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Error Analysis of Basque/Spanish Learners' Written Language: A Case Study

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Abstract

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It is generally believed that when learning another language, students most commonly use their first language as the source of language influence. In the Basque region of Spain people are either Spanish monolinguals or Basque bilinguals and in this case study I set out to see whether students use Spanish or Basque as a reference when learning English. The three most common written errors of Spanish monolinguals and Basque bilinguals were analyzed by using Error Analysis as an analytical tool. The errors were not only described but also reasons were put forward as to why these errors were made. Even though Basque was the first language of half of the students, the results show that Spanish was the main source of influence when writing in English.

Key words: Error analysis, Basque, Spanish, first language, language influence

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List of Abbreviations

BAC – Basque Autonomous Community

EA – Error Analysis

FCE – Cambridge First Certificate in English

IL – Interlanguage

L1 – First Language

L2 – Second Language

L3 – Third Language

LAD – Language Acquisition Device

SLA – Second Language Acquisition

TL – Target Language

1 Introduction

The Basque Country is an autonomous region of northern Spain and depending on whom you ask you are bound to get very different answers regarding the geographical whereabouts of the Basque lands. The Basque Country covers an area bordering The Bay of Biscay and the northern and southern slopes of the western Pyrenees that separate France and Spain. This region is referred to as *Euskal Herria*¹ and consists of four provinces in Spain (Guipuzkoa, Bizkaia, Araba, Navarre) and three on the French side. The Spanish Basque Country, however, is made up of two political entities, the Basque Autonomous Community (BAC; Bizkaia, Guipuzkoa, Araba) and Navarre. This study will deal with the former.²

Figure 1 Map of Euskal Herria and the BAC³



Although the Basque language was prohibited for more than 30 years during the Franco dictatorship (1939-1975) it has managed to survive and due to the 1979 statute of autonomy, the region has become a bilingual community where both Basque (the minority language) and Spanish (the majority language) are official languages.⁴ The Basque Statistical Institute (Eustat) divides the different groups of speakers in the BAC into three categories, Basque speakers, Quasi-Basque speakers, and Spanish speakers.⁵ Percentagewise, the

first and second group account for about 48%, and the remaining 52% of the inhabitants are Spanish monolinguals.⁶

Over the past few years, English has managed to make its breakthrough in this bilingual community. Although older generations are more likely to speak French as L2 or L3, English has come to replace that role. In fact, experiments are being carried out in order to make the BAC a trilingual community.⁷ It is estimated that a great majority (some 97%) of pre-university students learn English as their first foreign language. However, according to Lasagabaster⁸ for many years, the English education has not been sufficient and a reason mentioned for this is among others textbook-centered lessons and the central role of mainly teaching grammar. In addition, English-speaking television programs are dubbed and therefore exposure to the English language has been very limited.

¹ This is in Basque and means the land of Euskera (Basque) speakers

² Author's own data, 2009. Unpublished

³ Picture taken from http://www.jmsc09551.pwp.blueyonder.co.uk/eh_map.jpg

⁴ Lasagabaster 2000:179

⁵ Basque speakers: can speak and understand Basque without any problems, Quasi-Basque speakers: can speak Basque with difficulty but understand it well or with only slight trouble, Spanish speakers: can neither speak nor understand Basque. Lasagabaster 2000:179

⁶ It should be noted that within this 48% there is a great difference between use and knowledge of Basque. Eustat 2006

⁷ However, this project is relatively new and started in the private and public schools in 1990 and 1996 respectively. Del Pilar Garcia Mayo 2010:134

⁸ Lasagabaster 2000:179-197

Considering that Basque is not an Indo-European language and has no relations with Spanish or English, it is very interesting to examine whether learners of English use Spanish or Basque when writing in English. When learning a Second (L2) or Third Language (L3), learners are often thought to use their First Language (L1), therefore, it will be interesting to see how the subject pool thinks when writing in English.⁹ In this study, I am thus interested in the thinking process of the students.

Linguistically, this is a very interesting region to research, especially when it comes to Second Language Acquisition (SLA) and Error Analysis (EA) as it will give me some insight into the learning process of my subject pool. It is interesting to examine what mistakes are made by Spanish and Basque learners of English when writing, but also what differences and similarities, if any, can be seen between Basque bilinguals and Spanish monolinguals. Furthermore, I am interested in not only what, but also why. That is, why do they make the errors they do?

My research questions are thus as follows:

1. What differences or similarities can be seen between Basque L3 learners and Spanish L2 learners?
2. What are the three most common errors?
3. Why are the errors made?

1.1 Arrangement of Chapters

In the following chapter the literature review is presented. In this chapter, a brief introduction to Basque and Spanish is given where the two languages are compared. The literature review also discusses SLA and Error Analysis. This chapter is followed by an account of the method of the practical research. The findings and discussions are presented in chapter four. In this chapter, answers to the research questions are given and the results are connected to the research on SLA and Error Analysis. The concluding chapter presents the conclusions, personal reflections, and tips for future research.

*A brief note on the referencing system used in this essay. The bibliography is arranged according to the Harvard Referencing System. However, the in-text referencing does not follow this system as footnotes have been used instead. There is no specific name for this type of referencing and the reason this way of referencing has been used is because I find it easier to read a text if it is not full of brackets.

⁹ Cenoz 2000a:50

2 Literature review

In this chapter, a short introduction will be given to the two languages. This chapter will be followed by an account of previous studies within this field. In the following sub-chapters explanations to SLA and EA will also be given.

2.1 Basque and Spanish

Believed to be one of the oldest and most enigmatic languages of Europe,¹⁰ Basque, or Euskera as it is called by its speakers, has always been spoken by a rather small community. Nowadays, the territory of Basque is considered to be the Biscay area – apart from the western parts and the city of Bilbao, the provinces of Guipuzkoa, north of Araba, the northwestern area of Navarre, and the French Basque regions.¹¹ Although there is no consensus, there are theories regarding the origin of Basque. Some theories claim that the non-Indo-European language families; South Caucasian and North Caucasian are related to Basque. Other theories claim that there might be remnants of extinct languages in Basque or that Basque and Celtic somehow are related.¹²

Nevertheless, although it is a language which has no Indo-European roots and its origin is unclear, the Basque language has been in contact with Latin and Romance languages and has thus been influenced by these languages. However, the influence has solely been on phonological and lexical levels.¹³ There are Spanish loan words in Basque of course, but Basque has influenced Spanish as well. For instance, the Spanish word *izquierda* which means *left* is an example of this.¹⁴

Due to the reasons mentioned above, its grammar has unusual characteristics compared to the Indo-European languages. To demonstrate how different the language is, we are going to look at a neutral-word-order sentence in Basque:

Umea kalean erori da

Basque is considered a Subject-Object-Verb (SOV) language. That is why the word-for-word translation of the Basque sentence is: *Child-the street-in fall-asp is* which in ‘normal’ English is *the child fell in the street*. The sentence is constructed with the intransitive verb *erori* ‘fall’. The verb is marked for perfective aspect¹⁵ with the morpheme *i*, and it denotes a completed action. The auxiliary verb is *da*, a form of English *be*, which is inflected for present tense, third person singular. *Kalean* is a locative postpositional phrase which means *in the street*. The role of locational postpositions is to place their complement in some relation with time or

¹⁰ Avazpour 2009:10

¹¹ Laka 1996: Introduction

¹² Ostrowski n.d, Trask 1996

¹³ Ostrowski n.d., Cenoz 2000b:2

¹⁴ Cenoz 2000b:2

¹⁵ The perfective aspect is a grammatical aspect used to describe a situation as a whole, whether it occurs in the past, present, or future.

space. There are six of these and the locational *n* means *in/on*. Therefore, *kalea* means *street*, and *kalean* ‘*in the street*’.¹⁶

Just like English, Spanish is a SVO language. Nevertheless, the SVO word order in Spanish is not as rigid as it is in English.¹⁷ Thus, the same sentence, *the child fell in the street*, follows a similar sentence structure in Spanish, the only difference is that the verb fell in Spanish is reflexive, that is: *el niño se cayó en la calle* (the child fell in the street, *se cayó* is the reflexive verb).

Spanish is an Indo-European language and more specifically, it belongs to the Romance languages, French, Portuguese, Catalan, Italian, and Romanian. There are many differences from English, but there are also many similarities. Similarities can be seen in the vocabulary for instance, some 40% of English words are considered to have a related word in Spanish. Furthermore, although adjectives come after nouns in Spanish and the reverse in English, there are similarities in word order as well.¹⁸

In Spanish, verbs are inflected for person (first, second, and third), number (singular and plural), tense (present, past, future, and conditional), aspect (perfective and imperfective), and mood (indicative, subjunctive, and imperative). In Basque verbal inflection instantiates: person, number, gender, tense, aspect, and mood.¹⁹

Table 2.1 English, Basque, and Spanish

English	Basque	Spanish
I am	Naiz	Soy
You are	Haiz	Eres
She/he/it is	Da	Es
We are	Gara	Somos
You are	Zarete	Sois
They are	Dira	Son

2.1.1 Ergative and Nominative languages

English and Spanish are so called nominative languages. This means that in sentences where the verb requires an object, a so called transitive verb, and in sentences where the verb does not require an object, also known as intransitive verb, the subject of these two sentences are treated equally. To demonstrate:

¹⁶ Laka 1996: The sentence

¹⁷ Alonso 2000:12

¹⁸ Colorin Colorado 2011

¹⁹ Del Pilar 2010:131

Transitive verb:
I opened the window.
Intransitive verb:
I know.

