failed to concentrate on explaining errors in the second language by transferring features from the L1, which will be described below as Interference.

As far as transfer is concerned, strategies should be taken into account, as learning has to do not only with linguistics aspects, but also with cognitive ones. Richards (1971)

\(^1\) Target Language
formulated the theory of a hypothetical strategy, simplification. He defined simplification as “one way in which speakers of different languages can make a new language easier to learn and use”. Hence, it is a strategy of learning. Widdowson (1977) explained that teachers’ simplification should approximate to those of the learners at the stage they are in the learning process or recreating one. Corder (1983: 16) established a distinction between learning strategies and communication strategies. On the one hand, learning strategies are connected with the processing and retention of input, and are incorporated into the interlanguage; on the other hand, communication strategies are related to the use of language to communicate.

Following these studies, Tarone et al. (1983) classified communication strategies into several groups, among them, transfer or borrowing from the mother tongue. Similarly, within transfer we can describe two subgroups, literal transfer and language switch. The former has to do with the transfer of word for word from the native language, e.g. *He invites him to drink*. The latter consists in the use of a native word without translating it, for instance, the use of *balón* instead of *ball*, sometimes the use of a false friend because of its similarity, for example, *balloon*.

Another communication strategy, which Tarone et al. (1983) note, is “salirse por la tagente, evitando el punto en cuestión” (Bueno González, 2001: 165); one of the alternatives to do so is the use of the mother tongue. Pit Corder (1983: 16) also refers to this strategy, which he called risky strategies, using linguistic loans or changing to the L1, among other resources.

Therefore, firstly, interference is based on the theory concerning the association of stimuli, response, reinforcement and habits; and, secondly, holds a salient role in the notion of a universal grammar, because there are structures shared among languages, and linguistic systems which are specific of certain languages. Regarding the afore-mentioned idea, these differences would be more difficult to learn or acquire than those which are similar among languages.

5. Transfer

Alonso Alonso (2002: 20) affirms that, although several authors have coined transfer in a different way, the most accepted term is this one, and this is viewed as the influence of the L1 on the learning of the L2. She also presents different definitions of language transfer,
and for that, we are going to provide two different ones showing how transfer was considered at the beginnings of the theory, and the perspective authors have nowadays. On the one hand, Lado (1957: 2), a contrastive linguist, said the following about language transfer:

Individuals tend to transfer the forms and meanings, and the distribution of forms and meanings of their native language and culture to the foreign language and culture –both productively when attempting to speak the language and to act in the culture, and receptively when attempting to grasp and understand the language and the culture as predicted by the natives.

On the other hand, Jarvis (2000: 252) gives the following definition: “L1 influence [transfer] refers to any instance of learner data where a statistically significant correlation (or probability-based relation) is shown to exist between some feature of learners’ IL performance and their L1 background.”

As we can appreciate, the viewpoint towards transfer has differed since the beginnings. While in the first definition by Lado (1957: 2) a more radical and theoretical perspective is claimed, in the second, as Alonso Alonso (2002: 22) also states, Jarvis (2000: 252) is focusing on methodological foundations, and presenting a more practical definition of language transfer.

Slabakova (2013: 5) explains that the interest has increased in clarifying the difficulty in learning some structures. Dekeyser (2007) also discusses a number of linguistic constructions which are difficult to learn, or even impossible. One of the reasons would be interference.

When a student is learning a language as a foreign language, they already have some basic knowledge in their mother tongue and, according to Bestard Monroig (1989: 111-112), we should disregard it. Traditionally, this basis, as mentioned above, has been thought as influencing negatively (interference); however, this can be quite useful, and this is why we consider positive transfer.

Corder (1974: 130) notes the following:

Many errors bear a strong resemblance characteristic of the mother tongue, indeed many erroneous utterances read like word-to-word translations. This observation has led to the widely accepted theory of transfer which states that a learner of a second language transfers into his performance in the second language the habits of his mother tongue.
He also expounds that resemblance between the mother tongue and the L2 will foster facilitation, whereas if they differ, this will pose a learning problem, and subsequently interference.

Bueno González (1992: 163) presents several facts inherent in those students who have the foundation of their mother tongue promoting positive transfer:

i. Assimilation of the role of the language in everyday life.
ii. Understanding of language as a social institution.
iii. Knowledge of basic units conforming language: sounds, graphemes, syllables, words, phrases, clauses, sentences and texts.
iv. Knowledge of the different parts of speech.
v. Comprehension of different processes ruling sentences.
vi. Knowledge of the existence of a skeleton supporting the use of language such as linkers and strategies to avoid repetitions.

(Translated and adapted from the original)

5.1. Methodological implications of the mother tongue within the classroom

As we already know, transfer does not only undergo difficulties, but it can also facilitate the learning of our students; according to Carver (1983: 88) the mother tongue can have some methodological usefulness in the ELT. He also proposes certain situations in which the L1 can be employed, but considering some basic assumptions:

- The mother tongue is not forbidden by authorities.
- The teacher and students share the mother tongue.
- There is just one mother tongue in the classroom.
- Students have an academic knowledge of the mother tongue.

(Adapted from the original)

Students, as Spratt (1985: 199-202) explains, tend to use the L1 when they are lost or they do not know a word; when they do not understand quite well the instructions or activities; or when they want to be relaxed. Bueno González (1992: 164) also considers what has been called “task management”, that is, students come to their mother tongue when they organize the different steps of an activity, turns, etc. or they comment on what they have to do.
Deller and Rinvolucri (2002:10) explain that in the last forty years different linguists have advocated that the mother tongue is a kind of obstacle and it should not be present within the classroom; however, their “contention is, on the contrary, that mother tongue (MT), is indeed the mother of the second, third and fourth languages.” Furthermore, they introduce some benefits for the students when the teacher uses the MT, such as a faster process at beginner levels, grammar can be better understood, vocabulary differences are easier to grasp, and activities related to linguistic intelligence will be more enjoyable.

