UNIVERSIDAD LATINA DE COSTA RICA

SEDE DE GRECIA

THE INTERFERENCE OF THE MOTHER TONGUE IN THE WRITING PROCESS OF

ENGLISH AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

RESEARCHERS:

MARIA SUSANA ROJAS PACHECO

CARLOS OLIVIER VARGAS PORRAS

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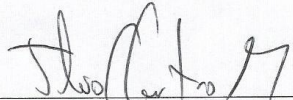**UNIVERSIDAD LATINA
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Tutor

_____
LICDA. Yanory Arguedas Carballo
Lector

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LIC. Roy Alfaro Alfaro MS.c
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER V DISCUSSION

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of the Study

A mother tongue is also called first language, native language, or home language. It is the language that people acquire naturally when they are babies. It usually plays a determinant role when acquiring another language because people will always connect their first language patterns with the patterns of the other language. When people learn a foreign language, there are several factors that affect the process like motivation, attitude, input, and context that might be vital for its learning. But, what about the mother tongue? Does it interfere in the learning of the foreign language? Obviously, if both languages have similarities, it will probably help the learner. However, if both languages are totally different, it will cause serious problems to the person. In the case of Spanish and English, both languages differ in some of their aspects. This study will be carried out in a Spanish speaker country with high school English learners.

The interference of the first language could appear on the four skills as listening, speaking, reading, and writing. But for this study, the focus will be on the writing skill since it is a challenging skill for English learners. People who are learning a foreign language usually have some difficulties when writing in terms of grammar such as subject-verb agreement, word order, spelling, missing capitalization, punctuation, lack of pronouns, literal translation, wrong use of words, among others. For some learners, those difficulties and the fact that teachers do not encourage them to produce paragraphs and essays, turn into serious obstacles to achieve the foreign language. For example, literal translation. Most of the time Spanish speakers translate from their mother tongue to the foreign language causing errors, lack of meaning, and even misunderstandings. In the sentence "Technology has been standing out around the world

actually," but the correct use of the word 'actually' is "Actually, it was how technology began a new era."

Teaching techniques developed in English lessons may influence the learning of writing. For this reason, it is important to identify which activities or strategies are being implemented in the Costa Rican educational system in order to verify if they are working or not.

The purpose of this project is to inform and prevent foreign language students from making the same errors due to the interference of the mother tongue. This research will be useful for those students who have some problems and difficulties in the skill of writing, and for English teachers who need to implement effective techniques and strategies in order to provide learners with assistance in writing.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

- To analyze the interference of the mother tongue on the process of writing English as a foreign language.

1.2.2 Specific Objectives

- To identify the teaching techniques used in Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares to learn writing in the area of English as a foreign language.
- To determine the writing difficulties faced by Spanish speaker students in Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares when learning English as a foreign language.
- To provide some strategies to improve the writing process of the students in the Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares when learning.

1.3 Research Question

- How does a mother tongue interfere in the writing process of English as a foreign language?

1.4 Definition of terms

- **Mother tongue or First language (L1) :** The first language that you learn when you are a baby, rather than a language learned at school or as an adult.

- **EFL:** Abbreviation for English as a Foreign Language, the teaching of English to students whose first language is not English.

- **Interference:** An occasion when someone or something tries to interfere in a situation.

- **ELL:** English-language learners, or ELLs, are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English, who often come from non-English-speaking homes and backgrounds, and who typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language and in their academic courses.

- **Target language (TL):** A language other than one's native language that is being learned.

- **Foreign language (FL):** A language that is not widely or officially spoken in a particular place.

1.5 Significance of the Study

A study of the interference that native language has when acquiring English as a foreign language will be implemented in the ability of writing. The interest is to find several aspects in the area of writing that limit the correct learning of the foreign language. This project will work

with students of eleventh grade at Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares in writing and reading English class because they are at an advanced level where they are able to produce paragraphs and compositions.

The writing techniques used to teach the target language will be observed in the classroom to prove its effectiveness. As well as students' errors and mistakes when writing in English will be analyzed to detect which are more common and repetitive in order to implement strategies to solve the problem.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

2.1 References

Interlanguage

Guerrero (2014) mentioned in her research about the "Role of the Mother Tongue in the Learning of English as a Foreign Language" the important role that interlanguage plays when learning a foreign language.

> (…)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 (foreign language) learner's attempted production of a TL1 norm. This linguistic system we will call interlanguage'" (…) 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). (pp. 12-13)

In other words, interlanguage is a unique linguistic system that English language learners (ELLs) created in order to learn the target language. It contains features of the mother tongue and of the foreign language as well. This process is considered important when people learn a foreign language because they create their own system on their minds and develop their own rules about the target language.

Fossilization

In the same way, Guerrero (2014) referred to the term fossilization, as part of the previous mentioned term of interlanguage.

> 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. (p. 13)

What fossilization means is that even though the amount of instruction learners of a foreign language receive they continue committing the same errors due to the interference of their mother tongue. An example of fossilization when Spanish speakers are learning English is the following; I am extremely happy because my sister is embarrassed and her baby will be born on December. The word "embarrassed" is confused with the word "pregnant" as in Spanish it sounds similar "embarazada."

