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Understanding EFL students' learning through classroom research: Experiences of teacher-researchers

Sandy T. Soto
Compiler





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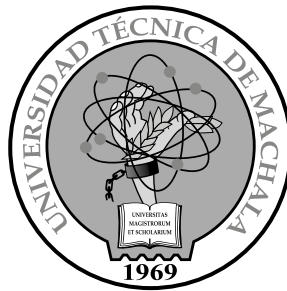
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Understanding EFL students' learning through classroom research: Experiences of teacher-researchers

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Dedication

To those EFL teachers who, day by day, give the best of their own
for helping their students construct their knowledge and learn
English in meaningful and effective ways.

Sandy T. Soto

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Introduction

What should foreign language teachers do to help their students improve their linguistic skills? Many are the ways how teachers can support their students' learning process. There are a variety of methods, strategies, techniques, as well as materials and resources we can rely on in order for our students to succeed in the development of their skills.

Teachers can get ideas on what to do from published research, presentations at academic events, informal conversations with colleagues, online resources, and their own language learning experience. It is just a matter trying these ideas out and evaluate the extent to which they favor the enhancement of students' linguistic competences in the target language.

In line with these ideas, this book is intended to inform pre-service and in-service EFL teachers about the result of investigations conducted by English as foreign language teachers. The book is composed of five chapters which demonstrate how these teachers have taken a step further by taking the role of teacher-researchers to understand and boost their students' performance.

The first chapter of this book reports on a study conducted at the university level where students majoring in Hospitality and Tourism participated as principal users of videos to develop vocabulary of their field. The study aimed to find out the opinions of students about the use of English subtitled videos or movies to develop tourism vocabulary and to explore the benefits of using English subtitled videos in a context where there is no practice of the target language outside the classroom.

The second chapter of this book focuses on the development of listening skills through the use of podcasts as a strategy and resource in EFL classes. The aim of the study was to discuss the importance of podcasts for teaching English as a foreign language and to analyze the results of using them to improve listening comprehension in university students.

The third chapter digs into the writing skill. It is based on an interuniversity investigation in which the authors identified the most common errors made by EFL beginning level college students in their written discourse. The identification of these errors can guide EFL teachers to make methodological decisions to improve their students' writing performance.

The fourth chapter also addresses writing. In this case, this chapter discusses how a group of college students developed their writing skills through the writing of paragraphs and peer correction. Students wrote e-mails, blogs, reviews and posts and used rubrics to evaluate their performance with the help of their peers.

Finally, chapter seven examines the use of cell phone games within English classes. The chapter seeks to introduce these games as a valuable resource to encourage the practice of English through mobile phones in and out of the classroom. Concepts of mobile games and the reasons to use them in EFL classes are addressed. The chapter also provides some suggestions of game applications developed to support the learning of EFL.

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Chapter 3

The most common errors
within the written
discourse of EFL beginners
at Ecuadorian universities

The most common errors within the written discourse of EFL beginners at Ecuadorian universities

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The most common errors within the written discourse of EFL beginners at Ecuadorian universities

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Abstract

Making errors while learning a language is nothing else than part of the learning process itself. The transfer of the mother tongue (L1) into a second language (L2) acquisition process is inevitable and mainly noticeable in the initial learning levels. The results of an Error Analysis (EA) in the written discourse become an advantage in the teaching of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) since it provides a clear image of what should be reinforced in the classroom. The aim of this study is to identify the most common errors made by EFL beginning level Ecuadorian college students in their written discourse. The researchers elaborated a linguistic corpus from writing samples provided by a group of forty-five students from three public universities in Ecuador. The EA process yields a high percentage of errors related to Word Missing; Form Spelling; Lexical Single; Lexico-Grammar, Verbs, Complementation; Style, Grammar, Verbs, Number; Grammar Articles; and, Grammar – Adjective Order. Errors in the analyzed samples mainly occur due to the interference and negative transfer resulting from the L1 (Spanish) over the L2 (English). Poor lexical and grammar knowledge are also causatives of the errors found in the study.

Keywords: error analysis, transfer L1-L2, EFL, writing, writing errors.