The subjects of both sentences, marked red in the table, are the same, i.e. *I*. We know that the verb is transitive because an object is required after the verb *open*.

In Basque the same notion of subject/object does not exist because it is an ergative language. In a sentence with a transitive verb such as *I opened it*, the *I* is the *agent* of the transitive verb *open* and is in the *ergative case* (ERG). Ronan explains that in sentences with intransitive verbs, there are no agents, rather *patients*. Thus, the *I* in the second sentence is the patient of the verb *know* just as *the window* is the patient of the verb *open* in the first sentence. The patients of these verbs are in the *absolutive case* (ABS).²⁰

Now one could ask; why are the words *the window* and *I* referred to as patients? Ronan explains that this is because: “neither one is the agent of any action, but something is happening to them.”²¹ That is, the window is opened and somebody knows something. In the first sentence, however, somebody is performing an action; the opening of the window and the *I* of that sentence is thus the agent.

Therefore, in an ergative language, it is the agent of the transitive verb that is treated differently, but in English and Spanish the subject is treated the same and the transitivity is shown in that there is an object following the transitive verb.

To demonstrate this further, we are going to look at two Basque sentences with an intransitive and transitive verb:

Table 2.1.1a Basque sentence with an intransitive verb

Sentence:	<i>Umea kalean erori da</i> (Ume- a kalean erori da)	
Word-for-Word:	Child-ABS	fell in the street
Function:	Patient	Intransitive verb
Translation:	The child fell in the street	

²⁰ Ronan: Ergativity

²¹ Ronan: Ergativity

Table 2.1.1b Basque sentence with a transitive verb

Sentence:	<i>Umeak mutila ikusi du</i> Ume- ak mutil-a ikusi du		
Word-for-Word:	Child-the ERG	boy-ABS	saw
Function:	Agent	object	<i>transitive</i> verb
Translation:	The child saw the boy		

2.1.2 More Differences

When studying about Basque, I realized that certain grammar points are very distinct from English, thus this part was included to highlight these differences.

In Basque the definite article, which in Basque is *a*, is a suffix. Thus, *gizona* means *the man*. The numeral *bat* ‘one’ also serves as an indefinite article, therefore, *gizon bat* could be *one man* or *a man*. Both the indefinite and definite articles follow the noun, the difference is that the indefinite article is not attached to the noun. Both articles also have plural forms; for the definite article *-ak* and for the indefinite article *batzuk*.²²

Table 2.1.2 Articles

Indefinite article (plural)	<i>Gizon batzuk</i>	<i>Some men</i>
Indefinite article (plural)	<i>Gizonak</i>	<i>The men</i>

Spanish, just like Basque, makes no distinction between the numeral *one* and the indefinite article. Therefore, a construction such as *we have one Christmas tree* as opposed to *a Christmas tree*, is very common.²³

Something that is in sharp contrast to the surrounding Romance languages is that Basque nouns do not have gender, they all have the same form of the article. However, something that the language has in common with the Romance languages is that the adjective follows the noun. For example; *gizon gaztea* means *the young man* (in Spanish *el hombre joven*).²⁴

2.2 Previous Studies

Cook’s *Linguistics and Second Language Acquisition* was used in this study to get a deeper understanding on SLA and EA. Also related to the same topics but applied specifically to the BAC, Cenoz and Jessner’s *English in Europe* was studied as to obtain specific information on

²² De Rijk 2007: 17-18

²³ Coe 2001:104

²⁴ De Rijk 2007: 17-18

linguistic studies and experiments carried out in the BAC. In this book, Lasagabaster's conclusion concerns the levels of competence in Basque, Spanish, and English attained by students in the BAC. This study and many other studies conclude that bilingual children outperform monolinguals in the learning of an additional language.²⁵ On the other hand, not all research studies report that bilingualism has a positive effect on third language acquisition. A study conducted in Sweden has reported no differences between bilinguals and monolinguals learning English as a foreign language.²⁶

Swan and Smith's *Learner English* deals with the typical mistakes that are made by, among others, Spanish learners of English. There are many chapters in this document and they deal with different learners of English of different languages. The chapter I will be focusing on is *Speakers of Spanish and Catalan* and is written by Coe. His research deals with the typical types of interference that can be expected from these learners when learning English. Everything from grammar, to pronunciation and spelling has been covered in this chapter. Another pdf document that was consulted was Alonso's *Teaching English Word Order to ESL Spanish Students: A Functional Perspective*. Alonso's study, similar to Coe's, brings up errors that are typical for Spanish speakers. However, in conducting this research as I did not want to be influenced by their results, I made a clear decision that I would make more of my own findings. Thus, the correction of the written assignments and the interviews were carried out first and then these pdf documents were consulted in the discussion part of this essay.

Previous research within a similar field has been carried out by Del Pilar and Villareal. This research deals with very specific linguistic matters, such as suppletive and affixal tense and agreement morphemes in bilingual Basque-Spanish learners. The study introduces, among other things, very interesting information on Basque grammar. Furthermore, another similar case study on Error Analysis has been carried out by Darus in Malaysia and this study investigates the written English of Malaysian students. The research sets out to investigate what the six most common errors are in English. This research was very useful as I saw how EA has been applied in a similar case.

2.2.1 SLA, Multilingualism, and Error Analysis

Cook (1993) writes that much SLA research has been about stating the stages through which the learner develops a language.²⁷ Although he considers the description of the learner's stages to be a useful tool, he does not, however, agree with this emphasis within SLA. Thus, in his view, to be able to give a sufficient answer to the question of acquisition, the means by which the learner acquires a second language must also be considered. He claims that by only describing the stages of a learner's language acquisition we are not given the complete picture as ordering acquisition does not give us the reason behind errors.²⁸ Therefore, in studies concerning SLA it is not only important to ask what, but also why.

²⁵ Lasagabaster 2000:184

²⁶ Cenoz 2000a: 45

²⁷ Cook 1993: 45

²⁸ Cook 1993:43-44

Furthermore, Ellis (1997) suggests that in SLA it is important as a researcher to investigate what learners do as opposed to what they think they do. This can be done by analyzing their written language and this will provide evidence of what the learners know about the language they are trying to learn (the Target Language).²⁹ Just as Cook, Ellis mentions that it is not only describing what the learners do that is relevant to the SLA research but also explaining why they do it. Early studies on SLA often saw L2 learning only as a relationship between the L1 and the L2, a so called Contrastive Analysis which was based on the behaviorist explanations of L2.³⁰ Contrastive Analysis compares two whole languages to predict interference or transfer but it has been criticized for only giving a partial picture of L2 learning and putting too much focus on input and nurture. Thus, it has been considered an over simplistic view and it came to change when researchers started talking about learners' language which is neither L1 nor the L2. This shift came in the 1960s when thoughts in psychology and linguistics changed. The new paradigm focused more on nature than nurture and believed that we are all born with a Language Acquisition Device (LAD).³¹ Thus, the idea was born that learners are actively involved in constructing their own 'rules' which many times are irrespective of their native language. This came to be referred to as **Interlanguage (IL)** by Selinker and it became widely accepted for the L2 learner's independent language system.³²

IL, which is further explained below, is also important within the field of EA. EA was established in the 1960s by Corder and it examines what learners get wrong and the reasons for this. Studying errors have been considered very useful in the process of language learning and it is considered especially important to researchers and teachers, but also very useful for learners who can self-correct the errors they make.³³ The investigation of errors can be seen as having two purposes, one diagnostic because it tells us what problems the learners experience, but also prognostic as the teacher can modify learning material to meet the learners' problems. However, there are limitations to EA, namely that it only provides a partial view of learner language and it does not take into account avoidance strategy since it only investigates what students do. Some students might for example avoid using some sentence structures which they find difficult due to the differences between their L1 and the TL. An example of this can be sentences with relative clauses as these are used differently in English. The most common English relative pronouns *that*, *which*, *whose*, or *who* can often be replaced by one word in Spanish, *que*.³⁴ I have been aware of this problem; however, I have not seen how it can be avoided during my research.

In Error Analysis, errors can be classified into a number of types, for example: **form** (omission, insertion, substitution, misinformation, misordering), **type** (systematic competence

²⁹ Ellis 1997:4

³⁰ Ellis 1997:32

³¹ Ellis 1997: 32

³² Cook 1993:17-18

³³ Ellis 1997:15, Cook 1993:20-21

³⁴ Ellis 1997:19, Darus 2009:487, Cook 1993:21

errors, non-systematic performance mistakes), and **cause** (interference, Interlanguage).³⁵ These are all explained below.