Mother Tongue Influence on English Language Learning

As Sharma (2015) claimed in his research about "Mother Tongue Influence on English Language Learning",

When confronted with something new, whether it is a new food, a different kind of music or just new information, it is natural instinct to look for similarities with things that are familiar to us and to draw some comparison with what we know already. Consciously or unconsciously, we bring what we know to what we do not, making it possible to learn language without relying to some extent on our mother tongue. In fact it is humanitarian also to accept mother interference in learning a foreign language Studies on the interdependence between Mother tongue and foreign language indicate a linguistic interdependence (Jessner& Cen02,2000) with regard to multiple subsystems (phonological, syntactic, semantic and textual). (pp. 2165-2166)

The interference of the mother tongue, when learning a foreign language, will always exist because as Sharma mentioned the natural instinct of foreign learners will act when necessary making use of their mother tongue even in a conscious or unconscious way. It is something unavoidable since the first language is part of the person's background. It is obvious that if a Spanish speaker does not know a specific structure when writing a paragraph in English, he or she will immediately think of that structure in Spanish in order to try to create a literal translation to English. A concrete illustration is the sentence "I bought my "car red" on "15th December"." In this case, there are two errors and a person who does not know the specific structure in English will probably make any of them. In English, the adjective "red" will be placed before the noun "car" ("red car"). In the same way, when writing the date, the number will be placed after the month ("December 15th"). For this reason, a Spanish speaker might make those errors due to the interference of his mother tongue.

The same author explained that,

> In reality, foreign language learners appear to accumulate structural entities of the target language but demonstrate difficulty in organizing this knowledge into appropriate coherent structures. There appears a significant gap between the accumulation and the organization of knowledge. If the structure of two languages are distinctly different, then one could expect a relatively high frequency of errors to occur in foreign language learning thus indicating an interference of L1 on L2 (Dechert, 1983 and Ellis 1997). Ellis (1997:51) refers to Interference as "transfer" which he says is "influence that the learner's L1 exerts over the acquisition of L2." (p. 2166)

Even though, the target language structures are well acquired by the learners of a foreign language, most of them will just accumulate that information or structures on their brains. When they have to apply that knowledge in real situations, it will be difficult for them to put it into practice. This is a gap of some Spanish speakers when learning English. They accumulate some grammar rules on their brain, but when they try to put them into practice, errors appear since there exist no coherent on what they know and on what they try to produce in a written way. In other words, there is no coherence between theory and practice.

Does Mother Tongue Interfere in Second Language Learning?

According to Nur (2017),

> (...) there is high probability of cross-linguistic influence in second language acquisition and this influence may cause some errors, which are caused by negative transfer. Manrique (2013) stated that mispronunciation and grammatical errors are the most common types of interference between the mother tongue and the target language. Also, it was affirmed that writing has been considered as the most difficult of the four language skills. (p.40)

On the word of this author, writing is considered the most difficult skill for learners of a foreign language. For this reason, grammatical errors are the most common type of interferences when learning a foreign language. In the case of Spanish speakers, it is common to notice some negative transfers when writing in English because the mother tongue, in this case Spanish, is quite different. The writing performance will be affected.

In the same manner, Nur lists some grammatical errors in his research,

> The grammatical interference involved word order, number, countability, personal
>
> pronouns, genitive and possessive pronouns, it and there, past time, to be, non–finite
>
> forms, modal auxiliary verbs, active and passive, negatives, complex sentences, range
>
> and choice of vocabulary, transfer, and confusions. However, they claimed that the
>
> interference occurred because students did not receive input that facilitated them to
>
> write. It also occurred because of the lack of students' knowledge in foreign language
>
> acquisition. (p. 41)

The list of grammatical errors is short compared to the amount of grammatical errors
ELLs make when learning the language. Most of the errors are caused for the lack of
input of students when trying to produce written English or their lack of knowledge
about the target language.

Understanding English Foreign Language (EFL) Students' Errors in Writing

Richards (1971) explains the definitions interlingual errors by stating that these are
(as cited in Rattanadilok & Binti, 2015)

> (...) the errors caused by the interference of the native language. These errors are the
>
> results of the learners' application of the native language elements in their spoken or
>
> written performances of the target language. When encountered with new language,
>
> people tend to consciously or unconsciously draw a connection between what they
>
> already know and what they do not. (p.99)

For most EFL learners, speaking and specially writing skills are the most difficult fields of
learning English because they have to produce or create something new when applying them. So,

they use their knowledge of the mother tongue in order to understand and produce with the target language. During the learning process, students are not going to comprehend that both languages have some similarities and differences that is how the errors are going to come up when producing writing.