Now, in my own words, I am going to discuss about different techniques that Carver (1983) presented for the use of the mother tongue in different situations in the classroom. Additionally, Bueno González (1992) will be taken into account as he based some parts of his article on Carver’s one. Therefore, both authors will be followed throughout this discussion. The afore-mentioned techniques are the following:

i. **Quick translation equivalent.** This is mainly used for the comprehension of vocabulary, instead of giving a definition, conceptualizing or miming the word. In fact, it is less time consuming. According to Bueno González (1992: 165), teachers prefer other means such as visual aids, association with places and situations, definition, etc. but because of time reasons, the translation of words is employed.

ii. **Explaining rules.** If the main aim is their understanding, sometimes a good alternative is the use of their mother tongue to explain rules. Bueno González (1992: 164-165) specifies this is beneficial for beginners, because they will understand the rules better.

iii. **Making explicit comparisons.** When one aspect of language is really different in both languages, it may be profitable to establish a comparison between the two for the students to understand the difference better. Bueno González (1992: 165) explains that interference and the possibility of making mistakes oblige teachers to make comparisons. Similarly, he clarifies there are certain issues that cannot be assimilated by the students without considering equivalents, for instance, English equivalents to the Spanish subjunctive or the distribution of the passive voice in both languages, English and Spanish.

iv. **Preparing a written composition.** Frustration, especially in adults, may appear when they want to convey complex ideas, but they can express just childish and simple things. To avoid that, the teacher may allow them to transmit those
ideas in their mother tongue, and then, the teacher can provide equivalent expressions. Surely, their compositions will be enriched.

v. Gradual approximation to reading. The term gradual approximation was taken from Widdowson (1978) which describes what Burlings (1968) named outlandish proposal. He proposed approaching texts by the means of presenting texts in sequence at different levels of difficulty, e.g. mother tongue, mother tongue in target language word-order, mother tongue with target language word-order and word-endings, and so on.

Within the field of reading comprehension, Bueno González (1992: 165) suggests the use of reading comprehension questions in the mother tongue, avoiding the “calque” of answers from the text, and ensuring they are reflecting and thinking about the answers.

vi. Prompts in dialogue or bilingual editions in readings.

vii. Intercambio. This term was used by John Cromsham (Krashen, 1981). According to Carver (1983: 90), this is “a technique in which learners of foreign language are paired with natives of the foreign language. The pairs are encouraged to converse freely, and the only rule is: speak your own language.” This is really useful for fostering communication and participation in class.

viii. Language switching. Personally, I think this is the most interesting technique. This phenomenon, which has appeared in many different parts of the world, may be useful in the ELT. One of our objectives in communication is that students do not stop and do keep going; language switching enables this. When students do not know a word, instead of stopping and asking for it or something like that, they use the word in their mother tongue. Therefore, students are engaged in the communicative use of language at an earlier stage and they are more fluent. The teacher may link this technique with the correct use of form, by providing some feedback in which students reflect about the language employed, and the teacher provides correct forms of language. Bueno González (1992: 165) considers it as a strategy which allows students to communicate fluently.

ix. For testing (the knowledge of students in the foreign language).
Bueno González (1992: 164) explains that the most common uses of the mother tongue by teachers are giving instructions; explaining rules, particularly grammatical ones; transmitting a concrete meaning; and testing knowledge. Bueno González (1992: 167) also takes into account the following:

None of the previous assumptions claim the replacement of the target language as the vehicle of communication by the L1, but the consideration of the L1 as an important element for foreign language learning. Neither are they asking for the coming back of the Grammar-Translation method.

(My own translation)

According to Carver (1983: 92), the major aim of these assumptions has been:

[…] to suggest to teachers that the mother tongue has a useful, though limited part to play in teaching a foreign language. Clearly the assumption is that these teachers make extensive use of the foreign language in the foreign-language class. This is as it should be, and any use of the mother tongue should be kept to a minimum.

Besides, the use of the mother tongue, according to Bueno González (1992: 168), depends on the teacher, and it can be interpreted as possible modifications to the communicative method, structural method or direct method. From my point of view, different techniques and methods should be employed, because all of them have beneficial aspects, and our students are different and one method does not work for everyone; so that a variety of activities will foster personalized teaching.

Spratt (1895: 202) mentions some factors that teachers could consider determining when they can use the mother tongue:

- Determining the affective and cultural role of the students.

- Distinguishing activities whose objective is the expression in the foreign language from those in which the mother tongue may be helpful such as expressing in Spanish what the student has understood from an English text.

- Limiting the situations in which students use the L1 and deciding if the use of the L2 is necessary.
- Considering objectives and other questions such as time, the unnecessary complexity of certain aspects, and so on.

- Being consequent with the method used.

- Bearing in mind the future use of the foreign language on the part of the students.

(Adapted from the original)

As suggested by Deller and Rinvolucri (2002: 24), “It is a good idea to ask for feedback from our students regularly”. This will make them reflect on what they have already learned, and the teacher will realise if they have really understood it. Nonetheless, sometimes it is difficult for them to provide their feedback in English and here is where the mother tongue intervenes. If we allow them to use the mother tongue, feedback could occur at beginner levels.

5.1.1 Translation as a strategy and an activity

The use of the mother tongue is rigorously linked to translation from two different perspectives, as a strategy employed by students or as an activity proposed by the teacher in class.

In the history of the teaching of foreign languages, translation has an essential role in the Grammar-Translation method, but it has received plenty of criticisms. In Bueno González’s opinion, translation is useful for two reasons:

- It reflects the mind operation of foreign language learners; so that it becomes a strategy helping the student in learning. Thus, it has a role in the process of acquiring a language.

- It is a concrete activity carried out in the class, as has been described above.