2.2.1.1 Form

Omission refers to leaving out an item that is required, for example writing *she is teacher* and thus omitting the indefinite article. **Insertion** is the opposite and refers to when an item is not necessary, but is inserted, e.g. *I can to cook*. This is a typical mistake Spanish learners of English make because Spanish does not have modal auxiliaries and after the verb *can* (*poder*) the infinitive is used and not the base verb, as it is in English, *puedo cocinar*. **Substitution** is when the wrong word is used, e.g. *I dinner at 9*, thus wrongly using *dinner* as a verb. **Misinformation** refers to using one grammatical form in place of another, e.g. *I take shower now* instead of the progressive form; *I'm taking a shower now*. The final one, **misordering**, refers to wrong word order and can for instance be seen in sentences where a noun is modified by an adjective. In Spanish and Basque nouns are postmodified by adjectives, that is; *a white house* is *una casa blanca* in Spanish and *etxe txurria* in Basque ('house white').³⁶

These types of errors could also have to do with **overuse**. That is, even though the learner demonstrates that he/she knows how to use the present perfect, there could also be cases where this tense has been overused and over generalized. This is what Ellis refers to as an **overgeneralization** error.³⁷

2.2.1.2 Type

Corder introduced the distinction between **systematic competence errors** and **non-systematic performance mistakes**. When a native speaker makes a mistake, it is a non-systematic mistake, a so-called "accidental slip of the tongue",³⁸ which is not important to the process of language learning. On the other hand, the term error is according to Corder, systematic and occurs in a second language because the learner does not know what is correct.³⁹ Ellis mentions that in order to distinguish a mistake from an error we need to look at the consistency of learners' performance, another way of checking this might be to tell the learner to correct the mistake, if the learner cannot, this might be a sign of an error rather than a mistake. However, as Ellis writes, sometimes it is not as easy as this to be able to tell an error from a mistake.⁴⁰ Another difficulty, which is mentioned by Corder, is that we cannot always tell the nature of the error, because we do not know what was intended, therefore, for these situations, interviews will come in handy.⁴¹

³⁵ Routledge 1996, Ellis 1997:18

³⁶ Ellis 1997:18

³⁷ Ellis 1997: 18

³⁸ Ellis 1997:17

³⁹ Karra 2006, Cook 1993:21, Ellis 1997:17

⁴⁰ 1997:17

⁴¹ Cook 1993:21

2.2.1.3 Cause

Interlanguage (IL) has been defined as a series of hypotheses about the grammar of the target language, in this case English, that students consciously or unconsciously form and test them out in different language contexts, be it written or oral.⁴² Interlanguage becomes thus the student's own language, a language which is neither the L1 nor the target language and is thus the learner's own language system.⁴³ Ellis talks about errors being universal, i.e. that they are errors common to many speakers, for example, past tense errors that students do not know how to conjugate such as irregular verbs and where *eat* becomes *eated*. Other errors may not be universal; however, they may be common for people who share an L1. An example of this is the Spanish noun-adjective order after the verb in the English IL of Spanish speakers.⁴⁴

Interference has been defined as “those instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language”.⁴⁵ These transfer errors reflect the learners' attempt to make use of their L1 knowledge. This can occur in all the levels of language knowledge, phonological, grammatical, etc. Although speakers of several languages find language learning easier the more languages they speak, many learners still experience interference when learning another language.⁴⁶ For example, Spanish learners find it difficult to distinguish between the two English phonemes /i:/ and /i/ as in “seat” and “sit” because they are not distinct in their language. Moreover, they also find it difficult that adjectives in English premodify nouns, for example *a white house* is in Spanish, *una casa blanca*.

Although research in the area of cross-linguistic transfer in multilingual acquisition is still preliminary, some trends have been observed. Linguistic distance between the languages involved is believed to affect cross-linguistic interference. Therefore, if the languages involved are similar with respect to, among other things, syntax and vocabulary the chance of interference is higher.⁴⁷ Thus, if a learner's L1 is a non-Indo-European language such as Arabic, and his L2 is an Indo-European language such as French, it is more likely that this learner will transfer structures and vocabulary from French when learning English, than from his first language. Nevertheless, research has also suggested that transfer is more likely from the first language than those acquired later on.⁴⁸

Three stages have been proposed by Corder in order to acquire a detailed analysis of the learners' language:

- 1) **Recognition of idiosyncrasy** – This involves the stage where the researcher reconstructs what the learner was attempting to say by asking him or her what was intended. The researcher is also expected to look at the learner's sentence to see if it

⁴² Cook 1993:22, Wray and Bloomer 2006:54

⁴³ Cook 1993:18

⁴⁴ Ellis 1997:19, Cook 1993:18

⁴⁵ Cook 1993:8

⁴⁶ Wray and Bloomer 2006:55, Ellis 1997:19

⁴⁷ Cenoz 2000a:50

⁴⁸ Cenoz 2000a:50

conforms to the TL. This analysis should be done in order to obtain a grammar of the learner's own IL.

- 2) **Accounting for the learner's idiosyncratic dialect** – The researcher sees how the IL sentences can be described using a methodology of comparison. That is, the IL sentences will be compared to the student's L1 or L2.
- 3) **Explanation** – This is the stage where explanations are given as to why deviations from the grammar of the TL have arisen. Corder himself believed that interference was the main explanation from L1 patterns.⁴⁹

Since I am interested in the thinking process of the students, EA has been used as an analytical tool as to obtain an understanding of how the students think when writing in English. Therefore, these three stages have been applied in the presentation and analysis of the findings.

⁴⁹ Cook 1993:21

3 Method

In this chapter an account of the methodological approach will be given. The subject pool and limitations will also be discussed.

Although one of the research questions in this study deals with quantity, this study is predominantly qualitative. In general, I am not interested in the number of times something occurs, rather I want to get an understanding of why they occur. I intend to analyze my subject pool's written language and then interview them in order to ask questions about how they have been thinking during the writing process. Since I am interested in investigating the errors, Error Analysis (EA, see below), as a methodology for dealing with data, will be applied. EA has been applied as an analytical tool to understand the thinking progress of the students.

3.1 Essays

The subject pool was given three types of essays to write, two narrative essays which should have encouraged them to use past and future tenses and one discursive using present tense. The students were given clear instructions of the length and structure of the essays and they all had to write about the same topic. That is, the essays all had the same title. The first one was named: *An Incident that Changed My Life* (past tense), the second one *The Advantages and Disadvantages of Living at Home* (present tense), and the final one; *My Christmas Holiday* (future tense). These types of essays were chosen to encourage the subject pool to use different verbal tenses and thus get a better spread when it comes to analyzing the grammar since I am solely interested in grammatical mistakes. (See Appendix 3 for three examples of students' written assignments.)

I speak Spanish. However, since I do not speak Basque, I did not have any expectations of what kind of mistakes the students were most likely to make. Therefore, I did not want to give the students essays to write that would specifically target what are considered to be the typical problem areas for Spanish speakers. That is the reason why very general essay topics were chosen.

During the correction of the writings, the typical errors were organized in an Excel sheet. They were organized according to type. These were the headings given to the different types of errors found: *Missing subjects, wrong/missing prepositions/possessives, unnecessary prepositions/words/possessives, word order, demonstrative adjectives, in/definite articles, wrong word, tense, conjunctions, missing words, and expressions*. These headings were used for all essays, i.e. past narrative, future narrative, and present discursive. (See Appendix 2 for an excerpt of the results.)

3.2 Interviews

Interviews were conducted in order to clarify any doubts or questions that arose during the analysis of the written essays. Just as Wray and Bloomer mention, interviews enable the researcher to get hold of information which otherwise could have been difficult to obtain by

for example a questionnaire.⁵⁰ This was of great importance, as I needed to discover what the learner really had in mind in order to reconstruct appropriate English sentences.⁵¹ Group interviews were not chosen. Even though there are benefits with this kind of interviewing, such as speed and that individuals can get ideas from each other, I did not want the students to be influenced by the responses of the others. Wray and Bloomer also mention that people could also be restrained from expressing their true ideas due to the presence of other people.⁵²

The questions that were asked were open-ended questions but there were also some direct questions. As the purpose of the interviews was to try to understand what was going on when the students were writing, I tried to ask questions that were related with what they had written, for example; ‘Why did you choose this word?’ Or retrospective questions; ‘When you wrote like this, what were you thinking?’⁵³ As Wray and Bloomer mention, it is always difficult to ask these type of questions about language as it requires the students to have self-knowledge about the language (metalinguage). It is, however, considered that subjects learning a third language present a more highly developed metalinguistic awareness.⁵⁴

Advantages of this kind of intuition-data gathering are also mentioned. One of these is that the researcher feels that he/she can get inside the mind of the subject and observe it. Naturally there are also downsides. Scientifically, it is considered that data based on people’s intuition is imprecise and that what the researcher can get from the subject pool is only the tip of the iceberg and thus not representative of the whole.⁵⁵

I had an interview guide; nevertheless, the guide was nothing more than the name suggests. Many of the questions were altered during the interviews and many questions were added to obtain a better understanding of how students were thinking when writing the essays. All the seven interviews were recorded and they were conducted between December 15th – 20th, 2011. I did not make a transcript of the recordings but I picked things out as I was listening to the recordings. For more information on the interview questions, see Appendix 1.