Introduction

The language learning process generates more than one cognitive procedure at once, as it has been previously pointed out by different linguistics; Noam Chomsky for instance, emphasizes the child's intrinsic ability to acquire the language throughout his first years of life (Chomsky, 1959; Lightbown & Spada, 2013; Saville-Troike, 2006-2012; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). This process is what he called LAD or Language Acquisition Device. Other theories focus on how the environment influences the language learning acquisition development as well as other external factors that can directly affect it; Skinner's Behavioral theory is a clear example of it (See Skinner, 1957).

The way in which one can acquire a second language has been the main issue of different studies that try to establish the mechanisms of this process along with determining the proper methodology to obtain better results. When we allude to a group of students in an EFL class, it is indispensable to think about their social environment, besides the clear influence of their L1 throughout the learning course. These factors have led linguists and teachers to consider EA as a possible tool to clarify concepts about common mistakes among learners during their language acquisition period (Corder, 1967-1975; James, 2013), as well as important

means to improve their expertise in the class. As a matter of fact, Carrió-Pastor & Mestre-Mestre (2014) suggest that “the errors found in writing can illuminate the writing process and help us to understand the mechanisms that the non-native speaker adopts” (p. 99).

Contrast Analysis

Error Analysis cannot be described without defining Contrast Analysis (CA). CA studies the student’s L1 in addition to the target language, through establishing their differences as similarities (Lado, 1957; Corder, 1981; Shaghi, 2013-2014). In other words, one depends on the other. The comparison between the L1 and the L2 can predict the probable difficulties along the learning development. The contrast or comparative studies will help the teacher to know what to teach and when to do it.

Lado, in his book “Linguistics Across Culture” (1957), mentions the innate transfer of the native language general rules into the language being acquired, throughout the learning momentum. It is necessary to indicate that the transfer could be positive or negative as stated by Lado (Presada & Badea, 2014). As one of the most important advantages of the CA, it gives us the opportunity to interpret which concepts could be positively transferred from one language to the other (Murad, 2013).

An error is not a mistake

At this point, it is indispensable to make clear the difference between an error and a mistake. An error is a systematic deviation from a specific rule that cannot be corrected. Meanwhile, a mistake is a random lapse that can be auto-corrected (Shaghi, 2013-2014; James, 2013). EA can be considered as a study technique while the Linguistic Corpus is the main aim of it. Some authors contemplated Corpus Linguistics as a methodology rather than a theory (Castillejos, 2009). In fact, it has been said that Corpus Linguistics is a “Whole system of methods and principles of how to apply corpora in language studies and teaching/learning it certainly has a theoretical status” (Mc Enery, Siao & Tono, 2006, p. 7).

The interrelation between EA and the Linguistic Corpus aids to enrich the second language acquisition process, keeping their rules as they interrelate. By analyzing errors, we can have an idea how the L2 is being learned (Murad, 2013) in addition to defining the internal structures that each student creates to assimilate the new language; Selinker (1972) characterizes this last process as Interlanguage. Consequently, EA “scrutinizes the learners’ errors to shed light on the learners’ in-process interlanguage system” (Yildiz, 2016, p. 58).

The interlanguage is born from the relation between the two different language systems (Native / Second Language). This connection results in a new one. Ac-

According to Selinker (1972), there are five reasons for the language acquisition process: transfer of the language and formal education, learning strategies for a second language such as association and communication, and over-generalization of the material corresponding to the language being learned.

Transferring from the native language into the target language is the main origin of most of the common errors in the learning process (Richards, 1971-1974-1977; Taylor & Chen, 1991), in addition to the interference of L1 in the acquisition of L2. Errors related to interference are traditionally known as intralingual errors (James, 1998; Larsen-Freeman & Long, 1992; Saville-Troike, 2006-2012; Saville-Troike & Barto, 2017). In most cases, this factor emerges due to the null exposure of the students to the language being learned, which enables them to absorb the language as their own.

Motivation is another key component of the complete acquisition development (Miles, 2002). Traditionally the books used in the EFL class did not adjust to the reality of the students; neither had they considered the different problems that students could face during the learning process of the L2. Applying EA as an instrument allows to determine the possible causes of the difficulties experienced during the instruction by both the students and the teacher (Miles, 2002).