Sometimes, quick translation is employed even in direct methods, mainly in the first stages or with beginners. Therefore, from my viewpoint we should consider the L1 as a means more than an obstacle.

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According to Deller and Rinvolucri (2002: 77), translation may be a sort of alternative for varying the regular methodology of the class, and it may be useful to catch students’ attention when they realise the usefulness of knowing two languages and that they can translate texts from one language to another. In their own words, “Playing with two languages will fascinate the students with strong linguistic intelligences”.

5.2. Phonetics and Phonology

First of all, we should take into account that Spanish and English consonant systems present many similitudes; nonetheless, the Spanish vocalic system differs considerably from the English one. This may pose difficulties in the Spaniards’ pronunciation of English. Four different features are commonly found in Spaniards’ pronunciation of English:

- Difficulty in recognizing and using English vowels.
- Strong devoicing of final voiced consonants.
- Even sentence rhythm, without the typical prominences of English making understanding difficult for English listeners.
- Narrower range of pitch (in European speakers), producing a boring effect.

(Coe, 2001: 91)

As Mott (2005: 245) explains, in the learning of foreign languages the speakers “tend to transfer their own sound system and produce sounds which they have been accustomed to making since they first learned to speak. Thus, our pronunciation of foreign language is inhibited by our own articulatory habits.” Additionally, the Spanish should remember that phonemes are not letters, and consequently, that there is no correspondence among them as we will discuss below.

5.2.1 Consonants and vowels

According to Moulton (1962), there are four types of errors: phonemic errors (1), phonetic errors (2), allophonic errors (3) and distributional errors (4). First of all, we are going to focus on the first two errors and the different phenomena that Bell (1981: 178-179) stated.
As Bell (1981: 178) claims, sound substitution is “the most straightforward form of interference”. Sound substitution has to do with the replacement of a sound of the L2 by one of the mother tongue; for example, the use of the Spanish dental /t/ for the English alveolar /t/. Nevertheless, this substitution does not interfere in intelligibility and communication. Thus, it should not be our priority as teachers to correct it.

Coe (2001: 92-93) shows a series of problems connected to the consonant system, which are related to the aforesaid phenomenon, sound substitution; and we are going to describe them. The first problem is that Spaniards do not aspirate initial voiceless plosives /p/, /t/ and /k/ as the English do, so that those phonemes more often than not tend to sound to English native speakers as their voiced correspondence, /b/, /d/ and /g/. This may affect intelligibility. Secondly, voiced plosive are quite unlikely to occur in final position in Spanish, so again, they substitute /t/, /k/ and /p/ for /d/, /g/ and /b/ respectively. Another problem has to do with the three nasal sounds /m/, /n/ and /ŋ/. Spanish speakers tend to replace /m/ by /n/ and /ŋ/, for instance, /driːn/ or /driː ŋ/ instead of /driːm/ (dream).

Other cases proposed by Coe (2001:93), which we could also classified under the label coined by Bell (1981: 178) sound substitution, are the following: (1) /h/ is replaced by the velar fricative ch in Scottish loch which is the most similar phoneme to the English /h/; (2) the English /j/ is pronounced like the Spanish /y/ in words such as yes, yellow, young, and so on; (3) before a vowel Spaniards use /g/ rather than /w/, for instance, /gud/ for would.

Another phenomenon described by Bell (1981: 179) is underdifferentiation. This appears when the learner does not “recognize in the L2 a phonemic distinction”. Underdifferentiation is commonly found by Spaniards in the following sounds /s/-/z/ and /b/-/v/. As Coe (2001: 93) stated, the English voiced sound /z/ is not part of the Spanish consonant system, thus speakers associate both phonemes (/z/ and /s/) to the only Spanish phoneme /s/, and this sometimes results in the pronunciation of two different sounds as if they were homophones or the same word, these instances are pence and pens pronounced as pence, lacy and lazy as lacy, etc.

The same phenomenon affects /b/ and /v/, as mentioned above. Coe (2001: 93) explains this as follows: “Spanish only has one sound in the area of /b/ and /v/ (pronounced intervocally as a bilabial fricative or continuant); hence confusion between pairs like vowels and bowels.”
Underdifferentiation, as Coe (2001: 93), once more, wrote, also affects the English phonemes /ʃ/, /tʃ/, /ʒ/ and /dʒ/. European Spanish only has /tʃ/, so that they produced all the aforesaid phonemes as /tʃ/. This may provoke confusion between sheep, cheap, and jeep; or pleasure may be produced as pletcher, plesher or plesser.

This interlingual error, underdifferentiation, is more serious than sound substitution; although there are many cases in which intelligibility is possible, there are others in which underdifferentiation may give rise to misunderstandings, such is the instance of bowels-vowels.

This also happens with vowels, particularly in the distinction between long and short vowels. Bell (1981: 179) suggests “the lack of an /i:/ - /i/ distinction” which entails no contrast between minimal pairs such as beat – bit or sheep – ship. Coe (2001: 91) also puts forward other examples such as (1) the use of the Spanish /a/ for the three vowels /æ/, /ʌ/ and /a:/; (2) Spanish /o/ is employed for /əʊ/ and /ʊ/ as in caught; and (3) the English phonemes /u:/ and /u/ are pronounced as /u/, giving rise to the confusion of words such as pull and pool.

*Overdifferentiation*, according to Bell (1981: 179), consists in producing a phonemic contrast which does not exist in the L2, as it does in the learner’s mother tongue. It is a single-double phenomenon. In Spanish we have the single /t/ and double /tr/. So, if Spaniards find a double <rr> in English, they will attempt to produce it as it were a double Spanish /rr/. There are not many words with double <rr>, and most of them are borrowings, such as terrace and curriculum.

Moreover, Mott (2005: 262) expounds that Spaniards “either weaken or elide the final plosives of foreign words like club, slip, autostop, light, chip and spot.” Also, the Spanish tend to produce the English /ŋ/ as /n/ or by nasalizing the preceding vowel and not pronouncing the /ŋ/ sound.