3.3 Subject pool

My subject pool consisted of learners of English who are studying to get the Cambridge First Certificate in English (FCE). Thus, grammatically they are all at the same upper-intermediate level. Seven people participated in this study, three women and four men between the ages of 28 to 33 years old. All of the subjects speak Spanish; however, three people are Spanish monolinguals and the other four are bilinguals who consider Spanish their second language and Basque their first language; they were raised at home in the Basque language. This spread within the subject pool was deliberate in order to be able to compare and see if there are any major differences or similarities between the monolinguals and the bilinguals.

⁵⁰ Wray and Bloomer 2006:163

⁵¹ Cook 1993:21

⁵² Wray and Bloomer 2006: 163

⁵³ Wray and Bloomer 2006: 164

⁵⁴ Cenoz 2000a: 49

⁵⁵ Wray and Bloomer 2006: 164

For the sampling process the “snowball selection” was used. This method implies that the researcher uses the field to identify cases that are of interest for the research. It is considered that this method is suitable when the researcher has difficulties finding cases for the research or when specific qualities are sought for.⁵⁶ The snowball selection is a technique where the informants that the researcher can get hold of assists the researcher in finding new informants.⁵⁷ Considering my limited network of contacts in the BAC I relied much on the contacts that could be given to me by the people that I met.

In the results section, the students are not referred to by name to respect their confidentiality. Codes have been used instead of their names. Thus, when examples have been given from the students’ writings, a code such as SD1 has been used. The first letter stands for whether the student is Spanish monolingual or Basque. In this case the student is Spanish, for Basque students the letter *B* has been used. The second letter indicates the type of essay, *D* for *Discursive*, *P* for *Past Narrative*, and *F* for *Future Narrative*. The number indicates the order of the interviews. Therefore, the student SD1 and SP1 is the same student, and the only difference is the type of essay. The Basque students have been given numbers 1-4 and Spanish students 1-3. When giving quotes from the interviews, the same coding system has been used. What differs is that the letters D, P, and F have not been used due to irrelevance.

3.4 Limitations

Interviews were conducted as to clarify any doubts that might arise during the analysis of the written assignments. There are, however, limitations to this sort of self-report because my subject pool cannot tell me what they actually do, only what they believe they do.⁵⁸ This limitation is difficult to overcome. However, when reporting the findings I will do my best to report appropriately. That is to say, words such as “they claim/state/believe” will be used to demonstrate that I am aware of this limitation.

As there were only seven people participating in this study, my subject pool is very limited. This is due to lack of time and resources. I am aware that my findings can only be said to hold true of the particular group that I have studied, therefore it will be difficult to draw generalizing conclusions. Thus, this study does not aim at developing definitive answers, but should be seen as an attempt to contribute to the research concerning SLA and EA and acquiring knowledge on the language acquisition process of the subject pool.

3.5 Terminology

English plays no major part in the society or community in the Basque Country. Thus, English teaching in strict terminological terms should be referred to as **foreign-language learning**. **Second-language learning** occurs when the language is taught to somebody who has moved to another country whose language is different from the immigrant’s native language. An example of this would be a Spaniard moving to Sweden and learning Swedish

⁵⁶ Esaiasson 2007:216

⁵⁷ Esaiasson 2007:216

⁵⁸ Wray & Bloomer 2006:154

either informally or in classes. However, **second language (L2)** is also used generally and in this essay, as a cover term to refer to second and foreign language.⁵⁹

Although **multilingual acquisition** usually refers to the process of acquiring more than two languages, **multilingualism** and multilingual acquisition are frequently thought to be variations on **bilingualism** and **SLA** and SLA typically stands as a cover term to refer to any language other than the mother tongue.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ Wray & Bloomer 2006:46

⁶⁰ Cenoz 2000a:40, Ellis 1997:3

4 Findings and Discussion

In this section, answers to the research questions will be given.

4.1 What differences or similarities can be seen between L3 and L2 speakers?

My main and most interesting finding was that both groups said that they used Spanish rather than Basque as a reference when writing in English. The quotes below summarize very well what the Basque students said to the question: *do you believe you ever think in your L1?*

B4: *For English I never think in Basque, because maybe it's more difficult, because in Basque you have to think in another way, there are more similarities between Spanish and English.*

B1: *When I started again to learn English, I speak with my sister and she said 'if you think in Spanish, you speak and write better because English has a lot of similarities with Spanish' and I start to think in Spanish, because it's better, for example present perfect is; has been and is 'He sido/estado', but in Basque it's very different. There are very complicated and difficult verbs [in Basque]. When I speak I mix *sin querer* [without wanting] but most of the times I think in Spanish.*

B2: *I think in Spanish when I write in English.*

Another student was asked how he was thinking when he constructed the sentences like this:

BP3: *I went into a coma for one week and I lost 3 fingers **of** my left hand. I managed to recover from this accident with the help of my family and friends.*

And I was told:

B3: *This is directly [from] Spanish. *Perdí* [I lost] *tres dedos* [three fingers] *de mi mano izquierda* [of my hand left]. I think in Spanish, because normally when I have to make the translation, I think in Spanish. When I studied English, it was in Basque in school, but when I have to make the translation to English, I think in Spanish. I'm not thinking in Basque.*

Even when I asked one of the students about a sentence she got right, and asked; '*How were you thinking when you constructed the sentence like this?*', she said:

BD1: *Maybe in Spanish it's similar.*

Whereupon she started translating the sentence to Spanish and told me that yes, that sentence was from Spanish.

And the Spanish monolinguals:

SF3: *Because we think in Spanish [...] I always say the similar thing, I think in Spanish and I translate and it's not right.*

S2: *It's not possible for me [to only think in English]...I think in Spanish, I try to make a sentence in English and sometimes I change the translation because I've learned in school or with friends. I think in Spanish and then translate it to English and then change some things.*

In some instances where Spanish and Basque have similar constructions, the students still claimed that when they wrote they were thinking in Spanish. For example, in the case of the overuse of the definite article,⁶¹ the students have all said that they believe they used Spanish and not Basque. However, the occurrence of *the life* as opposed to just *life* without the definite article could be translated from the Spanish construction *la vida* but also from Basque, *bizitza*. *Bizitz* means life, and the *a* at the end of the word is the definite article, i.e. the life. Another example that can be mentioned is:

BP4: *I was working for **paper** manufacturing company in Tolosa when the financial crises [crisis] **has heavily hit** our economic situation and all young workers **had been expelled**.*

This is a sentence with many typical mistakes. Although it contains problems with the tense, verbal tense was not something that was one of the most common errors in their writings. Rather, the omission of the indefinite article *a* before *paper manufacturing company* is one of the typical errors that will be discussed below. The student was trying to say that the workers were fired. The use of the word *expulse* in this situation is a direct translation from Spanish which uses the word *expulsar* to express to fire somebody. When the student was asked about this, the response was:

B4: *It's Spanish grammar, but I think if I had to write [it] again I'm sure that I do [would write] the same.*

When asked why this was the case the answer would usually be because Basque is a language which grammatically has nothing to do with English.

Another interesting finding was that the omission of articles (see below) was more common in the writings of the Basque bilinguals than the Spaniards. In all of the writings, I only managed to find one Spanish student who on a few occasions had omitted the article. I do not know the reason for this or even whether there is a reason or mere coincidence. Thus, in order to be sure whether there is a connection more research needs to be carried out.

What I also discovered is that unfortunately I cannot see any clear major differences between L2 and L3 speakers. There are details mentioned below; however, research with bigger groups needs to be carried out in order to confirm whether these are real differences or mere

⁶¹ See chapter 4.3

coincidence. Thus, unfortunately, I cannot draw any conclusions on whether one group's English was better than the others or whether a certain mistake was repeated more or not.

4.1.1 Creation of Rules – Students' Interlanguages

Students have also created some of their own rules sometimes. In situations where there is a preposition and they need to use the gerund after, they have instead used the base verb. For example:

BP4: *After my **expulsion** I focus all my attention **in organize** all the stuff of the trip*

What this student was trying to say was: *After I got fired, I focused all my attention on organizing all the stuff for the trip.* Later when I asked how the student was thinking and why the sentence had been structured like this, I was first told:

B4: *For me this is an English construction.*

However, when the student reflected on this, he said:

B4: *Yes, yes this is all in Spanish, Puse toda mi atención [I put all my attention] en organizar [in to organize] todas las cosas de viaje [all the things of trip].*

Now, in Spanish, and as can be seen from the student's answer, the same sentence would have to be followed by the infinitive after the preposition, i.e., *en organizar*. Therefore, the English construction has nothing to do with Spanish, Basque nor English and in accordance with Ellis and Cook this could be considered part of the student's interlanguage.⁶²

Another case where a student has created his own rules has to do with infinitive or gerund constructions.