Following the idea that Richards (1971) expressed to understand errors, he also defined another type of error, which is intralingual errors, "these errors are referred to the errors that occur because of the ineffective traits of learning such as faulty application of rules and unawareness of the restrictions of rules." (Rattanadilok & Binti, 2015, p. 99)

In this other case, English foreign language students tend to commit errors and experience the target language by inferring based on the rules. For instance, at the beginning of their learning process, EFL learners understand that most past tense verbs include a "d" or "ed" at the end of the word. However, in that stage, they do not acknowledge that there are some exceptions or irregular past tense verbs which have a different structure, and that is when the error is made.

Teaching English Writing for a Global Context: An Examination of NS, ESL and EFL Learning Strategies that Work.

According to the study of Janet Emig (1971) about the writing process, she explained,

> (...) quantitative and qualitative evidence that the most fruitful and often the best writing was done via a slow process of drafting, reviewing with self and peers, revising and reviewing again and again, in a seemingly endless loop. The formal school sponsored writing assignment, as Emig points out in her findings, "truncates the process of composing" that in self-sponsored writing can take up to two years (p. 98).

This truncating of what appears to be a natural process also disengages the student from the writing they do for school. (as cited in Webb, 2015, pp. 174-175)

Following the same suggestion, Peter Elbow (1973) mentions another definition of the writing process, in which he,

(...) made a similar discovery about his own writing and then made the radical decision to teach process writing to his own students. The results of his observations from his own writing experiences and those of his students produced another well-known text, Writing Without Teachers (1973). In this text, Elbow presents a well-known analogy describing writing like growing and cooking ideas rather than transferring them. It provides, I think, an adequate description of the theory underlying the pedagogical practice of the process writing approach. (as cited in Webb, 2015, p. 175)

Basically, both researchers discovered that the writing process should follow some steps in order to obtain a better product. In this case, students are going to be able to understand that they simply need to start with the process of drafting, then reviewing with self and peers , and finally revising and reviewing several times to achieve in the task. Then, Elbow indicated that the writing process is like cooking where there are steps to follow in order to prepare something, explaining the same idea as Emig did.

With both explanations, students will be able to follow a pattern on what is the best way to write or how to write a paragraph, an essay, or a paper in order to be skillful in writing, instead of having deficiencies with this skill.

Rebecca Webb (2015) claims that,

(...) the process writing approach can be effectively used with ELL students at all skill levels. They also reveal the continued need for formal instruction in grammar for all

students, but combining two counter-intuitive practices such as grammar instruction

with its discrete skills exercises, drills, and quizzes, with process over product

instruction is problematic, as many writing teachers have experienced. (p. 173)

In this paragraph, the author keeps underlining the importance of the formal instructions about the grammar rules in the writing process. Also, the author considers that the practice of this skill is going to enhance the knowledge of the students by doing several exercises that are directly related to the writing skill. Those instructions are going to make easier the teaching-learning process of the writing skills for most facilitators.

2.2 Summary

Interlanguage

According to Guerrero (2014), "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)." (p. 13)

In other words, interlanguage is a unique linguistic system that ELLs create in order to learn

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their mother tongue.

Mother Tongue Influence of Foreign Language

Consciously or unconsciously, we bring what we know to what we do not, making it

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Understanding EFL Students' Errors in Writing

Interlingual errors "are the errors caused by the interference of the native language. These errors are the results of the learners' application of the native language elements in their spoken or written performances of the target language."(as cited in Rattanadilok & Binti, 2015, p. 99)

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CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES

3.1 Rationalization for Qualitative and Quantitative Research

The purpose of this research is to apply both the qualitative and quantitative methods in the study. Furthermore, this research is focused on the diverse experiences from students and teachers in the writing area. As Ritchie & Lewis (2003) mention in their work

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. It consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. (...) At this level, qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them. (p.16)

Besides, in this research numbers also will reflect why EFL students fail regarding the writing process. Perumal (2014) defines quantitative research methods in his work as "research methods dealing with numbers and anything that is measurable in a systematic way of investigation of phenomena and their relationships". (p. 87)

3.2 Data Collection Tools

Four tools are used in this project to collect the data. The first one are some observations (see annex 1) to both groups of eleventh level to get as many data as possible. Then, a first diagnostic (see annex 2) will be applied to EFL students of both groups in order to find out their common errors and weaknesses in writing. After that, an in-depth interview (see annex 3) to both teachers in charge of the students in order to know more about the techniques and the strategies they use to teach the target skill and to get more information about the strengths and weaknesses of

students. Once the pedagogical strategy or class is put into action to both groups, a second

diagnostic (see annex 4) will be applied to the learners in order to find out the results of the

strategy.

3.3 Site and Participants

This study will be developed at Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares which is a public institution

located in Palmares, Alajuela, Costa Rica. The selected population are eleventh grade students of

11-2 and 11-5 groups which are a total of 19 students.

3.4 The Plan of the Study Data Analysis Procedures

After the information is collected, the data will be analyzed to get the findings and results.

The four tools observations, teacher's interviews, first placement test, and second placement test

are the instruments used to carry out the research and will be the necessary tools to prove the

problem in study. The observations and teacher's interviews will be analyzed as qualitative data

describing what occurred in classes and the instructors' perspective about the writing process.

On the other hand, the two placements tests will be studied as vital quantitative elements of the

research since both of them will clarify if there are deficiencies or not with the interference of

the mother tongue in the writing process of English learners.