Nevertheless, it is essential to take into account that it could be difficult to label a mistake as exclusively grammatical or lexical. The categories which are to be used in an error analysis study must be thoroughly explained in a way that avoids confusion and also allows the language teacher to understand the appropriate teaching measures which are needed in order to fulfill students' expectations (Salem, 2007). The aim of any EA study is to provide meaningful feedback depending on the type of error detected. Associative Learning is a key ingredient in the process of acquiring a new language and it could be a valuable tool when correcting common errors. Fluency could also be enhanced through word combinations or repeated associations according to the different contexts students may be involved into in the future (Barcroft, 2017).

Error tagging system

In 1996, a group of scientists (Dagneaux, Denness, Granger, & Meunier), led by Dagneaux, at the Corpus Linguistic Centre in the Catholic University of Louvain, created a method of qualifying errors which is composed on seven labels to catalogue the most common errors according to the following categories:

- Formal Errors: (F) Morphological Errors (misspelling/ word order)
- Grammar Errors: (G) Errors against Grammar rules (proper use of articles, prepositions, pronouns, verb order, etc.)
- Lexical: (L) Improper use of the semantic properties of the words or phrases.

- Lexical-Grammatical Errors: (X) Violating the syntactic and morphological qualities of the words. (Countable/Uncountable, etc.)
- Redundancy of words: (W) Improper word order or missing words in the speech.
- Register: (R) The errors which occur when expressing an idea or through the speech along with the type of it (level of formality, Written vs. Oral production)
- Style: (S) When the oral speech is restricted, not clear or incomplete.

In 1998, Dagneaux, Denness y Granger, through the ICLE error tagging Project: analysis of Spanish EFL writer, created a computer-based technique named Computer-Aided Error Analysis (CEA), whose main goal was to optimize the process of analyzing errors that was usually done by hand. It is necessary to point out that, according to their findings, the most common errors are the lexical ones, including conceptualization, placement or meaning (See Dagneaux, Denness, & Granger, 1998). In 2008, Dagneaux, Denness, Granger, Meunier, Neff, & Thewissen, launched the 1.3 version of the program with included error labeling, register and punctuation code.

Previous studies about EA

In a case study (Fossilization and acquisition: a case study of learner language) conducted by researchers at the University of Costa Rica Linguistic College, a group of English students, as well as students of the English Language career, were taken as a sample (Hasbún, 2007). The researchers found that the most common errors in the participants' written production were the use of prepositions and articles. These errors showed to be the result of fossilization problems ("premature cessation of development in defiance of optimal learning conditions" (Han, 2004, p. 23)) over these grammar aspects even though they had repeatedly been explained in the classes. The omission of sentence subjects, concordance between the subject and the verb, was other important error commonly repeated by these students, especially during the first levels of instruction.

Similarly, in his study, Londoño-Vásquez (2008) analyzed the written composition by a Colombian university student who had been studying English at a public university in Antioquia for over five months. The results of this case study showed that the student made four types of major errors (omission, additions, misinformation, and misordering); the researcher also found errors linked to the Spanish interference into English learning. Another study conducted by Castillejos (2009), for the Autonomous University of Chapingo, Mexico, showed that most errors analyzed in her study were the product of the influence of the L1 on the learning development of the L2. In this case, 4 out of 10 errors directly corresponded to

this concept. Therefore, L1 influence over the L2 reports being a significant aspect to take into consideration through the analysis of the data obtained.

To summarize, EA and CA are two decisive tools in the teaching and learning of a second or foreign language. They provide teachers with the means to understand the concepts that need to be reinforced in the classroom, in addition to helping them to develop new strategies and techniques to enhance the complete teaching-learning experience of the foreign language (Miles, 2002). Among these considerations, it is indispensable to acknowledge that there are other factors that could affect positively or negatively the learning process, some of them, worth to mention, are the motivation, the quality of the input given by the teacher, students' aptitude towards the language, class materials, among others, (Hasbún, 2007).

Bearing in mind this, the objective of this research study is to identify the most common errors in the written speech of Ecuadorian college students at the beginner level. We expect to provide English teachers with a reference of what errors their students might most commonly make so that they can make decisions about how to counteract these limitations and improve their students learning process.