### 5.2.2 Consonantal clusters

Following Coe (2001: 193-194), we can also emphasize that consonant clusters, as they are much less frequent in Spanish than English, tend to be simplified by Spaniards. In fact, the Spanish language does not have final clusters. Some examples proposed are espres
(express), instan (instant), grab (grabbed), etc. Mott (2005: 262) provides a number of examples on the same topic, such as lor(d), sprin(t), flir(t), stan(d) and relax /reˈla(k)s/. As we can appreciate, in most of the instances, it is the final consonant that it is omitted.

In addition, Coe (2001: 193-194) notes another problem for Spanish speakers of English, that is, initial /s/ plus another consonant as in Spain, sceptic, stop, and so on. As in Spanish the /s/ in this position is in need of a supporting vowel, they pronounce the previous words as espan, esceptic and estop.

Mott (2005: 248) points out that the above-mentioned phenomenon occurs in the combinations [sp, sk, st, sf, sm, sn, sl]. In accordance with this author, “A Spaniard always adds an [e-] to such sequences as they are not tautosyllabic in Spanish: the [s] belongs to the preceding syllable. [...] Therefore, Spanish speakers of English find it hard to break the habit of saying e-spoon for spoon, etc.”

5.2.3 How spelling influences pronunciation

In the Spanish language there is a sort of correspondence between graphemes and phonemes. This habit is transmitted to the English language by Spanish speakers, provoking, as Coe (2001: 94) says, the pronunciation of “English words letter by letter”. Some examples provided by the aforesaid author are: asked as /asket/, break as /break/, answer as /answer/, and friend as /frien/, although in this case there is also reduction because the final cluster.

As regards the example described as overdifferentiation, Coe (2001: 94) classifies it as an error provoked by the correspondence spelling-pronunciation in Spanish. He explains that “in Spanish […] double r is rolled […], and this habit carries over.”

Mott (2005: 245) explains that “the fact two languages use the same alphabet deceives us into believing that the same symbol used in the two languages has an identical value.” Therefore, we could say that the fact that this occurs between the Spanish and English languages sometimes gives rise to the assumption that the Spanish sound would be similar or identical to the English one. An example given by Mott (2005: 245) would be “the [d] of Spanish lado is identical to the [d] of English door or made”.

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5.3 Grammar: Morphology and Syntax

Coe (2001: 98) compares English with Spanish, saying that Spanish has “highly inflected verb systems; have freer word order; show gender and number in adjectives and nouns; have no modal auxiliaries; use the passive much less and have a subjunctive mood.” Mainly, what I am going to comment on in the section is based on Coe (2001: 98 - 109), even most of the examples will be taken from this reference.

I would also like to take into account Lardiere’s (2005) Feature Re-assembly hypothesis. This hypothesis mainly “postulates that learning a second language involves figuring out how to reconfigure the formal features of the native language and those available from UG into new or different configurations in the L2” (Slabakova, 2013: 6). Therefore, those features which are different can pose a problem in L2 learning as there is a language variation (see Adger 2003).

5.3.1 Word-order and omissions

First of all, word-order should be considered as the Spanish language has a freer word-order than English, which is quite fixed. This will pose different problems such as subject-verb inversion in statements, the position of frequency adverbs and adverbials or the order of adjectives.

Considering Subject-verb inversion, sometimes Spaniards invert the subject and the verb in statements because of the influence of Spanish as it has a less fixed word order, for instance, *Arrived the fireman ten minutes later. Although this is not discussed by Coe (2001), we should say Spanish learners do not commonly apply the subject-auxiliary inversion in questions, as it does not happen in the Spanish language, for example *Where you are going? Once they learn it, they tend to overgeneralize that, and they apply it in indirect questions, e.g. *I don’t know where are you going.

The Spanish language also permits not to use the subject in the sentence, so Spanish learners sometimes forget it in English. Corder (1967) proposes an instance connected to this kind of error, e.g. *Is the book of my friend. According to Corder (1967) “the omission of the
subject pronoun and the use of the `of the´ possessive appear to be due to Spanish interference.”

Coming back to Coe (2001), we should consider that learning where to place adverbs of frequency may be difficult for Spaniards as this is something new for them, e.g. *I go always to the park, *Often she has helped or *She often has helped. But also placing adverbials correctly may be difficult for Spanish speakers as in Spanish they do not have a fixed order. This produces instances as the following *They took to the hospital her mother or Mrs. Smith speaks very well English.

Adjectives also present another difficulty for Spaniards. Adjectives in English in an attributive position always come before the noun; whereas in Spanish tend to follow it, e.g. *the day amazing or *they live in a house white.

The same happens with the fixed order of adjectives, as in Spanish they do not follow any order. So the following example, I bought a beautiful, long, red, Italian, silk tie3, a Spaniard could produce it correctly because the learner has learnt it by heart or unconsciously; if not, the learner will place adjectives in a wrong order, e.g. *I bought a long, silk, Italian, red, beautiful tie.

5.3.2 Auxiliary verbs and negation

Spaniards also have difficulties with “do”, “does” and “did” as we can appreciate in *Did they went?, *Do they went?, *Does she goes? and *Do she goes?; as well as with the question tags which they tend to say no?, for instance, You have a car, *no?.

Negatives also pose several problems. First of all, Spanish speakers do not use the auxiliary in negation, so the result would something like the following: *Peter not fount the key or *Peter not has found the key. Beginners may even employ no instead of not: *I no understand.

We could also mention that in Spanish, and in Greek, negation is always preverbal, that is to say, the negative adverb comes before the verb, so that the common error of Spanish is the use of preverbal negation in the second language (English), and an instance of this transfer would be *no understand or *no drink milk.