3.4 Summary

Qualitative and quantitative research methods will be employed throughout this project. The research is carried out at Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares, the selected population are eleventh grade students of 11-2 and 11-5 groups which are a total of 19 students, but at the moment of the research just 17 were in class. The analysis will be done through four tools, observation sheets, teacher's interviews, first placement test, and second placement test which are the instruments used to carry out the research and will be the necessary tools to prove the problematic in study.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

4.1 Data

Data analysis will be divided into four parts according to the instruments used to carry out the research.
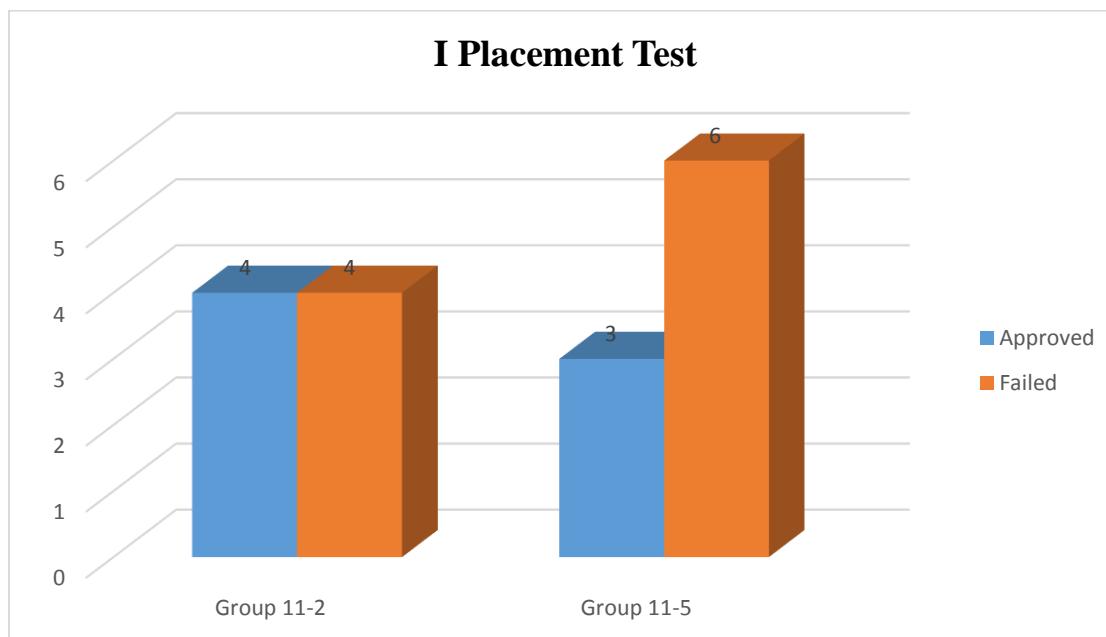
4.1.1 Observations

The intention of the observations was to see the real panorama of both groups, their weaknesses and strengths in the area of writing and to observe the interference of their mother tongue, in this case Spanish. Also, to observe the teaching techniques used by both teachers in the area of writing. Teachers have good technology, an excellent setting, a good amount of students per teacher because they have less than 12 students per group. Students work well, they cooperate with the teacher and are willing to learn. However, it was noticeable that the class was focused in reading rather than writing because teachers are worried about the idea of preparing students to pass the Bachillerato test (the test required by Ministerio de Educación Pública at the end of the year to approve the scholar year in Costa Rica). Another clear weakness of students was that they speak too much Spanish during the class causing a mother tongue interference when they write their ideas. They used to think of an idea in Spanish first, then they use the literal translation to write it in English. In the same way, when students read a sentence they translated the sentence word by word into Spanish to understand its meaning. The teacher techniques were not bad, but they can be better to encourage students to write and improve their writing process. Teachers are well prepared academically; however, they should improve their techniques by implementing new and innovative activities that encourage students to learn and enjoy English classes.

4.1.2 Teacher's interviews

According to the interviews applied to both teachers, they coincided in some of the aspects, and differ in others. For instance, as mentioned by the teacher in charge of group 11-2, the techniques she uses to teach writing are skimming, scanning and inferring information. She focused more on reading techniques rather than on writing. In contrast to the teacher in charge of group 11-5 who said that she explains the writing process and gives examples of the different parts of it. Then, both teachers agreed that the deficiencies of students due to the interference of their mother tongue are literal translations, pluralizing adjectives, word order, among others because of lack of usage of English grammar structures. Both teachers said that the writing performance of students in writing is not high neither the best. Their pieces of advice as experienced instructors to teach writing were to prepare activities students like, use pre-writing exercises, read articles about a topic to give them information and ideas, teach vocabulary related to the topic in order that they can know deeper about what they will write about. Regarding the program used in Costa Rica by Ministerio de Educación Pública, both teachers referred to the fact that it does not have the tools teacher's need to work with. Both teachers agreed that for some students writing is the most difficult skill for the complexity of the process and their lack of vocabulary. Both teachers described the writing process of students with the word "poor" and "difficult".