BD2: *Nowadays is very difficult become emancipated.*

The same sentence in Spanish is; *Hoy en dia es muy difícil emanciparse.* After the adjective *difícil* the infinitive of the verb is used, in this case the verb is reflexive; *emanciparse*, and the same rule applies in English *it's difficult to become*. However, the student has written the English sentence with the base verb, i.e. *become* instead of *to become*. Again, this could be counted as part of the student's own grammar which is irrespective of his L1 and the TL.⁶³

A third case where the student has created her own rule has to do with verb-preposition combinations.

SF3: *Next, we think the menu for dinner.*

When asked how she had been thinking when constructing the sentence like this, I was told:

⁶² Ellis 1997, Cook 1993, Wray and Bloomer 2006

⁶³ Ibid.

S3: *Because it's similar thing, because we think in Spanish, and in Spanish we say: despues pensamos en el menú de la cena [next we think in the menu of the dinner].*

This would have been true if after the verb *pensamos* (we think) there had not been the preposition *en*. Now, *en* translates to English *in*, or sometimes *on* depending on the situation, but in this case in the Spanish construction there is a preposition used after the verb *pensar* and normally it is *pensar en algo*, that is, *think about/of something*. However, the student has chosen to write *think* with no preposition after, even though the Spanish construction does have a preposition. Another interesting observation is that the definite articles have been dropped in the English sentence, even though they are required in the Spanish one (*el menú* and *la cena*) Thus, this is a case of omission, which is irrespective of the TL and the L1 and can be considered part of the student's IL.⁶⁴

⁶⁴ Ellis 1997:19, Cook 1993:8

4.2 What are the three most common errors?

This section has been divided into three separate headings where the three most typical errors will be mentioned and discussed.

4.2.1 Missing Subject

From the interviews and the writing process, I observed that some errors occurred more frequently than others. One of these was that both L3 and L2 students were sometimes inclined to omit the subject of the sentence. Thus, in EA terms, the learners' grammar of subjects differs from that of English. However, in this case it should be mentioned that deeming this an error does not mean that the students had no idea that English sentences are constructed with a subject. All the same, it occurred many times in their essays and the interview process made it clear that the students were not aware that the sentences were lacking something.

The missing subject was especially notable in the students' narrative past writings where in all of the essays, the subject was missing as much as 26 times. One of the students forgot the subject eight times in his one-page-long essay. There have been sentences such as:

BD2: *I was delighted, because everyday [I] worked with children*

SD3: *I haven't experienced this situation, but I think that [It] is very difficult for young people.*

When asked about the missing subject during the interviews, students' first reaction would be to automatically translate the sentence to Spanish, after which they would say that there is nothing wrong with the sentence. Yet, after some consideration, they would tell me that they believed they had used Spanish when writing.

B2: *It [my sentence] is like Spanish; hoy en dia es muy difícil emanciparse, nowadays is very difficult to emancipate*

B1: *Por eso es muy difícil, so is very difficult, but yes this is from Spanish.*

S3: *was a strange feeling. Yes, this is Spanish structure.*

Most of the times, the subject is missing in sentences with more than one clause, this tendency has been seen in more than 85% of the cases.⁶⁵ This has also happened with words or phrases that introduce a clause, such as *normally, for young people, because of that* etc., more examples are shown in the table below. After these phrases or words, it is required to use a subject, as can be seen in many cases this has been omitted. Below follows a more in-depth analysis of the different types of subject omission with more examples.

⁶⁵ There were in total 60 subjects missing, 52 of these were in sentences containing 2 or more clauses. (0,87)

4.2.1.1 Discussion

Many of the errors have to do with what EA classifies as interference.⁶⁶ The results tally with Coe's and Alonso's results on the missing subject as one of the common errors for Spanish learners of English. We are going to look at what subjects specifically students omitted.

4.2.1.2 Expletive and Existential Sentences

According to Cook and consistent with Coe's and Alonso's findings, subject personal pronouns are often unnecessary in Spanish because, as mentioned above, the verb ending already demonstrates person and number.⁶⁷ Hence, in English it is grammatically incorrect to start a sentence with: *Is beautiful and big*; however, in Basque and Spanish the same sentence would be perfectly fine without the subject; *Polita eta haundia da* and: *Es bonita y grande*. Cook mentions that Spanish speakers are more likely to wrongly accept null-subject sentences in English as correct.⁶⁸ The explanation for this has to do with the structure of Spanish, which allows sentences without apparent subjects:

Habla (He speaks)

A declarative sentence in Spanish can have an invisible subject, something which Cook refers to as the *pro*, thus the previous Spanish sentence can also be constructed:

El habla (He speaks)

However, the *el* is not required and these languages are thus referred to as *pro-drop languages* (pronoun dropping).⁶⁹ The null-subject is thus controlled by the pro-drop parameter and this is possible because of the richer verbal inflection in Spanish. As seen from the examples above, one word in Spanish expresses what two words express in English. In pro-drop languages the verb provides clues whether the subject is singular or plural (number), or first, second, or third person. Non-pro-drop languages such as English do not show this because they lack the same rich inflectional morphology; however, they compensate for this by having visible subjects.⁷⁰

Hablamos (we speak)

Non-pro-drop languages also require the so-called expletive subject, or the "dummy subjects". These are subjects inserted in for example existential sentences or sentences about the weather:⁷¹

- 1) *It's raining.*
- 2) *There is a bug in my soup.*

⁶⁶ Cook 1993:8

⁶⁷ 2001:105

⁶⁸ Cook 2003:165

⁶⁹ Cook 2003: 161

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Cook 2003:162

In English thus, these sentences are usually introduced by *there* followed by the verb *to be*, as can be seen above in example 2.⁷² In Spanish, on the other hand, existential sentences are introduced by the verb *haber*⁷³ in third person, i.e. *hay*; *hay un bicho en mi sopa* (translation: example 2 above). What is expressed with one word in Spanish is expressed with two in English and it was common to see that students would forget to use *there* in these types of sentences. As can be seen from previous examples and specifically the table below, Spanish exerted a strong influence on the students' English word order. The examples below demonstrate these cross-linguistic interference errors⁷⁴:

Table 4.2.1.2 Examples of sentences with existential or expletive subjects missing

1	SN2: <i>It was an amazing dinner, [I] loved each course, and [I] enjoyed to share that with my friends.</i> Spanish: <i>Fue una cena increíble, me encanto cada plato, y disfrute compartiéndolo con mis amigos.</i>
2	BP1: <i>[It] was my first day at university.</i> Spanish: <i>Fue mi primer día en la Universidad.</i>
3	SF3: <i>and inside the cake is a small figure.</i> Spanish: <i>y dentro de la tarta hay una figura pequeña.</i>
4	BD3: <i>[It] is difficult to get it without the physical separation of the family.</i> Spanish: <i>Es difícil conseguirlo sin la separación física de la familia.</i>

4.2.1.3 Adverbials and Subjects

Another problem that the students experienced was related to adverbial placement, especially time and place adverbials. However, this problem was not as common as the previous one. In Spanish to place these adverbials at the beginning of the sentence is no problem and gives the speaker the option of SV inversion. Thus, a construction such as *Ayer se cayó Andres* (*yesterday fell Andres*) instead of *Andres fell yesterday* are very common.⁷⁵

BD2: *Nowadays is very difficult to emancipate.*

SF3: *In new year's night is very different.*

When I asked the students to break down the sentence for me and tell me where the subject is, I was told:

B2: *Nowadays is the subject.*

⁷² *There* can also be followed by other less common verbs such as: exist, arise, remain etc.

⁷³ But also other existential verbs; *empezar*, *continuar*, *comenzar* etc.

⁷⁴ Cook 1993:22, Wray and Bloomer 2006:54

⁷⁵ Alonso 2000:15

S3: *In new year's night is the subject.*

During the interviews, as a test, I told the students to remove the adverbials from their sentences, so for example if the written sentence was: *nowadays is very difficult to emancipate*. Students had to remove *nowadays*. They were then asked to indicate where the subject was, whereupon they would be clueless. Coe and Alonso bring up this problem as well and mention that these types of problems with word order are very typical.⁷⁶ They both mention that due to a freer word order in Spanish, adverbials can often be placed at the beginning of the sentence. Thus, due to the rule in Spanish, once again the students showed a tendency to generalize and transfer a rule from Spanish.⁷⁷

Table 4.2.1.3 Examples of sentences with adverbials and missing subjects

1	BF3: <i>Normally [it] is the youngest cousin who finds it.</i> Spanish: <i>Normalmente es el primo más joven el que lo encuentra</i>
2	BP4: <i>In the beginning, it was not what [I] expected</i> Spanish: <i>al principio no fue lo que espera.</i>
3	SD1: <i>At home [It] is not a problem, [It] is helpful.</i> Spanish: <i>En casa no es un problema, es de ayuda</i>
4	BD1: <i>For that, [It] is easier to live with your parents.</i> Spanish: <i>Para eso, es más fácil vivir con tus padres.</i>

⁷⁶ Coe 2001:98, Alonso 2000:15

⁷⁷ Wray and Bloomer 2006:55, Ellis 1997:19, Cook 1993:8

4.3 Articles

Another error I observed has to do with form, namely omission or insertion of definite and indefinite articles.⁷⁸ More specifically, one of these problems was the overuse of the definite article *the* when writing about general things. For example, when the students are describing things in general, for example; life, music, people, or children, they have tended to write *the life, the music, the people*, and so forth. This was true for both L3 and L2 speakers.