Double negation is another common error in Spaniards. The Spanish language, contrary to English, allows this double negation, so that Spanish learners tend to use it in English, e.g. *I did not do nothing, *I not saw nobody, and *Tom doesn’t help her never. Similarly, Spanish learners do not differentiate the three categories: assertive, non-assertive and negative; thus, they often use non-assertive forms as they were negative, e.g. *I waited but anybody come.

5.3.3 Verbs and verbal constructions

The English construction be + adjective tends to be conveyed as have + noun in Spanish, in many cases. This provokes errors in the construction of those verbal structure, for example, *have reason (be right), *have hunger (be hungry), or *have heat (be hot).

According to Montrul (1977), there is a group of verbs belonging to psych verbs called Spanish gustar-type verbs. They pose potential learnability problems for English learners since the most frequent and unmarked word order with gustar-constructions is OVS in contrast to the obligatory SVO pattern in English. In Spanish, they are dative constructions, which nowadays do not exist in English (Belletti and Rizzi 1988). That is the case of verbs such as ‘fear’, ‘frighten’, ‘like’, and so on. Now, we are going to see an example in Spanish, a correct one in English and a possible error when reproducing it (López Jiménez, 2003).

E.g. (A mí) me gustan las manzanas.

Indirect object (experiencer) Subject

I like apples.

Subject Direct Object

* Me like apples.

As Coe (2001: 102) suggests, the present perfect may be used with time-when adverbials in Spanish, and this is transferred to the same structure in English, giving rise to sentences such as *When has she received the letter? And even they can talk about actions which have occurred before on the same day, such as *Today I’ve finished work earlier because I’ve started at seven o’clock this morning. Moreover, Spaniards tend to use the
subject in imperative sentences following the imperative verb, e.g. *Come you tomorrow!*
Also Spanish native speakers employ the subjunctive in most of the subordinate clauses referring to future time, while in English they would employ present simple, so that they tend to use simple future, e.g. *When Mary will get here, tell her to come in.*

Here, we should also illustrate “a mismatch with Spanish and English aspectual tenses” (Slabakova, 2013: 9). The past progressive in English has an on-going meaning in the past; however, the Spanish imperfect has a progressive meaning in the past, but also a habitual sense. The same happens with the English past simple and the Spanish preterit. The former has a one-time finished meaning and habitual interpretation, whereas Spanish only has a one-time finished meaning. Hence, interference could appear as they have to consider two tenses, past progressive and past simple in English, for what it is said with Spanish imperfect. Let us see some examples, also provided by Slabakova (2013: 9):

1) Guillermo robaba en la calle (habitual event)
   “Guillermo habitually robbed (people) in the street”

2) Guillermo robó en la calle (one-time finished event)
   “Guillermo robbed (someone) in the street”

3) Guillermo robaba a alguien en la calle cuando llegó la policía (on-going event)
   “Guillermo was robbing someone in the Street when the police arrived”

Attending to infinitives, Spanish speakers use them as abstract nouns in subject position, rather than using the correct –ing form in English which tend to be linked to the gerund meaning. E.g. *To smoke is bad for you.*

The passive construction is quite similar in both languages, English and Spanish. Hence, the *be + past participle* structure is positively transferred from the mother tongue (Spanish) to the foreign language (English). However, English has a second passive in which the indirect object becomes into subject, and these structures are really difficult for them to understand and produce them.
5.3.4 Other problematic areas

Following Coe (2001), let us see other problematic areas of Spanish speakers in the learning of English as a foreign language. Spaniards overuse articles in English, as a consequence of negative transfer from the Spanish language. They employ articles with mass nouns or plural nouns, producing the following sentences erroneously: *The food is more important than the art or *Do you like the big dogs? Additionally, articles are employed with possessive pronouns, as in *That is the yours, and this is the mine.

Within adjectives, comparatives and superlatives pose problems as well. Spaniards tend to utilise “more” or “most” in all cases rather than attaching the comparative or superlative suffixes to one or two syllable adjectives, e.g. *I am more old than my sister.

This fixed word-order mentioned above fosters a higher usage of prepositions, which also provokes problems for Spanish learners. For instance, the Spanish language has one preposition en for three different prepositions in English, i.e. at, in, and on. Thus, Spanish learners will tend to employ the preposition in in most of the cases because this is the preposition out of the three which most resembles in.

Another common error is to place a preposition before an infinitive in English, as if the Spanish language were. For example, *After to see the film, we went for a meal.

The so-called clitic-left dislocation is another construction, proposed by Slabakova (2013: 20), which may pose some problems. It has to do with doubling the fronted subject with a clitic. She gives an example:

1) El libro, lo leí > *the book, it-CL read-1sg; but the book, I read.

We should say this is a syntactic-pragmatic constraint, as it is a syntactic process but it involves much more than that, as intonation plays an important role (Valenzuela: 2006).

5.4 Lexis

Both positive transfer and interference influence the learning of lexis or vocabulary. In fact, according to Deller and Rinvolucri (2002: 38) the usage of the mother tongue in the classroom may activate vocabulary that they already know, and this will foster its learning in
the foreign language. Moreover, they thought of the mother tongue as a way of making comparisons of the common collocations found in the mother tongue, and the ones in the foreign language, in this case Spanish and English.

Students may find difficulties in learning words which are identical or similar graphically to other words in their mother tongue. These words are called cognates. *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* (1992: 229-230) gives the following definition: “Cognates are more or less like each other in form, but need not have much in common semantically: English *silly*, German *selig* holy, blessed.” As this quote suggests cognates share their morphological structure, but not necessarily their meaning. Bueno González (1998: 23) explains:

The common origin which defines cognates is clearly evident in those pairs of words which have a very similar—or even identical—form in two or more languages […] the similarity in form helps to guess the meaning and associate it to a term in the mother tongue. […] More concretely, we must add that many cognates have a common origin in classical languages.