4.1.3 I and II Placement Tests

Information taken from placement tests applied to 11-2 & 11-5 groups at Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares.
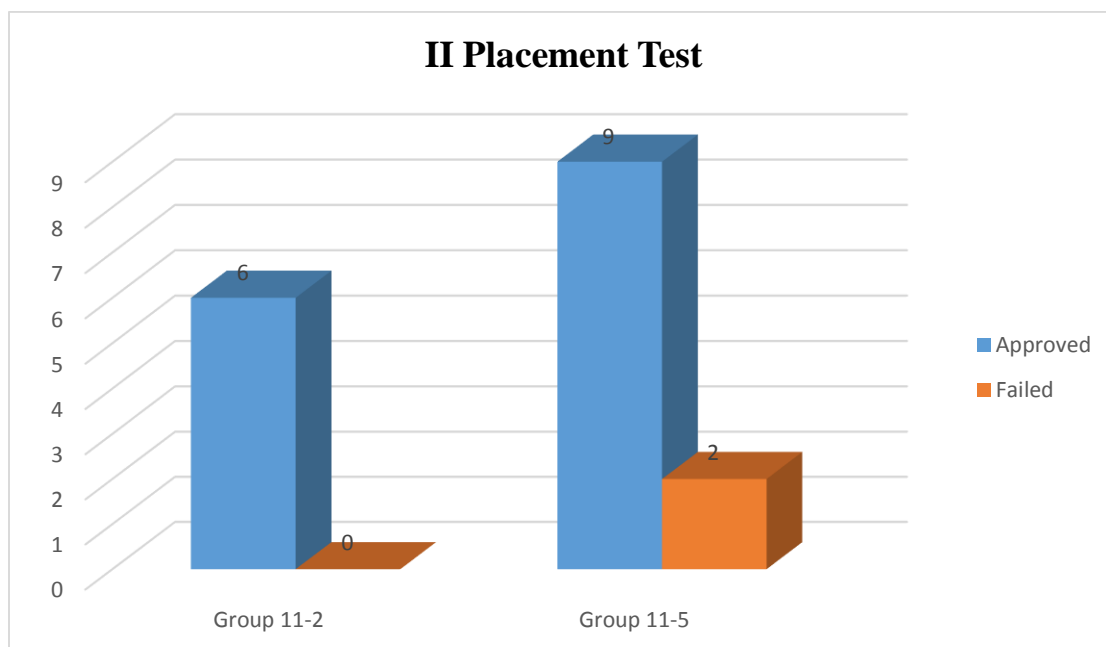
Information taken from placement tests applied to 11-2 & 11-5 groups at Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares.

During an observation, a placement test was applied on April 2nd to find out the difficulties that Spanish speaker students face while learning writing. The test consists of three parts. The first one is a multiple choice about linking words. The second part is a matching in which the students have to read the statements, and match them according to the type of grammar errors. Finally, in the production part, the students had to write a paragraph about some given topics related to the unit they were studying with the teacher in charge of the group. In this test, 4 students of group 11-2 approved the exam by getting a score up to 70 and the same amount of students failed that test by scoring under 70 (8 students attended class that day). In the case of group 11-5, 3 students passed the test by scoring above 70, and 6 students failed the test scoring below 70 (only 9 students attended class that day).

After a class was taught by the researchers, a second placement test was applied on April 9th to determine if the students were able to overcome some difficulties. This second placement test had a similar structure compared to the first one: Multiple choice, identification, and production. The results of the second test showed certain improvement in the use of grammar in writing activities. Regarding group 11-2, the 6 students who attended class that day approved the test with a score up to 70. On the other hand, in group 11-5 the amount of students who approved the test were 9 out of 11 with scores up to 70; only 2 students failed the test with a score under 70. In the production part the influence of the mother tongue was noticeable. Students' paragraphs showed in both tests many grammar errors in terms of literal translation from Spanish to English, wrong word usage, punctuation, among others. The mother tongue influence was evident; for instance, they used Spanish structures in the sentences which did not make any sense, and several words that were not part of the English lexicon.

4.2 Restatement of Questions and Discussion of the Results

The four instruments used in the research were excellent to have the perspectives of teachers, students, and our own perspective by observing the class. Those instruments were designed to try to get some results in order solve the main problem that was the interference of the mother tongue on the process of writing English as a foreign language. Our analysis leads to the result that mother tongue interferes in the writing process of students when learning English. The techniques used by the teachers in charge of the groups were not good enough to reinforce the writing area since they were interested on reading more than writing. The lack of knowledge about grammar structures, lack of practice in writing, and the frequent use of their mother tongue (Spanish) to turn ideas into English are some of the most important findings throughout the research.

Discussing about the two placement tests applied, the first one showed that learners had difficulties to understand some grammar errors such as misspelling, punctuation, wrong word usage, word order, among others; and to produce paragraphs because they were focused on writing structures of the Spanish language and translating word by word. In the first placement test, 7 students out of 17 who attended class approved the exam; the other 10 of them failed it. Then, the second placement test showed that they were able to identify common grammar errors. Even though their paragraphs were better, most students translated these paragraphs using their mother tongue. In the second test, 15 students out of 17 who attended class approved the exam after the application of the pedagogical strategy, only 2 students failed it.