Methodology

The study took into consideration the error analysis process by Castillejos (2009) and suggested by Corder (1974): gathering of samples, categorization of errors, description, and explanation of errors. The first two steps are considered in this section and the other two will be illustrated in the results and discussion section.

Gathering of samples

The corpus of data of this study was collected in 6 months, from March to August of the year 2017. The samples consisted in pieces of writing of 45 students (both males and females) enrolled in the first level of English in three public universities of Ecuador: University of Guayaquil, University of Cuenca and Technical University of Machala. The students' age ranked from 18 to 25. As part of their course work, the students wrote paragraphs covering topics related to daily activities in present tense, such as daily routine, people they admire, friends, family, and autobiographies. Fifteen paragraphs were randomly selected from each university. The paragraphs consisted of 50 to 80 words.

Procedure for the categorization of errors

Errors were identified by following the error tagging system coding proposed by Dagneaux et al. (1996). Individually, the authors built up a list of sentences or phrases that contained the errors they had found in the samples collected in their universities. After that, they evaluated the errors and determined the type of errors

they belonged to. Then to avoid misinterpretations, the authors exchanged the samples, analyzed the errors again and verified if they were not erroneously labeled. A color-coding system was used to build up the list of sentences/phrases that contained the errors. In this manner, the authors assigned a color for each category in the error tagging system table and then proceeded to highlight a sentence that exemplifies the mistake with the corresponding color in the written sample.

After the authors identified the mistakes in the written discourse of their EFL students, they created a list of errors entering the results in a spreadsheet to keep track of the findings and to identify the frequency of such data. In some cases, the authors determined more than one possible error category in a phrase or sentence. Table 1 shows the six codes used with their sub codification respectively, sixteen in total. The table of the codes and sub-codes system was adjusted considering the needs of the present study.

Table 1: Errors Codes and Sub codes (adapted from Dagneaux et al., 1998)

Formal Errors (F)	
FS	Form Spelling
Grammatical Errors (G)	
GA	Grammar Articles
GADJN	Grammar - Adjective Number
GADJO	Grammar - Adjective Order
GNN	Grammar- Nouns, Number
GP	Grammar- Pronouns
GVN	Grammar, Verbs, Number
GVT	Grammar, Verbs, Tense
Lexical Errors (L)	
LS	Lexical Single
Style Errors (S)	
S	Style (long, foreign-sounding, clumsy)
SI	Style, Incomplete
SU	Style, Unclear
Word redundant/word missing/word order Errors (W)	
WM	Word Missing
WO	Word Order
LeXico-grammatical Errors (X)	
XVCO	LeXico-Grammar, Verbs, Complementation
XVPR	LeXico-Grammar, Verbs, Dependent Preposition

Note: Code and sub codes used in this study.

Results and Discussion

After analyzing the data, it was possible to identify the most common errors of the written discourse of beginning level Ecuadorian students. As previously mentioned, to achieve the identification of such errors, the authors used the labeling model proposed by Dagneaux et al. (1996). The methodological procedure applied to analyze the collected data was the characterization of the errors from the samples, description of the errors, and their explanation (Corder, 1974). The explanations provided throughout the interpretation of the results was supported by already existing foreign language learning theories such as CA, EA, and the transfer theory, among others.

Description

The results show that the most common errors in the written production of students from the three universities were related to grammar: redundancy/word missing/word order, and errors related to the formal aspect. In figure 1, we can see the different error codes, the number, and frequency of errors from the analyzed sample. The numbers and percentages specified in the graphic are the results of the addition of all the errors found in all the subcodes that refer to the general codes.