The definite article was also sometimes used with words such as *some or most* for example; *the some people, or the most people*. The definite article was not only overused, it was also omitted many times. This was true not only for the definite article but also for the indefinite one. In cases where a singular noun was used, the indefinite article was often omitted. For example the sentence *I had a very good experience* became *I had very good experience*. Sometimes, the indefinite article was used with plural nouns, for example, *children become an adult or an adult children*. Another example:

BD2: *Forty years ago, there wasn't enough money to survive and the siblings had to work at **very** early age for the family.*

In this example, the student could not identify that there was something lacking in the sentence. In Spanish the phrase *at a very early age* is *a una edad muy temprana*, which of course does not use the indefinite article, this is because in Spanish there is no distinction between number *one* and the indefinite article.⁷⁹ It is interesting that the student has not translated directly from Spanish and written *at one very early age* but has rather chosen to write the sentence without the article.

Another related error was the confusion between the indefinite articles *a/an* and *one*. For instance, instead of writing *I was with the kids in a park in Donostia* the student has written *I was in one park in Donostia*. These errors were however less common than the first one with the definite article. More examples are shown in the table below. In most of the sentences there are more errors than just articles; however, only the articles are highlighted in bold. If the article is missing, the word which comes after is bold.

Table 4.3a Examples of sentences with inserted articles

⁷⁸Ellis 1997:19, Cook 1993:8

⁷⁹ Coe 2001:102

1	SF3: <i>In the new year's night is very different. We dinner at home with the family too, but next we go to celebrate with the friends.</i>
2	SD1: <i>I believe if an adult children learn in the childhood respect and other good manners at home is not a problem.</i>
3	SD2: <i>A children who wants to leave from his parents house is because he wants to live in his own.</i>
4	BD3: <i>For the parents I think is better to know that their children can manage by their own in the life.</i>
5	SP3: <i>I took the coffee alone.</i>
6	BF1: <i>In the Basque Country the Christmas starts in the 21 of December.</i>

Table 4.3b Examples of sentences with omitted articles

1	SP3: <i>First thing that I did, was buy nice and big house, big car and leave work</i>
2	BP4: <i>I would go to expensive hotel</i>
3	BF4: <i>We all meet in Andoain and the people are not tired and we use to [usually] have better [a good] conversation.</i>
4	BD2: <i>They worked in some jobs to earn money and they didn't have social life</i>
5	SF3: <i>Is very long night.</i>
6	BF4: <i>Because they know that there is a big party after dinner</i>

4.3.1 Discussion

The second most common error, the omission or insertion of articles is one of the common differences between Spanish and English that students get wrong. According to Coe,⁸⁰ the definite article in Spanish goes with mass nouns and plural count nouns that are used to express general meaning. For example, *the life*, *the music* etc. are common creations in Spanish. Therefore, this is something that Spanish learners often have problems with when learning English. However, this creation is also related to Basque as articles are used more frequently than they are in English. Whether the Basque students have been influenced by Basque or Spanish when writing in English is hard to tell; however, they did all believe they had consulted Spanish when writing. Thus this is another case of interference from Spanish.⁸¹

⁸⁰ 2001:104

⁸¹ Ellis 1997:19, Cook 1993:8

In Spanish the construction, *la mayoría de la gente* corresponds word-by-word to: *the majority of the people*, the student has instead written:

BD2: *The most people have got all that they ask for.*

When asked about why he had written like this, I was told:

BD2: *This is Spanish construction, la mayoría de la gente*

Furthermore, the students' confusion between *one* and *a/an* is, according to Coe, something that is common for Spanish students as, in Spanish, they do not make the distinction between the indefinite article and the number *one*.⁸² In addition, the authors explain that in some expressions where the distinction between one and many is considered irrelevant, singular count nouns need no article. In Spanish, thus, it is perfectly fine to say *his sister is teacher* (*su hermana es profesora*). In Basque, an article is used when mentioning a person's profession; however, it is the definite and not indefinite article that is used.

Table 4.3.1 Articles in a Spanish and Basque Sentence

Basque	Sentence:	<i>bere aizpa andereño-a da</i>
	Word-for-Word:	<i>Her sister teacher-the is</i>
Spanish	Sentence:	<i>su hermana es profesora</i>
	Word-for-Word:	<i>Her sister is teacher</i>

When students were asked how they had been thinking when writing these sentences they would automatically translate it to Spanish and say that they believed they had been influenced by Spanish. This was of course the case for all the Spanish speakers, but also for the Basque speakers. Not once did they question whether maybe they could have been influenced by Basque.

B3: *When I have to make the translation to English I make the translation from Spanish. I'm not thinking in Basque and later to English, never.*

⁸² Ibid.

4.4 Wrong Word

Use of the wrong word was the third most common error.⁸³ An example of this was the use of the verb *live* instead of the noun *life*. During the correction of the essays, I was not sure whether this could be considered a competence error or a performance mistake. However, seeing as it kept repeating in the writings I had a hunch that it could be an error. During the interviews when students were asked about this, they were not able to see why there was something wrong with the sentences. They were asked to read the sentence, which contained the verb instead of the noun, and they did not know whether the sentence was correct or wrong. When I later told them to focus on the word *live*, they would ask me if it would have been better if they had used *life* instead. When told yes, they could not explain why. I thus concluded that this was not a non-systematic performance mistake, but rather a systematic competence error.

BP1: *But 8 years after, we learn to live without her, of course, the **live** never will be the same.*

Another less surprising example of using the wrong word was the use of *used to* for present habits but also conjugating it incorrectly for past habits. Instead of using adverbs or the present tense to indicate present habits, students have tended to write sentences such as:

BF2: *At Christmas, I **use to** go on vacation.* (The student is referring to present habits)

SF1: *We **used to dinner** late in our tradition.* (The student is referring to present habits)

BP1: *we **use to** be once a month.* (The student is referring to a past habit)

BF4: *When grandparents were alive, we **use to** meet in Tolosa.* (The student is referring to a past habit)

This is a common error for Spanish learners of English and it was observed in all of the essays, even in the essays of students with a slightly better grasp of the language. When asked about this during the interviews, the students had evidently no idea that *used to* can only be applied to indicate past habits, and not present ones.

Many times there were problems with the verbs, *take*, *have*, *make* and *do*. The students have often not known which of these to use.

BD1: *You can't stay in home with your friends **making** a party or something like this.*

Once again, when asked about this, I was told that the structure and the choice of word was from Spanish. More examples of using the wrong word has been using *dinner* as a verb, mixing up *say* and *tell*, confusing *another* and *other*. In the analysis below, possible reasons will be given as to why students wrote like this.

⁸³ In the category of 'wrong words' I have not considered the use of wrong prepositions as this has been a separate category.

Table 4.4 Examples of sentences which include wrong words.

1	BD1: <i>For that, is easier to live with your parents without responsibilities so your parents do everything and you don't have to pay anything.</i>
2	BD4: <i>Our parents use to say that their young-life has been harder than ours.</i>
3	SF1: <i>we usually wake up early in the morning, take the breakfast, then me and my mother check the ingredients will be ready to prepare the dinner.</i>
4	BP1: <i>Eli was very surprised and she told me that we had to do a lunch in my flat.</i>
5	BF3: <i>Another activity I usually make in Christmas if I am in Donostia is to meet with my friends of the University</i>
6	SD3: <i>Other big problem today is the price of houses.</i>
7	BD4: <i>The manager say you: oh! You are what we are looking for!</i>
8	BF2: <i>When my grandmother died all changed and we celebrate the Christmas in the other way.</i>
9	SF3: <i>We dinner at home with the family.</i>
10	BF3: <i>We keep in touch at least twice a year making one lunch in summer and the other in Christmas</i>

4.4.1 Discussion

When it comes to the words *live* vs. *life* the most plausible explanation has to do with the pronunciation of the words. The students are not sure about the differences in pronunciation and therefore mix them up. During the interviews, the verb *live* /lɪv/ would often be pronounced /laɪf/, i.e. exactly as the noun *life*. Coe mentions that for Spanish students the diphthong /aɪ/ is not difficult to pronounce as a similar element in their language exists. The same thing applies to the vowel /ɪ/ in the word *live*.⁸⁴ Furthermore, Coe also mentions that the phonemes /v/ and /b/ are often given their mother tongue values and thus there is only one sound in the area of /b/ and /v/. That is why *very* is often pronounced with a /b/, /beri/.⁸⁵ So far thus, there is not much concerning consonants and vowels that explain why the students mix these two up. Thus, one possible explanation could be related to orthography. Spanish has high sound-spelling correspondence; obviously, the spelling and pronunciation of English

⁸⁴ Coe 2001: 91

⁸⁵ Coe 2001: 92-93

words do not come easily.⁸⁶ Thus, in this case the spelling of both words are very similar, the only thing setting them apart is the use of phonemes /v/ and /f/. Have the students once been taught how to pronounce the word *live* with the diphthong, they might transfer this rule to the word *live* and also pronounce it with a diphthong, a case of overgeneralizing a rule.⁸⁷

When it comes to using *used to* for present habits, one explanation could be interference from Spanish.⁸⁸ In Spanish there is one verb for expressing habits and the verb is *soler*. However, the verb can be used both in the past and the present, it just needs to be conjugated properly depending on the verbal time. Therefore, one possible explanation could be that students have transferred this rule from Spanish and applied it to English. In Basque, the adverb *ohi* (usually) is used to indicate past or present habits. For instance:

Table 4.4.1 Basque adverb 'ohi'

	Present	Past
Sentence:	<i>Dantzatu ohi dut.</i>	<i>Dantzatu ohi nuen.</i>
Word-for-Word:	Dance usually have.	Dance usually had.
Translation:	I usually dance.	I used to dance.

In English, we can use adverbial construction to indicate present habits, for example; *I usually/often dance*, or *I dance every Friday*; however, for past habits we cannot use the same structure, as *used to* is employed to express past habits: *I used to dance*. Basque seems to have a similar construction albeit distinct since the adverb remains the same for both past and present and what changes is the verb (see table above). From my own teaching experience as an ESL-teacher, I have noticed that this is a very common mistake that many students struggle with. This problem could also have to do with how this grammar point is taught, as many times the different expressions with *use* are taught separately and thus this error could also be related to teaching methods.

Another interference from Spanish has been using the word *dinner* as a verb.⁸⁹ In Spanish *cena* equals *dinner* and *cenar* means *to have dinner*. In Basque the same sentence is constructed like in English; *gosaldu/afaldu/bazkaldu*, which means *to have breakfast/dinner/lunch*. Interestingly enough, the Basque students have not used the English noun as a verb. However, they have not known what verb to use with the nouns *dinner/breakfast/lunch* as sometimes they have written *do lunch* or *make lunch*.⁹⁰ Thus, this could be a case of positive interference for the Basque students; however, they have not applied the rule completely since *have* has not been used.

⁸⁶ Coe 2001:94, 96

⁸⁷ Ellis 1997:18

⁸⁸ Wray and Bloomer 2006:55, Ellis 1997:19

⁸⁹ Wray and Bloomer 2006:55, Ellis 1997:19

⁹⁰ Students: BP1 and BF3

As mentioned above, the students have had issues with the words *take*, *have*, *make*, and *do*. In Spanish, there is only one verb for the verbs *make* and *do*, namely *hacer*. Therefore, most of the times when the students have needed to choose the correct collocation, for example *make the bed* or *do the bed*, they have not known which one it is and have often told me that they believed they guessed.

B1: *I never know which to choose.*

In the case of example 4 in table 5.2.3, *take the breakfast* is taken from the Spanish structure; *tomar el desayuno* (*tomar*=take, *el desayuno*= the breakfast). The same thing happens with the words *say* and *tell*, in Spanish and Basque there is only one word for this, namely *decir* and *esan* respectively and this is a very common confusion.

In the case of the words *Other* and *another* there are similar rules in Spanish as in English. *Otro* (*another*) is used with singular nouns and *otros* (*other*) with plural ones, in Basque on the other hand, the word is *beste* and this does not take the plural form, it is only the noun that changes. Therefore, this construction is completely different from both English and Spanish. Thus, even though Spanish has a similar construction students did not manage to get it right, and this could be seen as part of their own internal rules about English.⁹¹

It should also be mentioned that there have been instances where students have got sentences perfectly correct, when asked about this, they would often say that they had been taught to write like this, or because they had travelled, lived, or studied abroad. Other times students told me that the sentences were expressed in the same way in Spanish, thus cases of positive interference from Spanish.

⁹¹ Cook 1993:18

5 Conclusion

There has been a great deal of cross-linguistic interference in the writings of the subject pool. This interference has mainly been from Spanish. Students have pointed out that they do not consult Basque when writing in English. Thus, just as Cenoz mentions, this indicates that when learning a third language, students do not necessarily consult their first language as the source language of influence.⁹² Hence, this research contributes to the research on interference in multilingual acquisition and reaffirms that the first language does not always need to be the source of influence.

In accordance with Corder's results⁹³, interference proved to be the main explanation for why the errors occurred. However, students have also actively been involved in the creation of rules and many times these creations did not have anything to do with interference from neither Spanish nor Basque. This creation of rules has to do with the students' internal grammar, i.e. their interlanguage.

In regards to studies concluding that bilingual learners outperforming monolingual ones in the acquisition of a third language, I have not been able to see any trends that either prove or disprove these studies. Naturally, this research has been restricted in the sense of a limited number of participants and a very wide scope as regards to their writing tasks. Thus, to make any conclusions regarding proficiency levels between the bilingual and monolingual participants would not be accurate. For future research, tailored essays to generate a more specific language would be more useful to provide a better discussion regarding levels of proficiency.

The diagnostic tools that were used in this essay, i.e. the writings, were both useful and problematic. Useful as they generated a great deal of responses which was needed, since I did not have any idea of what the typical errors could be. Problematic for the same reason, that there were too many responses and the analysis of these consumed a great deal of time. For future research more tailored essays could provide clearer results. When it comes to the missing subject I had no difficulties finding examples in the writings. Thus, for this purpose the writings were sufficient. The writing about their Christmas holiday provided very useful and generated many example sentences where the articles were either omitted or inserted. For future research more narrative descriptions of holidays or traditions could be included to get more results. However, in this research I believe I obtained a good insight of what is going on.

By focusing on the errors that are typical for Spanish learners of English and understanding why these errors are made, as an ESL teacher and a future EFL teacher this is an invaluable lesson for me. Looking at what students do and what they believe they do, has given me an insight into what goes on when a student acquires another language. The results will contribute to better class methodology as I have a better understanding and can predict difficulties of Spanish learners of English.

⁹² Cenoz 2000a:50

⁹³ Cook 1993:21

It is also worth remembering that in this study there were variables which could not be controlled, among them class methodology, teachers' proficiency, and how much the students use English outside of the classroom. Also, since I do not speak Basque there might be aspects which I have missed. This study is thus limited in all these aspects. Furthermore, my findings can only be said to hold true of the particular group that I have studied. Thus, to be able to make generalizations it is necessary to conduct comparative research; something which could be of interest for future studies. More studies could be carried out with bigger groups in the BAC to verify whether students make the same mistakes. Similar studies could also be carried out in other bilingual regions/countries, for example in Quebec, Canada where many immigrants who enter Canada through Quebec already are bilinguals. From my own experience, many come from former French colonies in North Africa and thus speak both French and Arabic. However, they are mostly bilinguals who do not have much knowledge of English; therefore it would be interesting to see what language they consult when learning English.

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Appendix 1; Interview Guide

Age: _____ years old

Gender: M / F

Years learning English: _____

Mother tongue (underline the correct answer): Basque Spanish

Research Aim	Question
<p>This is a very important question because I need to know more about my subject pool's background. It will probably come in handy when I analyze the results to see if the ones who have lived or studied abroad have a better grasp of English.</p>	<p>1. Have you lived/studied in an English speaking country? If yes, how long?</p>
<p>I'm asking this question because I want to know whether they start thinking in Spanish first and then think of grammar rules in English, or vice versa, or if they don't think at all, either way this is very relevant for my research as I intend to analyze their mistakes and how they think.</p>	<p>2. How do you think when you start writing in English?</p>
<p>If they don't mention this in question 2, this question will be asked, for the same reasons as mentioned above.</p>	<p>3. Do you translate when you write in English? If yes, from Basque or Spanish?</p>
<p>These are typical mistakes that Spanish learners of English make, the question will be asked to test if they directly translate from Spanish.</p>	<p>4. How do you translate the sentences:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ayer fui al supermercado para comprar nuez • vivo cerca de un supermercado • La vida es hermosa
<p>Here I will give examples from their written assignments, as to reconstruct what the learner was attempting to say.</p>	<p>5. What do you mean when you write: During the first month after win the lottery, everything was perfect, everyone wanted to be with me, and turned many people that had no contact or met many new people?</p>

During the interviews, the questions have been modified to correspond to the interviewee. Thus, this is mainly a guide which and questions have been added and altered during the interview process.

Appendix 2; Excerpt of Results

	subject wrong/miss prep/poss	unnec prep/wo	demon. adj	in/def article miss/disagreement/unnec.	WW	Tense	conjunction
BD1	2 since (until) for that (por eso, because of that) in home (at)	get very late at home		the young people (young..) very good experience (a very good..) the live (life) the adults life	marriage (marry) but (however, starts sent less bigger (smaller) children knows (know) there are disadv. (plural) making a party (have) live outside the parental home (subj of sent, living) you are earn (you earn) outside (alone) recommend them work (to work) inf/ger live (life) everybody need (needs) adult life are(is)		
BD2	1 look up (at) children education (children's parents home (parents' spend it in (on	always are our parents near to h		the life x2 the siblings very early age (a very) social life (a soc.) because of the all the hours the adult children the music the most people	all (everything) siblings (children) worked in some jobs to (worked to..) had to being working (inf/ger) any problem (plural) it is truth (true) problem become (to become) inf/ger difficult become (to) that they aren't..		
SD1	7			the time an a disagreement (double) children become an adult x2 the life x2 the childhood x2 an adult children learn S+V x2	get used to parents solve (solving to the old child (to the oldest other (others) live (life) x2 responsibilites belongs get responsabilities (having..)		

Appendix 3; Examples of Students' Written Assignments

Student: BD2

The Advantages and Disadvantages of Adult Children Living at Home

The life is changing and so are manners. It's incredible if we look back and realize of all that has changed. We only have to look up our parents' life and our's. Forty years ago, there wasn't enough money to survive and the siblings had to work at very early age for all the family. They worked in some jobs to earn money and they didn't have social life because of the all the hours that they had to being working. Nowadays, we live better and normally, if we have any problem always are our parents near to help. So it's possible that there are adult children quite accommodated and spoiled too. It's truth that for adult children, it is a big problem become emancipated but the life is changing in lots of aspects.

There are a lot of advantages of living at home with parents. For instance, you don't have to pay for anything and neither do clean the flat. The only thing that the adult children want to do is going out with friends and have a good time. On the other hand there are disadvantages too, if you are living at home you can't do whatever you want such as have a party, play the music aloud, watching the TV... It's really difficult the connivance between parents and adult children too. Every day, there are a lot of discussions at home and so, it is not easy to live together.

In my opinion, I understand that nowadays is very difficult become emancipated but a lot of people are too comfortable at home and they don't want to move anywhere. Since earlier ages, the most people have got all that they ask for their parents and I think that it isn't good for the children education. So it would change and each one would begin to do it. On the other side, there is the big problem about the economical crisis. The flat's rent are too expensive and it doesn't help anyone to leave parents home. However, I believe that nowadays adult children don't save any money and in addition, spend it in lots of thing that they aren't necessary. To sum up, I think that the government have to change the way to make policy and the adult children the mentality.

Comment [R1]: Unnec.

Comment [R2]: ww

Comment [R3]: prep

Comment [R4]: sp

Comment [R5]: children

Comment [R6]: a very

Comment [R7]: unnec.

Comment [R8]: Unnec.

Comment [R9]: A social

Comment [R10]: Unnec.

Comment [R11]: works

Comment [R12]: problems

Comment [R13]: WO

Comment [R14]: Subj, Who are

Comment [R15]: ww

Comment [R16]: to become

Comment [R17]: unnec.

Comment [R18]: or

Comment [R19]: unnec.

Comment [R20]: Unnec.

Comment [R21]: Not ok!

Comment [R22]: ask

Comment [R23]: Missing subj

Comment [R24]: To become

Comment [R25]: From an early age

Comment [R26]: unnec

Comment [R27]: rephrase

Comment [R28]: prep

Comment [R29]: children's

Comment [R30]: ?

Comment [R31]: ww

Comment [R32]: unnec.

Comment [R33]: Unnec.

Comment [R34]: rents

Comment [R35]: missing word

Comment [R36]: parents'

Comment [R37]: prep

Comment [R38]: unnec.

Comment [R39]: has

My Christmas Holiday

The Christmas begins on December 24 until January 6. I usually celebrate the Christmas with my family. We prepare this special days ten days before. The first thing we do is decorate the house. We put the Christmas tree, and decorate it with many different embellishments. Is very big and special tree, because everyone hangs a letter with his wishes for the new year. Next we think the menu for dinner. Everyone cooks one different Christmas plate from other country. After dinner we chose the best plate and the winner doesn't help with the cleaning. We eat typical Christmas sweets. This night is the Olentzero's day and we open our Christmas gifts. Next we play bingo.

Is very typical too for my family play to the Christmas lottery, everyone buys one tenth of lottery for all, and we hope some year win it.

In the magic kings day we go to other family home for the lunch. We eat cake of king's day, and inside the cake is a small figure. Who has the surprise in his piece of cake, will have to pay the cake next year.

One day in Christmas holidays we celebrate all the years one lunch with workers-friends.

In new year's night is very different. We dinner at home with the family too, but next we go to celebrate with the friends. We meet all at the party, and become the friends who live farm. All the people is happy and we have a great time talking and dancing. Is very long night.

This year my Christmas holidays will be very different than other years. My grandmother has decided to invite all the family to spend Christmas in the Swiss mountains. She rented a pretty house in the ski station. We will go there on December 22. We are all very excited preparing our bags. We will spend seven days there. We will go all together to ski lessons. It will be very fun. Probably we will celebrate similar dinner that we do at home, because we love it but this year we will taste Swiss food. This year we will change our olentzero by the noel.

- Comment [R1]: unnec
- Comment [R2]: and lasts
- Comment [R3]: same
- Comment [R4]: to
- Comment [R5]: up
- Comment [R6]: subj missing
- Comment [R7]: a
- Comment [R8]: ww
- Comment [R9]: then
- Comment [R10]: prep
- Comment [R11]: another
- Comment [R12]: ww
- Comment [R13]:
- Comment [R14R13]: ww
- Comment [R15]: missing subj
- Comment [R16]: participate in the lottery
- Comment [R17]: ww
- Comment [R18]: tense, subj missing
- Comment [R19]: prep
- Comment [R20]: ww
- Comment [R21]: ww
- Comment [R22]: unnec
- Comment [R23]: ww
- Comment [R24]: subj missing
- Comment [R25]: missing subj
- Comment [R26]: prep
- Comment [R27]: missing word
- Comment [R28]:
- Comment [R29R28]: sing
- Comment [R30]: ?
- Comment [R31]: prep
- Comment [R32]: subj missing
- Comment [R33]: ww
- Comment [R34]: unnec
- Comment [R35]: ¿
- Comment [R36]: S+V
- Comment [R37]: Subj missing
- Comment [R38]: a
- Comment [R39]: wo,ww
- Comment [R40]: missing words
- Comment [R41]: ¿
- Comment [R42]: prep
- Comment [R43]: ww

An Incident that Changed My Life

Was my first day at university, I felt very nervous, but I was very happy. I caught the bus with my old friend Hibai and we arrived at the university when we met for chance with other three friends. One of this, was my close friend Ainara, other was my school's friend Eli, and the last one, was my high school's friend Ainhoa. We entered in the class, the class was empty, we were about 200 people. All my classmates were girls except 10 boys. The university was wonderful, and I made a very good new friends, one of this was the most special for me, he was Asier. We were always together, making jokes, going out... Perhaps were the best years of our lives. Why? Because We were young, without responsibility and making different plans all the time. But at the end of university all began to change. I started working as a teacher and the rest of my friends too. We were so far and was very difficult for us to be together as before. Anway we use to be once a month.

One year after ending university I was with the kids in one park of Donostia, the weather was sunny, I didn't remember wery well but maybe was July. I was playing with my kids when ran into Eli. Eli was working in the same park, we spoke a lot and I said that I will rent a flat with two friends, Eli was very surprised and She told me that we had to do a lunch in my flat.

After that, Eli was going on vacation with her boyfriend. They were driving when the car lost control. Unfortunately, both died in this car accident. We were 22 and we had our heart broken. I can't explain what felt in this moment because I couldn't believe it, was horrible for us, we were very sad, crying all the time. This kind of things are very difficult to overcome. We needed time. But 8 years after, we learn to live without her, of course, the live never will be the same because the friends are one of the most important things. In conclusion, if you have a very good friend, you should take care of it, because you never know when will be the last time you see him.

- Comment [R1]: Subject missing
- Comment [R2]: preposition
- Comment [R3]: Unnecessary preposition
- Comment [R4]: Word order
- Comment [R5]: Demonstrative adjective wrong
- Comment [R6]: Definite article missing
- Comment [R7]: Unnecessary possessive
- Comment [R8]: The same
- Comment [R9]: Unnecessary preposition
- Comment [R10]: Indefinite Article disagreement
- Comment [R11]: Demonstrative adjective wrong
- Comment [R12]: Not ok!
- Comment [R13]: These were, subejct missing
- Comment [R14]: Tense, subj
- Comment [R15]: Far from what?
- Comment [R16]: Subject missing
- Comment [R17]: spelling
- Comment [R18]: past tense
- Comment [R19]: tense, used to be what?
- Comment [R20]: One vs. a
- Comment [R21]: Wrong preposition
- Comment [R22]: Past/present confusion
- Comment [R23]: Subject missing
- Comment [R24]: Subject missing
- Comment [R25]: Do/make/have
- Comment [R26]: Past ...
- Comment [R27]: They lost control of ...
- Comment [R28]: Were, wrong word
- Comment [R29]: pl
- Comment [R30]: Subject missing
- Comment [R31]: Subject missing
- Comment [R32]: Conjunction missing
- Comment [R33]: Demonstrative these
- Comment [R34]: wrong word
- Comment [R35]: present/present ...
- Comment [R36]: spelling
- Comment [R37]: definite article un... ..
- Comment [R38]: never will be Word ...
- Comment [R39]: unne.
- Comment [R40]: Wrong word