In order to illustrate better the findings regarding the interference of the mother tongue, a chart highlighting some errors encountered in both groups is the following.

Type of Error	Group 11-2	Group 11-5
Misspelling	"carrer", "althougth"	"bussines", "companys", "carrer", "collage" "relly"
Word order	"team country"	you are an example of what <u>can you</u> achieve with effort and dedication.
Punctuation	"In the future I'll like"	" I will enter to Ulatina ,because"
Wrong Word Usage	"attend" instead of "assist", I "have" 6 years old	"good great" instead of "grade" "colleague" instead of "college" "champion mundial" "cualities", "most good"
Literal Translations	"goods", "trate" instead of "try", "veterinaria"	"I am going to esforce my college to have a good great", "you are so displinated and centrated
Subject-Verb Agreement	"animals who lives", "you was"	"I thinks", "she do", "you is"
Missing Capitalization	a big company like "apple"	"olympico games"
Pluralization	"childrens"	"that days"
Absence of Pronouns	"because like them:	"because is very mystery and dangerous"

Information taken from placement tests applied to 11-2 & 11-5 groups at Colegio Bilingüe de

Palmares.

4.3 Summary

The intention of the observation was to visualize the settings of both groups, their weaknesses and strengths in the area of writing and the interference of their mother tongue. Also, to observe the teaching techniques used by both teachers in the area of writing. Both groups have less than 12 students and both of them work well. However, it was noticeable that the class was focused in reading rather than writing because teachers were worried about the idea of preparing students to pass the Bachillerato test. Another clear weakness of students was the use of Spanish during the class causing that when they write their mother tongue interfere with their ideas.

According to the interviews applied to both teachers, they coincided in some of the aspects and differed on others. For instance, the techniques used by the teacher in charge of group 11-2 were skimming, scanning and inferring information. She focused more on reading techniques rather than writing. In contrast to the teacher in charge of group 11-5 who said that she explains the writing process and gives examples of the different parts of it. Then, both teachers agreed that the deficiencies of students due to the interference of their mother tongue were literal translations, pluralize adjectives, word order, among others because of the lack of usage of English grammar structures.

Regarding the tests, the first placement test was applied to find out the difficulties that Spanish speaker students face while learning writing. So, it consists of three parts; a multiple choice, a matching, and production. In this test, 4 students of group 11-2 approved the exam by getting a score up to 70 and the same amount of students failed that test by scoring under 70 (8 students attended class that day). In the case of group 11-5, 3 students passed the test by scoring above 70, and 6 students failed the test scoring below 70 (only 9 students attended class that day). A second placement test was applied and divided into three similar parts; multiple choice,

identification, and production. The results were that 6 students who were in class at the moment of the test approved it with a score up to 70 in group 11-2. On the other hand, in group 11-5 the amount of students who approved the test were 9 out of 11 with scores up to 70, and just 2 students failed the test with a score under 70.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

5.1 Conclusion

- The interference of the mother tongue in the writing process of English is based on the study of the deficiencies of English learning students and the appropriate way to provide them with tools so that they can improve their writing skill.

- During the observations of the classes, both teachers developed activities more focused on reading techniques rather than writing. Also, they do not take advantage of the technology provided in their classroom, and the students speak a lot of Spanish during the learning-teaching process.

- Some writing difficulties that the students face are mainly related to the most common grammar errors such as subject-verb agreement, misspelling, word usage, word order, etc. Moreover, they tend to translate most of the words from Spanish into English without taking into consideration the differences of both languages' structure.

- Both teachers were interviewed; they agreed on mentioning that the students' deficiencies are literal translation, pluralizing adjectives, and word order due to the lack of exposure to the English language structure. Besides, they coincided in the fact that Ministerio de Educación Pública in Costa Rica is deficient in terms of methodologies to teach English. For this reason, they are forced to focus their classes on reading rather than writing.

- Two placement tests were applied; in the first exam, most students flunked the test because of two facts. The lack of knowledge about the English grammar and the lack of experience when writing paragraphs. In the second test, most learners passed the exam after a brief explanation of common grammar errors and some writing techniques. Although they keep having the same deficiencies at a lower level.

5.2 Implications

5.2.1 Recommendations

Some strategies to take into account for students, teachers, and the high school in which the research was carried out to reduce the interference of the mother tongue on the process of learning English are the following.

- To implement the use of modern teaching techniques by using technology in order to encourage students to practice the writing skill.

- To explain the topic or units in innovative and creative ways avoiding the traditional lesson.

- To dedicate more time to review English grammar structures providing students with enough examples and time to practice with short paragraphs writing emails, journals or letters by giving them freedom to put into practice their own knowledge.

- To create awareness among students, so they will be able to avoid errors that ELL's make when learning English due their mother language by providing them with real examples of paragraphs that other students wrote.