Figure 1. Total Number of Errors by Code



Note: Number and percentage of errors by code

Table 2: Samples of errors found

No	CODES /SUB CODES	EXAMPLES	FREQUENCY	%
1	FS	I go to the universty \$university\$	73	14,84
		I brush my theed \$teeth\$		
		I was born in piñas \$Piñas\$, but i \$I\$ live in cuenca \$Cuenca\$		
2	GA	a \$an\$ excellent person	32	6,50
		They like the \$O\$ food ecuadorian		
		My name is a \$O\$ Roberto Sánchez.		
3	GADJN	goods \$good\$ characteristics ...	2	0,41
		We are happies \$happy\$...		
4	GADJO	... with a Coca Cola cold \$cold Coca Cola\$.	30	6,10
		She is an accountant very professional \$very professional accountant\$		
5	GNN	the peoples \$people\$	23	4,67
		Kevin plays the drum \$drums\$ and sing.		
		I go home with my parent \$parents\$...		
6	GP	I consider me \$myself\$	19	3,86
		Me \$I\$ like		
		I love they \$them\$		
7	GVN	I are \$am\$ very patient.	34	6,91
		He like \$likes\$ the music.		
		She have \$has\$ short business.		
8	GVT	Adriana is use \$wearing\$	6	1,22
		Adriana is use \$wearing\$		
9	LS	use \$swear\$ brown jackets	63	12,80
		look \$watch\$ cartoons...		
		I have \$am\$ 19 years old.		
10	S	He like the \$O\$ music.	40	8,13
		I like make \$practice\$ sports.		
		have a \$O\$ time with my family.		
11	SI	because \$I\$ want to\$ become \$a\$ great engineer....	8	1,63
		My routine \$starts at\$ 7 am \$when\$ I \$have\$ breakfast ...		
		Then \$I\$ go\$ back ...		

12	SU	on weekends of all her classmates at university \$I meet my university classmates on weekends\$	5	1,02
		I is a sleeping and baby \$I sleep with my baby\$		
13	WM	\$I\$ usually do a lot of exercise.	104	21,14
		because \$he\$ is a wonderful person		
		It is \$a\$ city in Ecuador.		
14	WO	I all weekends in the tomorrow go the running in the park \$I go running in the park every weekend in the mornings\$	3	0,61
		all days playing videogames \$play videogames every-day\$...		
		...uncle house's \$uncle's house\$...		
15	XVCO	my dream is graduate \$to graduate\$...	44	8,94
		I like ride \$riding\$ my mountain bike.		
16	XVPR	She like listen \$listen to\$ music.	6	1,22
		go \$go to\$ the university...		
TOTAL NUMBER OF ERRORS			492	100

Note: Results obtained with their list, code or sub code, examples, frequency, and percentage.

Table 2 shows examples of each type of error found in the students' writing samples, accompanied by their specific subcode, frequency, and percentage. In some of the examples illustrated in Table 2, more than one error is evidenced. However, in those examples, we only refer to the specific part for which they were taken as evidence. The explanation of all errors was accounted for the frequency, as it can be observed in the following part.

Explanation of errors

The analyzed samples revealed that beginners make a high number of errors related to the subcode WM as it can be observed next: because **\$he\$** is a wonderful person. Just like what was found in (Hasbún, 2007), students particularly omit words that comply the function of the subject (mainly subject pronoun), verbs and prepositions. As Spanish-language users, we can assert that the omission of subject pronouns is highly frequent within Spanish discourse due to the implied condition of the grammatical person in this language.

In some cases, verbs are also omitted such as in I **\$am\$** twenty years old because students assume that the action is implicit in the complement of the sentence. This idea can be affirmed from the experiences the authors have had in their classes. On several occasions, they have found the same mistake patterns and asked their student to show them the verb in the sentence, and they immediately pointed and explained that it was there (in the complement part of the sentence). Another

reason why students omit verbs and other words is because they have poor knowledge of their function and how sentences are structured.

In an example of the subcode FS, the student changes the spelling of the word apples in the sentence: I like appols **\$apples\$**. This is because, in Spanish, words are written the same way they are pronounced. Something that does not happen in English as the pronunciation of most English words differs from their written form. Therefore, the student is transferring his L1 knowledge into his L2 production. Negative L1 transference into the L2 is one of the common factors for the emergence of errors in the learners' discourse as it has been found in other studies such as the study conducted by Castillejos (2009).

Errors linked to the subject pronoun "I" are also found in the students' writings, especially when it is used in the middle of a sentence. In English, this pronoun should always be written in capital letters, but students write it in lowercase when it is not at the beginning of a sentence. E.g.: I was born in piñas **\$Piñas\$**, but i **\$I\$** live in cuenca **\$Cuenca\$**. Here, we can also see spelling errors associated with proper nouns; this type of errors is also seen in the students' L1.