When this association between form and meaning is possible, we are dealing with “true friends”. Regarding the two languages concerned in this essay (English and Spanish), the inference of their meaning may be facilitated by the linguistic competence of the students. Students’ knowledge of morphology may be incredibly helpful for them to guess the meaning of lexical items. Therefore, positive transfer may be produced in the case of “true friends”, and teachers can foster this transfer by making students acquire “linguistic competence”.

Nevertheless, as the above-mentioned quote from *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* puts forward, sometimes words formally similar do not have the same meaning. These words are the so-called “false friends” (from French *faux amis*) or “false cognates” for some authors such as Gairns and Redman (1986: 67). This provokes students commit errors when guessing meanings, and this is what it is named as interference. As advised by Bueno González (1998: 24), “By warming our students about common “false friends” we will be able to help them to avoid mistakes”.

5.4.1 True friends and methodological implications
As mentioned above, “true friends” share form and meaning, and they give rise to “positive transfer”. Carter and McCarthy (1988: 14) explain: “similarities in sound, morphology or etymology can assist word memorization.” From this conception, they state that the German word *Hund* is easiest to be learned by an English speaker than the French word *Chien* because of its connection to the English word *Hound*.

More or less the same idea is supported by Wallace (1982: 25-26):

learners who speak a language that is related to English may have an advantage because many words in both language have the same derivation and are therefore similar in form (“cognates”). Thus the Spanish *método* is clearly related to the English *method*.

Once more, word-formation plays an important role, and as Wallace states, English words ending in –ation are usually translated into Spanish words ending in -ación, proposing some instances such as *organization-*organización, *nation-*nación, and so on.

This is why it is suggested in Bueno González (1998: 24) that teachers ensure that students are familiarized with the identification of stems, prefixes and suffixes from Latin and Greek that are present in both English and Spanish. For that obviously the teacher must have certain knowledge of the word etymology. Some examples of common stems were listed by the above-mentioned author; those are the following, act (*actor* / *actor*), biblio (*bibliography* / *bibliografía*), dict (*dictionary* / *diccionario*), morph (*morpheme* / *morfema*), therm (*thermometer* / *termómetro*), zoo (*zoology* / *zoología*), etc.

The same phenomenon occurs with prefixes and suffixes, and again some instances provided by Bueno González (1998: 25). Some prefixes are auto- (*autobiography* / *autobiografía*), bi- (*bilingual* / *bilingüe*), ex- (*ex-actor* / *ex-actor*), neo- (*neo-Gothic* / *neogótico*), sub- (*subconscious* / *subconsciente*), vice- (*vice-president* / *vicepresidente*); and some suffixes would be –able (*probable* / *probable*), -ible (*possible* / *possible*), -ism (*idealism* / *idealismo*), -ize/-izar (*popularize* / *popularizer*), -or (*actor* / *actor*), and so on.

Morphology is not only interesting on the label of word-formation, but also from another perspective as we can see in Sumpter (1993: 266):

there are still hundreds of words in everyday use in English and Spanish which share both a common spelling and a common meaning. Students only need to have these words pointed out to them for their vocabulary to increase dramatically. There are of course some dangers: words which share a common spelling, but where meaning is different.
He also introduces what he calls “guessable words following morphological conventions” (p. 267), such as the following: (1) double consonant in English becomes single consonant in Spanish, e.g. *anual / annual*; (2) word-ending shift is produced to follow tradition, e.g. *literature / literature*; (3) there are specific endings which always change into the same one, e.g. *acción / action*; (4) initial “e” in Spanish disappears in English, e.g. *España / Spain*; (5) words sharing the root has to end differently, e.g. *variar / vary*; (6) there exist spelling simplification in Spanish, e.g. *photo / foto*; (7) difference in unvoiced / voiced intervocalic consonants, e.g. *salvo / safe*.

### 5.4.2 False friends and methodological implications

“False friends”, as defined above, have to do with cognates which differ in meaning. Carter and McCarthy (1988: 14) explain: “caution must be continually exercised to avoid the kinds of confusion and unlearning that can take place through misguided analysis of parts of words or through the establishment of false cognates”.

Some examples taken from Bueno González (1998: 26) that would be problematic for Spanish speakers are: *actual, actually, adequate, agenda, assist, attend, conductor, critic, library, morale, sensible, sensitive, sympathetic, terrific*, etc. Also there are words in Spanish which have two terms in English such as: English *channel and canal* vs. Spanish *canal*; English *real and royal* vs. Spanish *real*; English *prescription and recipe* vs. Spanish *receta*; and so on.

Some textbooks include lists of “false friends” and exercises. I think that the learning of false friends is necessary and the teacher should draw attention on them, but, from my viewpoint, the best way for the students to memorize them is by learning them in context. So, maybe instead of presenting students lists to memorize, teachers could present a reading activity and from the text they should elicit the meaning, as the more students reflect on their learning, the more they learn and memorize.

### 5.4.3 Other problematic areas within lexis

Furthermore, Spanish learners have a tendency to employ English words coming from Latin in all the contexts, when they are usually connected to a formal register. That occurs
because these words are learned easily as they are alike their Spanish counterpart. Therefore, here we are dealing with a mistake at the level of Pragmatics. Following this idea, Spanish students of English will use *educate* rather than *bring up*, or *permit* instead of *let*.

### 5.5 Pragmatics and culture

#### 5.5.1 The learning of pragmatics

Muñoz (2000: 248) takes into account several studies related to transfer and pragmatic development, among them Takahashi and Beebe’s (1987) study. This did not provide clear results, but they proposed the hypothesis that the mastering of the second language was closely connected to pragmatic transfer.

We should pay attention to the learning of second language pragmatics, as Muñoz (2000: 249) puts forward. This will help us comprehend the difficulty of its learning, and the reason why it poses many problems, not only to Spanish speakers, but also to other speakers. For this description, I will follow Muñoz (2000: 249-251), and other authors she mentions will be also quoted.

She explains that the opportunities to get pragmatic input within the class are limited, and this limitation is shown in the lack of politeness devices (Lörscher and Schulze, 1988) and the limited number of speech acts (Long, Adams, McLean and Castaños, 1976). Moreover, teachers tend to control the organization of discourse, so students cannot manage their own discourse.

Poole (1992) and Lim (1996) explain that, following the so-called *socialization of language*\(^4\) perspective, culture or cultural information was positively transmitted by interaction, in the educational context, the interaction between the teacher and students within the class.

Muñoz (2000: 250) presents several studies which consider whether cultural information can be taught or not. The answer to this hypothesis was that it is possible to do so. Most of them point out that this is possible with advanced or upper intermediate students, but not at lower levels. The explicit teaching of pragmatics obtains better results than implicit teaching. Finally she states:

Las respuestas conversacionales fluidas y apropiadas requieren un grado muy alto de control sobre el procesamiento para comprender y producir una elocución, y es muy posible que tal control no se pueda desarrollar en el aula dadas las oportunidades limitadas que ofrece para practicar la lengua.

Therefore, cultural information and, consequently, pragmatics are difficult to learn, and even more when the cultural information you have is the one from your mother tongue. The lack of opportunities to learn the pragmatics of the second language fosters the negative transfer of your own cultural information and use of pragmatics.

5.5.2 Spanish and English differences

Language could be defined as a tool people have to communicate ideas, emotions, culture, traditions, memories, etc. In fact, Halliday (2004), in his Systemic Functional Theory, states that language has three main functions: ideational, interpersonal and textual. The ideational function has to do with the expression of ideas; the interpersonal function with establishing social relationships; and the latter, the textual one, is connected to the context and situation.

This justifies the connection of language with culture, as depending on this people will convey different beliefs or ideas, and they will be involved in different contexts and situations; and not only culture, but also individual factors such as status or social class, geographical area, or register. Thus, there is a correlation between both society and language, and that is reflected on foreign language learning.

Politeness is the best example of that clash of cultures when learning a language. Spaniards tend to be more direct when speaking, and use different devices to express politeness. By contrast, English speakers are not so direct, and they use modality for the expression of politeness.

This presents a conflict when Spanish students speak English. For instance, for the request of closing the window, the Spaniard would say, if s/he is being polite, ¿Podría abrir la puerta, por favor? The English equivalent would be Would you mind to open the door, please? However, the Spanish student could produce the following Could you open the door, please? which would be the calque structure of the Spanish one. Or other calquing structures
from Spanish to English such as *Can you pass me the salt?* In both cases, it is not a question of being or not being polite, but intercultural variation, within the area of politeness of course.

Spanish people also use lots of imperatives, whereas English speakers are not used to them. Thus, a Spanish student using imperatives could seem to be rude when speaking to a native speaker of English. And once again, this will provoke a problem in communication.

Another error highlighted in the studies of Applied Linguistics related to pragmatics and culture is the so-called *pragmatic error*: the inability to understand “what is meant by what is said” (Thomas, 1983: 91). It is a major point in the failure of intercultural communication which may come from errors induced by teaching. For instance, usually a Spanish learner of English would answer the question *Have you brought your coat?* with *Yes, I have brought my coat.* This gives rise to a bad use of the principle of economy which consists in being concise and precise in language utterances. This type of errors is usually associated to some teaching method strategies.

6. Conclusion

To put it in a nutshell, it is true that there are many aspects that can be transferred from Spanish to English, but it does not mean that all of them will provoke interference, or that it is something negative for the learners. Mistakes and errors are part of the learner’s learning, and in fact, they show that they are learning. The role of the teacher here is to take advantage of them, either by fostering positive transfer and explaining something ensuring they have understood it, or by “predicting” areas which they may find difficult and paying more attention to them.

We have seen many theories were reformulated and gave rise to others. At this point, I would like to argue that we cannot neglect any theory completely because each one has its role, and at least they imply the creation of a new theory or thought.

As we have been discussing, transfer may appear at any level of language, but probably the most difficult area for L2 learners, not only Spaniards, is pragmatics, as it is a reflection of the culture and social values of the English language community. The most important idea is that those problems we have presented are real problems providing that they
affect intelligibility, and communication, which is the main aim of language, is stopped. In those aspects, the teacher has to put special emphasis on them.

To end my final degree project I will provide the following quote:

Using the mother tongue, we have (1) learnt to think, (2) learnt to communicate and (3) acquired an intuitive understanding of grammar. The mother tongue is therefore the greatest asset people bring to the task of foreign language learning and provides a Language Acquisition Support System. (Butzkamm, 2003: 29).

**Conclusión**

En resumen, podríamos decir que hay muchos aspectos que pueden transferirse del español al inglés, pero esto no quiere decir que todos ellos provoquen interferencia. Los errores son partes del aprendizaje del alumno, y además, muestran que este está aprendiendo. El papel del profesor es beneficiarse de aquellos aspectos que se transfieren ya sea para fomentar la transferencia positiva, explicando algo en español para asegurarse de que lo entiendan, o prediciendo áreas que pueden presentar dificultades para prestarles más atención.

Hemos visto que muchas teorías se han reformulado y dado lugar a otras, por lo que en este punto, me gustaría discutir que no podemos rechazar una teoría completamente porque cada una de ellas tiene un papel, al menos pueden ser útiles para la aparición de una nueva teoría o pensamiento.

Tal y como hemos visto, la transferencia puede aparecer en cualquier nivel de la lengua, pero probablemente el área que presenta más dificultades al aprendiz de lengua extranjera, no solo a los españoles, es la pragmática, ya que esta es un reflejo de la cultura y los valores sociales de la comunidad de habla inglesa. Lo más importante en dicho caso es que afecta a la inteligibilidad y la comunicación puede cortarse, por lo que el profesor debe poner gran atención a este ámbito.

Para terminar citaré y traduciré a Butzkamm (2003: 29),

Usando la lengua materna, hemos (1) aprendido a pensar, (2) a comunicarnos y (3) a ser intuitivos en el aprendizaje de la gramática. La lengua materna es por lo tanto la mayor ventaja que los aprendices tienen para el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera y el Sistema de Apoyo para la Adquisición de una Lengua.
7. **References**


8. Appendix: Potential interference areas for Spanish speakers learning English

In this appendix we are going to present a practical application of the concept of transfer, concretely, of negative transfer or interference. For that we will provide some examples attending to different levels of language (phonetics and phonology, morphology and syntax, lexis and pragmatics).

8.1 Phonetics and Phonology

8.1.1 Consonants and vowels

8.1.1.1 Sound substitution

Dream /dri:m/ > /dri:n/ or /dri:n/

Sing /sin/ > /sin/ (sin)

Thing /θiŋ/ > /θin/ (thin)

Yes /jes/ > /yes/

Yellow /'jelou/ > /'yelou/

Would /wud/ > /gud/

8.1.1.2 Underdifferentiation

Rise /raiz/ > /rais/ (rice)

Lazy /laizi/ > /laisi/ (lacy)

Vowel /'vauəl/ > /bauəl/ (bowel)

Cheap /tʃi:p/ > /ʃi:p/ (sheep)

Beat /bi:t/ > /bit/ (bit)

Sheep /ʃi:p/ > /ʃip/ (ship)

Cat /kæt/ > /kat/ \(^5\)

\(^5\) (Spanish /a/ for /a/, /a:/ and /ʌ/)

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Cup /kʌp/ > /kap/ or /kæp/ (cap)

8.1.1.3. Overdifferentiation

Terrace /terəs/ > /terrəs/

Curriculum /kə’rikjʊləm/ > /kə’rrikjʊləm/

8.1.1.4. Other errors: addition or deletion

Club /klʌb/ > /klʌb/

Slip, stop, spot (/slip/, /stɒ p/ and /spɒ p/) > /eslip/, /estɒ p/ and /espɒ p/

Light /laɪt/ > /lai/

8.1.2 Consonantal clusters (omission of sounds)

Express /ɪks’pres/ > /ɪs’pres/

Instant /’ɪnstənt/ > /’ɪnstən/

Grabbed /græbd/ > /græb/

Lord /lɔː(r)d/ > /lɔːr/

Sprint /sprint/ > /esprin/

Relax /rɪ’læks/ > /rɪ’læs/

Stand /stænd/ > /stæn/

Flirt /flɜː(r)t/ > /flɜːt/

8.1.3 Influence of spelling

Asked /aːskt/ > /’ɑsket/

Break /breik/ > /break/

Friend /frend/ > /frien/
Answer /aːnswer(r)/ > /aːnsər/

8.2. Morphology and syntax

8.2.1  Word-order and omissions

The fireman arrived ten minutes later > *Arrived the fireman ten minutes later

Where are you going? > *Where you are going?

I don’t know where you are going > *I don’t know where are you going

This is the book of my friend > *Is the book of my friend

I always go to the park > *I go always to the park

She has often helped > *Often she has helped / She often has helped

They took her mother to the hospital > *They took to the hospital her mother

Mrs. Smith speaks English very well > * Mrs. Smith speaks very well English

The amazing day > *The day amazing

They live in a white house > *They live in a house white

I bought a beautiful, long, red, Italian, silk tie > *I bought a long, silk, Italian, red, beautiful tie

8.2.2  Auxiliary verbs and negation

Did they go? > *Did they went? / *Do they went?

Does she go? > *Does she goes? / *Do she goes?

You have a car, haven’t you? > *You have a car, no?

Peter did not find the key > *Peter not found the key / *Peter not has found the key

I do not understand it > *I no understand / *No understand / *No drink milk
I did nothing > *I did not do nothing

I did not see anyone > I not saw nobody

Tom never helps her > *Tom doesn’t help her never

I waited but nobody came > *I waited but anyone came

8.2.3 Verbs and verbal constructions

I’m hungry > *I have hungry

I’m 6 years old > *I have 6 years

He is right > *He has reason

I like apples > *Me like apples

When did she received the letter? > *When has she received the letter?

Come tomorrow! > *Come you tomorrow!

When Mary get here, tell her to come in > When Mary will get here, tell her to come in

Smoking is bad for you > *To smoke is bad for you

8.2.4 Other problematic areas

Food is more important than art > *The food is more important than the art

Do you like big dogs? > *Do you like the big dogs?

That is yours, and this is mine > *That is the yours, this is the mine

I am older than my sister > *I am more older than my sister

After seeing the film, we went for a meal > *After to see the film, we went for a meal

El libro, lo leí > *The book, it read > The book, I read

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8.3. Lexis

8.3.1 False friends

Actual > *actual; real
Adequate > *adecuado; suficiente
Agenda > *agenda; orden del día
Assist > *asistir; ayudar
Attend > *atender; asistir
Conductor > *conductor; director de orquesta
Critic > *crítica; crítico
Library > *librería; biblioteca
Sensible > *sensible; sensato
Sensitive > *sensitivo; sensible
Sympathetic > *simpático; comprensivo
Terrific > *terrorífico; genial

8.3.2 Other problematic areas (Formality)

Educar > Educate vs. Bring up
Permitir > Permit vs. Let

8.4. Pragmatics and culture

8.4.1 Politeness (context-dependent)

¿Podrías abrirme la puerta? > Would you mind to open the door, please? / *Could you open the door?
¿Me pasas la sal? > Can you pass me the salt?

8.4.2 Pragmatic error

Have you brought your coat? *Yes, I have brought your coat

8.5. Calque expressions

*Me preguntaba > I asked me… (I wondered…)

*Poner un poco de nuestra parte > Put a little of our part

*Sino que > if not that

*Hablar con > speak with (speak to)