- Peer correction can be useful to make students analyze the peer's errors and at the same time give them the chance to help other partners to improve their writing.

- To provide enough feedback to students so that they realize what are their strengths and weaknesses on their writing process.

5.2.2 Limitations

- Once the groups and the teachers were selected, set up, and observed; an unexpected change in the schedule came up causing the new choice of the groups to be observed.

- The fact of time was one of the main difficulties faced in the development of the research because high schools in Costa Rica start class on February. After that, students had the evaluation week in which they did not have class continuing with a week off, Holy week.

5.3 Concluding Statement

The mother tongue strongly interferes on the writing process of foreign language learners since they are influenced by their native language. For this reason, innovative strategies should be taken into consideration to improve the teaching-learning process of students, and at the same time to encourage them to think and write in English.

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ANNEXES

ANNEX 1   **Observation Sheet**

Researchers' Names_____ Date_____ Institution_____ Group Observed_____

	Criteria	Observtion
1.	How is the classroom setting (physical conditions)	
2.	How many students are there?	
3.	How are students placed?	
4.	Did the teacher get students' interest through a good motivation? How is it used?	
5.	What type of material is used? What is the quality of it? How is it used?	
6.	What is the students' attitude towards the material shown?	
7.	What are students doing while the teacher is presenting the topic?	
8.	What is the teacher's attitude towards students' behavior?	
9.	Does it seem the teacher is presenting the subject correctly?	

10.	What types of exercises are used to reinforce the writing process? Are they in accordance with students' knowledge?	
11.	Are students really motivated along the whole class?	
12.	How much English is used by the students during the activities and the whole class?	
13.	Does the teacher speak Spanish during the class?	
14.	What are some writing difficulties in the writing process?	

Annex 2

I Placement test

I. PART. Multiple Choice (5 points)

Read the following statements and choose the correct answer. Circle the letter of the best option. 1 point each correct answer.

1. Russell has felt more confident_____learning how to do karate.
a) although
b) since
c) besides
d) in other words

2. He's starting to get nervous _____ he has so much work to do and not enough time to finish it all.
a)because
b) by contrast
c) moreover
d) therefore

 3. Traffic was very slow coming home today _____ a heavy snowstorm.
a) due to
b) unfortunately
c) consequently
d) likewise

4. The beach we visited is spectacular,_____ the waterfall and the valley.
a) in fact
b) although
c) as well as
d) for instance

5. There were too many accidents on this road when the speed limit was 55 miles per hour; _____, the city decided to lower it to 45 miles per hour. The limit for snowmobiles was also lowered.
a) in fact
b) therefore
c) however
d) due to

II Part. Matching (8 points)

Read the following sentences from **column A** pay attention to the mistake. After that, look for the name of the mistake in **column B** and match it. **YOU CAN REPEAT SOME OPTIONS IN COLUMN B.**

Column A	Column B
A. Some people **has** to change in order to achieve their goal--------------------------( )	(%) word order
B. He starts his temporary assignment **tommorrow** .------------------------------( )	($) missing capitalization
C. For **who** did you draw that picture?------------ --( )	(@) Subject-verb agreement
D. Macaroni and cheese is a dish on the **menu lunch**. ------------------------------------( )	(X) Misspelling
E. Louise and Henry had coffee, cheese **and crackers and grapes**. ----------------------( )	(#) Punctuation (comma)
F. Every **December**, I can hardly wait for Santa Claus.-------------------------------------( )	(?)Wrong word usage
G. She went to the stage to **recieve** her diploma. ------------------------------------( )	
H. The books and the magazine **was** placed on the table.----------------------------------( )	

III PART. Production (8 points)

In the following space write a paragraph with your own words (of at least 8 sentences). Choose one of the given topics to write about in your paragraph. Remember to use **TRANSITION WORDS** (although, because, also, therefore, etc), be careful with your **GRAMMAR**.

- ❖ **The job I wish to have in the future**
- ❖ **The major/career I dream to study**
- ❖ **The university I will enter when graduated**

_____

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Rubric evaluation	Very good	Needs to improve
Student writes clear and logical progression of ideas and provides strong use of **transition words**. (2-3 linking words are considered good)	2	1
Student writes complete and correct **sentence structure**. (Sub-Verb-Compl)	2	1
Student uses **subject/verb agreement**.	2	1
Student commits minor errors in **punctuation, capitalization**, and **spelling**. (2 errors are considered good)	2	1

Annex 3

Guide for the teacher interview

1. What are the most common teaching techniques that you use when teaching writing?

2. What deficiencies do you consider students have due to the interference of their mother tongue? Can you name the most common ones?

3. What strategies do you consider will be the better to improve their writing process?

4. How is the student´s performance in writing?

5. As an experienced teacher, what do you advise us to do in order to improve the student´s motivation when teaching writing?

6. From 1 to 10 in which 1 is the lower number and 10 the highest, what number do you give to MEP´s English programs? Does the MEP have well developed programs to teach the writing skill?