I knew **\$met\$** him last year is an example of errors associated with the subcode LS. This type of errors appears due to students' limited ability to recognize which word to use in certain contexts. The absence of words choice awareness leads them to use verbs such as "know and meet," which in Spanish mean "conocer," interchangeably; without reflecting that, in English, these words are used in different ways.

Another reason for these errors to happen is the absence of vocabulary in the students' lexicon. The lack of vocabulary prompts students to use their few available vocabulary resources and translate them into the wrong use of the word itself; such is the case of "use." English speakers use the verb "wear" when referring to wear clothes and "use" to make use of something. Spanish speakers do not make such differences for these definitions. Therefore, this word is employed as both "wear" and "use" in this language.

The errors associated with the subcode XVCO demonstrate the poor handling of grammatical rules. For example, the student does not know which rule applies to verbs when they are part of a structure that complements another verb. In the example I like ride **\$riding\$** my mountain bike, we can see how the student writes "like ride" without considering that the verb "ride" should be written in its infinitive form or its gerund form.

The types of errors found in the subcategory S clearly reflect the influence of the L1 on the second language. In the example, I can play the guitar from the seventeen years old **\$since I was seventeen\$**, the student made use of his L1 knowledge and wrote this sentence word by word, which does not necessarily work in English. This practice makes the language learner's written output have a foreign sound.

In the sub-code GVN, errors mainly relate to the conjugation of verbs in third

person singular (he, she, it), where the general grammatical rule is to add an “s” to the verb, except for those special verbs like “have.” Quite often the omission of the “s” is evident as in He likes **\$likes\$** the music. In the example, She has **\$has\$** two pets, the error indicates that student ignores the conjugation of the third person singular and writes “have” when he had to write “**has**.” In this other example, My favorite colors is **\$are\$** blue and red., we can observe that the student does not recognize his subject, so he writes the wrong form of the verb to be. My favorite colors represent the subject pronoun “**they**,” therefore, it must be accompanied by the conjugation of the verb to be “**are**.”

The errors included in the subcategory GA are related to the omission, incorrect, or unnecessary use of articles. In Spanish, definite articles “**el, la, los, las**” are used more frequently whereas their equivalent in English, “the,” is only used for specific cases and when referring to a plural noun in a general way, we use zero article. Hence, in They like the **\$O\$** ecuadorian food, the student uses the definite article “**the**” unnecessarily. Likewise, the incorrect use of the articles “**a/an**” like in ... a **\$an\$** excellent person and their consistent omission in front of professions in their singular form were evidenced, my mother is **\$a\$** teacher. The latter happens because in Spanish articles are not required before professions in their singular form.

In the examples ... with a Coca Cola cold **\$cold Coca Cola\$**, She is an accountant very professional **\$very professional accountant\$**, and ... children poor **\$poor children\$** ..., which correspond to the GADJO subcode, we can see the negative transfer from the L1 to the L2 regarding the order of adjectives. In Spanish, the adjectives are placed after nouns as in “**Coca Cola cold**,” whereas in English occurs exactly the opposite, “**cold Coca Cola**.”

As noted in the introduction to this work, students in an EFL class tend to make repetitive errors as they develop their written skills. At a certain grade, making errors is acceptable because it is part of the language learning process; but if these errors keep emerging and the learners do not stop making them, such errors might become fossilized (Han, 2004).

In contexts like Ecuador, the little or the lack of exposure to the foreign language interfere negatively in the student’s language acquisition. Therefore, it is essential to reinforce grammatical and lexical awareness in the learners by applying effective strategies that would promote the internalization of rules established for the correct use of the language. By doing this, teachers will be able to reduce the number of errors made in the written discourse of language learners, in addition to providing greater security to the learner when using the L2 in real situations.

The errors discussed in the previous paragraphs respond to those errors with a higher frequency within the samples collected. Errors that respond to the subcodes GNN (4.67%); GP (3.86%); SI (1.63%); GVT (1.22%); XVPR (1.22%); SU

(1.02%); WO (0.61%); and GADJN (0.41%) were also found in the students' writing samples. They were the last mentioned due to their significantly lower emergence within the data collected. Even though they have not been explained in detail, it does not mean that they are less important. On the contrary, teachers should also consider these errors as they may appear in the written production of their students. Teachers must keep in mind that every student learns differently, consequently, a rule that might be easier for one student can be a headache for another.

In this section, we have discussed the errors that had a higher incidence in the written discourse of students from three public universities in Ecuador. The errors were withdrawn from forty-five pieces of writing produced by EFL beginner students covering topics in the simple present tense such as daily routine, people they admire, friends, family, and autobiographies. As one of its main findings, this work provides a clear idea about which linguistic resource is prone to suffer more mistakes. Such mistakes occur as a result of the influence of the L1 on the acquisition of a different language: the interlanguage that the student creates in the process; the students' poor knowledge of the language; lack of linguistic and grammatical awareness, and fossilization processes.

From the results obtained, we can suggest that beginner language learners make more WM, FS, LS, XVCO, S, GVN, GA, and GADJO errors. Such errors are common in the written output for EFL learners whose L1 is Spanish. Students with beginning English proficiency no matter the level of instruction – elementary, middle or high school, or college- are likely to follow the same error patterns. Therefore, we make a call for teachers who are practitioners at the elementary, middle, and high school levels as well as college teachers to implement techniques and strategies that would allow them to help their students overcome such errors not only in their written but also in the spoken production.

Among the limitations of this study is the lack of access to a software that would identify and classify the errors automatically. Even though the errors were meticulously classified by hand, the use of appropriate software could prevent from making mistakes. Another limitation would be the number of pieces of writing and topics selected for the sample; a more in-depth study of this topic would require a higher number of samples and a wider variety of topics for students to demonstrate their language knowledge.

For future research studies regarding this topic, we recommend the analysis of errors, made by language learners at the intermediate and advanced level, about not only the written but also their spoken output. We also suggest the use of a bigger sample for the study. Similarly, it would be important to study how Ecuadorian teachers address errors; it means how they correct them so that they do not become fossilized in the students' knowledge.

To summarize, language learners are most likely to make errors related to WM,

FS, LS, XVCO, S, GVN, GA, and GADJO. Errors related to GNN, GP, SI, GVT, XVPR, SU, WO, and GADJN also occur but in less frequency. No matter what, all language learners make errors in their written output; it is part of the learning process. Hence, when planning their instruction, EFL teachers must consider both the errors with the highest emergence in the students writing output as well as those with least frequency. They should also refer to language theories that study the occurrence of these errors such as the transfer theory, CA, EA, fossilization, and look into the reason why these errors occur. By doing so, teachers can find suitable solutions for their teaching setting, lessen the emergence of these errors in their students' written production and help these students to move to the next level.

Conclusions

This work had the purpose of identifying the most common errors in the written discourse of a group of Ecuadorian college students at the beginning level. After analyzing the corpus consisting of forty-five paragraphs (which covered simple present topics) written by students from the first level of English in three public universities in Ecuador, we found that the most common errors are those related to Word Missing, Form Spelling, Lexical Single, Lexico-Grammar, Verbs, Complementation; Style, Grammar, Verbs, Number; Grammar Articles, and, Grammar – Adjective Order.

Every language has its conventional rules about what is allowed to do and what is not when producing the language. The findings lead us to conclude that the errors made by beginner students are mainly the result of the interference or transfer of the linguistic knowledge of the L1 into the L2. The fact that the samples analyzed came from students at the university level reveals that Ecuadorian students at this instructional level have a poor command of the lexical and grammatical resources of English, even though they received six years of EFL instruction during middle and high school and some of them even at the elementary level.

Another explanation for the appearance of such errors at this instructional level is the fossilization of those weaknesses in the students' knowledge of English as their L2. Unfortunately, since students might not have received appropriate feedback, these errors became fossilized. Therefore, the list of examples provided in the table of results represents a reference for teachers interested in turning their language teaching on the most urgent needs of their students such as the improvement of their writing skills.

Teachers need to identify the most relevant and difficult language points to make methodological decisions that seek to improve students' writing performance, and the results of this work show the linguistic areas in which teachers and learners need to put the greater emphasis. Error making is part of the learning process

of any language, but each individual reacts differently in different settings. Then, it is recommended that future researchers replicate studies of this nature at various school levels. Finally, we also suggest conducting studies about how Ecuadorian EFL teachers address their students' written and spoken errors.

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