7. Are students able to write a short essay when they finish high school?

8. Do you consider writing as one of the most difficult skills for students? Why?

9. In one word, how do you describe the student´s writing process?

10. Do you know the new English syllabus established by MEP?

Annex 4

Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares   **Total points: 21 points**

Instructors: Susana Rojas-Carlos Vargas   **Obtained points:_____**

Level: 11th   **Score:_____**

 Student's name:_____

 Date:_____ Group:_____

I. PART. Multiple Choice (5 points)

Read the following statements and choose the correct answer. Circle the letter of the best option. 1 point each correct answer.

1. Jake couldn't sleep_____ he was very tired.
a) although
b) since
c) instead of
d) because

2. Lisa went shopping,_____ she didn't buy anything.
a) for
b) but
c) moreover
d) therefore

3. The game was cancelled _____ the bad weather.
a) consequently
b) also
c) due to
d) likewise

4. The company has been in its present location_____ the beginning of the century.
a) in fact
b) although
c) as well as
d) since

5. · The athlete was caught using drugs._____, he was kicked off the team.
a) because
b) therefore
c) likewise
d) due to

II Part. Identification (6 points)

Read the following paragraph and **CIRCLE the 6 grammar errors** you find in the text**.**

Keylor Antonio Navas Gamboa was born on december 15th, 1986. Keylor is a Costa Rican professional foottballer who plays as a goalkeeper for Spanish club Real Madrid and the Costa Rica national team. He was born in Perez Zeledon, Costa Rica. Keylor Navas are a person with a physical good appearance. Navas is not one of the biggest goalkeepers in the world, his height is 1.85. Keylor Navas is dark-skinned. he was raised largely by his maternal grandparents, Juan Gamboa and Elizabeth Guzman.

III PART. Production (8 points)

In the following space **write an email** (**of at least 8 sentences**) to your **favorite national athlete** in which you tell him/her your opinion about

- Why you admire him/her,
- What his or her main achievements are,
- The best things you think she/he has done for Costa Rica,
- Ask him/her for his/her future plans.

Remember to use **TRANSITION WORDS** (although, because, also, therefore, etc), be careful with your **GRAMMAR**.

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Rubric evaluation	Very good	Needs to improve
Student writes clear and logical progression of ideas and provides strong use of **transition words**. (2-3 linking words are considered good)	2	1
Student writes complete and correct **sentence structure**. (Sub-Verb-Compl)	2	1
Student uses **subject/verb agreement**.	2	1
Student commits minor errors in **punctuation, capitalization**, and **spelling**. (2 errors are considered good)	2	1

Annex 5

School: Colegio Bilingüe de Palmares   Grade: 11th   Section: 11-5/ 11-2
Student – Teacher: Susana Rojas/ Carlos Vargas   Time/lesson: 80 min
Mentor Teacher: Carmen Castro/ Nehismy Ulate
Tutor: Julio Castro   Date: April 9th
Cognitive Target: Grammar mistakes and linking words
General Objective: To exchange information about the different grammar interferences or errors of ELL.

Specific Objectives	Language Examples	Culture and Attitudes	Mediation Activities	Time	Evaluation of Learning outcomes	Materials
	Linking words In addition Therefore Furthermore Although Because	Tolerance Respect Honesty Teamwork	**Routines** Teacher calls the roll and greets students.	3 min		Computer
Recognizing some national athletes by playing hot potato.	Since Besides Moreover Likewise however **Grammar mistakes** Misspelling Wrong word usage		**Warm up** 1. Students play hot potato. 2. While the teacher claps, they pass around the hot potato. 3. Then when the teacher stops, the person who has the hot potato has to unwrap a paper from the hot potato and answer a question related to the topic sports.	5 min	Students recognize the name of some National athletes of Costa Rica	Hot potato
Identifying the most common grammatical errors of ELL by listening and reading to a power point presentation.	Missing capitalization Subject-verb agreement Punctuation Word order		**Presentation** The teacher explains information about the most common grammatical interferences or errors of ELL through a power point presentation. It will be a performance of both researchers in charge in order to make the class more dynamic and entertaining. It consists of a program in which some famous athletes post on different social networks (Facebook, Snapchat, Twitter, etc) their opinions about things related to grammar and share some ideas about grammar errors Spanish speakers make when learning English.	20 min	Students identify the common grammar errors. Students listen actively to the teachers.	Power point presentation T.V Computer

Applying some grammar errors in context by playing a game.			**Practice** 1. Students play a game called "Jeopardy". 2. They are divided into three groups. 3. Each group has to choose a column and a number in order to start playing. 4. Then, they have to answer a question related to grammatical errors in order to get a point. 5. At the end, the group who has more points wins the game.	25 min	Students participate properly in the activity.	T.V Computer
Implementing knowledge of common grammar mistakes by taking a placement test.			**Production** 1. Students are given the second placement test. 2. Students have to take it individually in order to measure their grammatical knowledge.	25 min	Students complete the second placement test effectively.	Placement test, pen or pencil
			Farewell Teachers say good bye to the students and leave the room clean and organized.	2 min		

Curricular Accommodation: Pay close attention to students with curricular accommodations.

References: