

## Interlanguage in undergraduates' academic English: Preliminary results from written script analysis

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### Abstract

The following article aims to revisit Selinker's theory of Interlanguage by analysing a group of undergraduates' written scripts in L2. The initial outcomes of the study establish a linguistic parallelism between students' Interlingua and English as a lingua franca in the academic world. In the light of this comparison, certain theoretical standpoints can be determined for the analysis of students' written production in English. Consequently, the practice of scaffolding by the teacher can be more productively directed towards their individual needs.

**Key words:** Interlanguage, English, academic, writing, lingua franca.

### Resumen

Este artículo pretende retomar la teoría de la Interlengua de Selinker a través del análisis de exámenes escritos en lengua extranjera por un grupo de estudiantes de universidad. Los resultados iniciales del estudio establecen un paralelismo lingüístico entre la Interlengua de los estudiantes y una lengua franca en el ámbito académico. A la luz de esta comparación, determinados aspectos teóricos pueden ser esclarecedores para el análisis de la producción escrita en inglés. Como consecuencia, la práctica de apoyo pedagógico por el docente podrá ser más productiva si es dirigida en base a las necesidades individuales de los estudiantes.

**Palabras clave:** Interlengua, inglés, académico, escritura, lengua franca.

### 1. Introduction

Written discourse analysis has always revealed linguistic behaviours that take place under certain circumstances. The purpose of this article is to find common linguistic patterns in a sample of Spanish university students' written evidence in English<sup>1</sup>. As examples of foreign language writing, these data provide clues on the writers' L2 development. Inspired by Mitchell and Myles's (2004: 9-15) analysis of language learning theories, I am studying these common linguistic behaviours which may clarify different steps in the L2 learning process. For this purpose, the concept of Interlanguage (also referred to as Interlingua) should be described and new insights should be provided, taking contextual and behavioural factors into account.

These pupils' written output clearly shows their particular position along their language learning continuum, thus having direct consequences on their own teaching-learning process. In other words, the practice of scaffolding by the teacher can be more productively directed towards their individual needs.

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This article is not a longitudinal study but a transversal and cross-sectional one, in which references are cross-learners. Only a longitudinal revision could go into causal relationships between L2 input and written production. In this case, the preliminary nature of this analysis merely focuses on some Interlanguage features grouped according to nature, students' levels and frequency. This pilot research process has consisted of examining 27 undergraduates' written scripts in English as L2; revealing discourse findings suggest common features in these written texts and therefore, we can claim for a shift from Interlanguage perceptions towards a lingua franca standpoint. Groundbreaking assumptions arise with this terminological change, especially regarding pedagogical implications in the L2 classroom.

The first sections of this study deal with previous literature in the field of Interlanguage and foreign language writing. This theoretical review will lead to the analysis of written exams produced by Spanish university students at Málaga University. Their writing in a foreign language exemplifies the preceding theories on linguistic behaviour; moreover, they could also point out new hypotheses underlying. Finally, some classroom implications for teachers and learners are provided.

## **2. Interlanguage: a route for linguistic development**

The beginnings of Interlanguage analysis date back from 1945, when Fries (1945: 9, in Selinker 1992: 6) stated: "the most scientific materials are those based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learner".

The term 'Interlanguage' was first proposed by Larry Selinker in 1972, and has been revisited again in 1992 by the same author (Selinker 1972; 1992). Later on, works by Corder (1981) and Mitchell and Myles (2004: 156) among others have done a revision on the topic of Interlanguage. At the same time, Nemser (1971) developed a parallel foundational theory to that of Selinker, in which he analysed the way foreign language learners dealt with L2 linguistic systems.

Interlanguage could be defined as an intermediate stage between a learner's L1 and L2, in which s/he uses rules from both linguistic systems in order to produce sentences in L2. Following a constructivist approach, Interlanguage is the measurable proof of students' construction of their learning progress; Interlingua indicates the different linguistic stages the learner undergoes. As Piaget pointed out in his learning theory, those various stages go from a more controlled phase to an abstract and creative thinking process (Williams and Burden 1997: 21-22). Interlanguage is the transitory and always changing linguistic state of SL users. It evolves towards the best SL state possible for that user, and it is directly influenced by individual cognitive skills and contextual pushing factors.

The different instances of Interlanguage should be perceived as a proof of the learner's assimilation of the new language into his/her own reality; they are also a sign that the learning activity is meaningful for learners. However, Interlanguage is not only a measurable evidence of language learning, rather it is the complex result of internal cognitive processes that take place during learners' process of second language (SL) acquisition.

### **3. Interlanguage in relation to other learning theories: Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development**

Vygotsky (1978) identified a specific cognitive area called Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) in his analysis of children's developmental processes. ZPD was defined as "the difference between the child's developmental level (...) and the higher level of potential development as determined through problem solving (...) in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky 1978: 85).

ZPD requires deep pedagogical attention since it shows clear evidence of the learning progress (either positive or negative achievements). In the field of written discourse, Interlanguage performance is the tangible proof of a learner's state within his/her ZPD, and should therefore be analysed thoroughly. ZPD and Interlanguage have different foundations regarding language learning; however, the concrete linguistic data provided by Interlanguage evidence help to measure language development objectively. This has direct classroom implications that will be suggested later on in this article.

Selinker's interpretation of Interlanguage makes clear that there are no monolingual situations in a second language learning process. This multilingual nature provokes some controversies regarding the ways in which this theory should be handled with. For this reason, Selinker complains about not having any "theory of language that can handle Interlanguage units (...) in terms of language transfer and interlingual identifications" (1992: 223).

From my point of view, ZPD can offer a solution to this issue: English teachers, being aware of their students' Interlanguage features, can offer better scaffolding both individually and by identifying collective weak points. After all, teaching suggestions are often based on Interlanguage instances, which guide the whole process in the teaching and learning interaction. In order to use ZPD as a diagnostic tool in the class, some changes have to occur regarding students' role in their learning process. Inspired by Kasper's (2001: 37) reflection on communicative competence, the intra-individually focused concept of self-monitoring has to be expanded to the inter-individually orientated notion of interaction in continuous development. In this way, cognitive aspects of language learning are interrelated with social factors, equally influential.

These concepts of teachers' assistance and interaction have been researched by Ohta (2001), who defines classroom scaffolding as a negotiated discovery: social interaction both reveals and determines a learner's ZPD (Ohta 2001: 54). A sociocultural perspective of learning triggers the necessary mechanisms of language internalisation (Swain 2001), and we can see why. The cognitive load of language is put into practice in a collaborative dialogue, having as a result a meaningful use of Interlanguage samples.

In fact, a collaborative interaction between students creates more opportunities to use L2 and thus provides "a greater potential for L2 learning in the ZPD" (Kasper 2001: 39). It is only in interaction when subjects can be more aware of their Interlanguage state in comparison to others, placing themselves in their zone of development accordingly. In other words, interaction helps to visualise individual differences and, at the same time, fastens the process of pragmatic learning in an instructional environment.

### **4. What is behind Interlanguage?**

#### **4.1 Cross-linguistic influences and transfers**

All SL processes, either oral or written, imply some degree of cross-linguistic influences and transfers. These influences actually occur in either direction, as Jarvis and Pavlenko (2008) indicate. This conclusion was

previously published in Han and Selinker (1999) and it becomes evident after the research done for this study.

Foreign language writing is a continuous flow of cross-linguistic influences. This language and culture transfer has a double purpose: on the one hand, it is a social identity builder, bringing sociocultural and sociolinguistic issues together; on the other hand, linguistic transfer works as an individual identifier, since it reveals psycholinguistic parameters within the writer's linguistic behaviour. In the case of adult L2 writers, they seem to develop an autonomous English writing system after some years of instruction. In my analysis of University students' written production, I have come across some common Interlanguage features, something that brings to mind some shared universal grammar even regarding L2 behaviour.

Some of the students' discursive features (see 11.2) are clearly related to a direct transfer from their L1. However, many others are the result of a mixture of processes and influences combining L1 and L2, together with the student's individual learning rhythm. Moreover, the phenomenon of linguistic transfer seems to occur only in some specific L1/L2 features, not affecting the whole linguistic system.

This explains the varied and chromatic nature of Interlanguage. As Krashen and Scarcella (1978, in Mitchell and Myles 2004: 45) state: "language knowledge acquired or learnt cannot (...) become integrated into a unified whole". Therefore, cross-linguistic transfers affect L2 learners in all their learning stages; they do so in very different ways, not being a negative influence at all. As I will show later on, it is the teacher's task to turn these transfers into positive learning opportunities to advance throughout their ZPD.

#### **4.2 The phenomenon of fossilization**

The phenomenon of fossilization is seen as "non-progression of learning despite continuous exposure to input, adequate motivation to learn, and sufficient opportunity for practice" (Han 2004: 13). The nature of this phenomenon is a mixture of cognitive and psychological motivations that can be conscious (when L2 speakers want to keep their identity) or unconscious, as in the case of university students writing in English for academic purposes. In this case, the reasons for fossilization are cognitive as well as sociolinguistic: together with L2 learner's mental inclination towards it, students lack real contact with native communities or with speakers of other languages.

In a language learning process, the target linguistic system is being constantly re-structured. Surprisingly enough, some mistakes are made and avoided at the same time in a student's piece of writing. Therefore, we can conclude that fossilization is more likely to appear in certain language forms (see 11.1), but it is also intermittent, depending on outer circumstances such as level of concentration and pressure. Curiously enough, some of the students' everyday words such as: 'language', 'philology', 'linguistics' and 'psychology' present a high degree of spelling mistakes in the exams analysed.

Some items are more prone to fossilization than others. In my list of fossilized errors in English for academic purposes (see 11.2), there are lexical as well as discursive items. As I will mention later on, fossilized discursive devices happen in more advanced learners; low-level students tend not to use discursive links as they might consider it a writing risk. As clear evidence of fossilization, university students' written output confirms the existence of an unavoidable system of deviant linguistic features that remain after many years of formal academic instruction. Identifying these features in a specific group of pupils will help to design graded activities appropriate for the learners' learning stages.



traditional Anglocentric view has given the floor to a more multicultural approach in language teaching (Barnard and Zemach 2007: 310).

## **5. Research process: methodology and analysis criteria**

Mitchell and Myles (2004: 9) identify five different language levels: discourse, syntax, morphology, semantics and lexis. In my analysis, I will focus on both discursive and syntactic features of students' written texts in English as a foreign language. From a top-down perspective, I will highlight Interlanguage features that are commonly present in the written samples. However, issues from morphology and semantics will inevitably come up due to their interrelation. The present preliminary examination is part of a larger study where this quantitative discourse analysis is to be complemented with oral interview data; at the moment of writing this article, the author was carrying out the more qualitative part of this research process.

The methodology followed during this discourse analysis is a quantitative and descriptive one. This consisted in examining 27 written scripts while highlighting the most frequent discursive and syntactic features in each script. These features are relevant because they stand for instances of students' Interlanguage, showing a certain degree of L1 transfer.

The written production I am analysing belongs to 27 undergraduate students aged between 21 and 24. They are in the third year of their English Philology degree, and all of them are native speakers of Spanish. Their current level of English –though heterogeneous—allows them to have rather competent writing skills. The kind of written production I have chosen is an English Applied Linguistics exam done by undergraduate students of English Studies at Málaga University; it is, therefore, English for a specific academic purpose. This means that we are not testing students' L2 linguistic skills only but we are evaluating theoretical contents as well. English is just the linguistic vehicle to express those curricular items. However, the foreign linguistic system is inevitably assessed in this process of content and language integrated learning. In this analysis, we should bear in mind factors such as time pressure and exam context, which certainly implied a degree of stress and anxiety.

Regarding the analysis criteria, this research process does not focus on the L1 and L2 parallelism exclusively; instead, attention is paid to the differences among students' Interlanguages, in search for common patterns of linguistic behaviour and their consequences on the L2 learning and teaching process (Ellis and Barkhuizen 2005). As the analysis proceeded, further classifications of Interlanguage features emerged, making the whole analysis more inductive. These typologies are exposed later on in this article as the results of my research.

## **6. Written evidence of Interlanguage: description of students' samples**

Due to these students' academic formation –and after many years of English formal instruction–, their current level is high. However, as their own exams show, level varies considerably from one student to another. In spite of these variations, fossilization happens in all of them, though different linguistic items are affected depending on the student's level of proficiency.

Interlanguage features can be observed and measured following the principles of any positivist science. In fact, the most common Interlanguage characteristics have been gathered and classified according to their nature and language level, as shown in the chart 11.2. These linguistic features can be divided into two major sections:

- Those breaking L2 standard grammatical system, e.g. lack of third person –s or absence of impersonal subjects.
- Those that result from L1 cognitive interference but which do not imply any breakdown in communication.

The first type relates to syntactic features, while the second one refers to discursive and lexical items coming from L1, and which have been inserted into the L2 system.

The inevitable influence that L1 exerts over the target language (i.e. English) should not be perceived as something wrong but rather as makers of an Interlanguage identity that is shared by all members in a class. These common identity features help to locate students in a particular point within their ZPD in their way towards learning English writing.

Analysing real data is a basic research tool in applied linguistics. Written samples of this kind present a rich, multidisciplinary and complete linguistic resource. However, according to Bygate (2004: 15), “while the surface is a key reference point, we need a series of theoretical explanations for what is happening on the surface, along with a repertoire of procedures for detecting them”.

## 6.1 Classification of Interlanguage features

In this section, I am analysing students’ written production in the light of Meara’s principles of Interlanguage (1984: 225-226) and Tarone and Swierzbins’ (2009) more recent explorations of learners’ language. Rather than errors, Interlanguage features are perceived as interesting deviations from the native-like production, which also result in a well-formed linguistic system. As Cathy Benson (2002: 68) indicates in her article on cross-linguistic interference, linguistic transfer is not always negative. In some cases, where both languages share structural similarities, that transfer can speed up L2 acquisition and facilitate its use.

One of the most positive influences of Spanish language in English academic lexicon is the degree of formality in style. Due to their romance linguistic origin, these students tend to use Latin cognate words in English, resulting in a higher formality in their writing style. Some of the most common Latinised expressions found in these exams are the following ones: ‘distinguish’, ‘memorisation’, ‘advantage’, ‘provide’, ‘invent’, ‘impose’, ‘substance’.

Together with this, I found other discursive and syntactic Interlanguage features that were common to almost all of the students’ samples:

- Extensive use of the determined article (‘the’)
- Generalised absence of undetermined articles (‘a, an’)
- Extensive word repetition due to lack of synonyms
- Lack of discursive links/linking devices (transition markers and adverbials)

Ammar (2008) explains different aspects in SL morphosyntax when it is influenced by learners’ L1. As earlier quantitative studies on Interlanguage suggest (Selinker 1979: 13), word-order is the most common error, something widely present in these samples: i.e. “let’s say language, without any purpose of communication, because he was alone in the Earth there was no communicative purpose” (Student’s

sample). As shown in the previous sentence, word order in romance languages is much freer (Kail 1989: 82) and students make use of this freedom to emphasise a specific information chunk in English.

In a study on collocations carried out by Granger (in Schmitt 2007: 81), the author describes how L2 writers use them according to L1 congruency, indicating a high degree of transferability from the native tongue. If I apply this phenomenon to these English Philology students, their use of collocations is, in most cases, a direct translation from their equivalents in L1. Spanish versions of English collocations generally transmit the intended meaning, but they are no longer English ones. An example of this is the following sentence: “transformational rules act in two manners” (Student’s sample).

Regarding students’ deviant forms, we can make a distinction between lexical and functional categories. As far as this research is concerned, functional categories seem to be more problematic in advanced students, who have a more stable knowledge about lexical items. Discursive links and devices are a major weak point in advanced stages of written production, and it seems to be the field functional Interlanguage features mostly fit into. Once grammatical and lexical rules are controlled, L2 writers have to face the challenge of functional discursive items in use.

This lexical-discursive dichotomy is pointed out by Ringbom (2007: 8), who defines L2 writing stages as formal and functional/semantic respectively. Discursive (functional) items, according to this author, are more difficult to learn in L2 because L1 discourse is “more resistant to modification and development than grammatical or, especially, lexical patterns” (Ringbom 2007: 64).

Following Mitchell and Myles’s (2004: 118) language principles, I have found several patterns that are present in students’ production, accounting for Interlanguage lexical and discursive features:

- The one-to-one principle: one meaning is always expressed by one form. In this way, we can find examples of invalid sentences or words that are used without taking the risk of looking for synonyms, e.g. the use of the word ‘represent’ to express both a verbal and a nominal meaning.
- The transfer to somewhere principle: a grammatical form occurs many times as a result of transfer in the Interlanguage, e.g. the introductory phrase ‘with respect to’, instead of the English form ‘regarding’.
- The relexification principle: students use L1 sentence structure filled in with L2 lexical items, i.e. “applied linguists have to have a knowledge in other fields or domains” (Student’s sample).

These common linguistic behaviours result in different students’ types, each of them requiring their own academic scaffolding and feedback.

## **6.2 Students’ cognitive and metacognitive evidence according to their Interlanguage**

In recent studies on intra and inter language influences (Ecke 2008), high-proficiency students very often show strong L1 influences and direct translations in lexical retrieval. The reason Ecke provides for this is that both L1 and L2 linguistic systems are almost parallel, being the former one highly influential.

The conclusion I draw from these written samples analysis is that those students with a high percentage of deviant syntactic forms present poorer or no use of discursive devices at all. On the contrary, students using linking words and discursive resources proficiently (in a lower or higher degree) do not write communicatively disruptive syntactic forms.

According to this, students' path of development would be conditioned by their lexical first and then discursive proficiency in English. Therefore, following this evidence, discursive competence is acquired and achieved once grammatical ability has been developed.

In his study on cognitive evidence in English as L2, Field (2008: 365) enumerates some principles of language acquisition that Interlanguage theory happens to complete at some points. For this author, second language acquisition is incidental, emergentist and example-based; students' instances of Interlanguage support Field's principles from real evidence. Students' production seems to be quite incidental, since norm deviations often happen randomly.

However, though their production should be based on real examples of written language encountered before, they do not always imitate them, but rather adapt them to their own Interlanguage linguistic system. Therefore, we find expressions or discursive links that students have surely never come across before, and that are being used for communicative purposes in their exams. This generation of non-existent L2 linguistic expressions evidences the high L1 influence on the cognitive process of writing.

Cognitive workload in a foreign language environment has been recently studied by Farris et al. within the context of pilots and air-traffic controllers. Their study concludes that everyday linguistic performances in English as a foreign language do not require (much) cognitive effort on the part of the speakers. However, simulations under factors of stress end up in a slower and poorer L2 production (Farris et al 2008: 406).

When applying these findings to an academic setting, we see that students' performances vary in a situation of stress too. Particularly in this study –analysing real academic exams–, basic grammatical errors appear where they would not come up in a normal classroom exercise.

During students' text production, different cognitive strategies are taking place in their minds. A student's success will depend on the combination of those with a set of metacognitive processes happening at the same time. On the cognitive side, there is an organisation of ideas/words, processes of summarizing what they remember, usage of imagery to bring up stored information and an elaboration procedure. On the other hand, metacognitive tactics shape their written output, e.g.: discourse planning in a limited time or monitoring themselves and evaluating their language production.

Interlanguage can be changed and consciously manipulated by students if they learn about its significance and purpose. As part of a metacognitive process, these student-writers bear in mind a communicative purpose, and if they believe in their positive outcomes, they can advance through their Interlingua towards proficiency in SL.

The idea of metacognition relates to the issue of locus of control, that is, "how far individuals see themselves as being in control of their own learning" (Williams and Burden 1997: 96). The more in control they feel, the greater achievements they can make. Yoshimura (2006: 420) is also in favour of triggering a metacognitive behaviour in advanced language students: "conscious effort needs to be made to shift attention toward language form if language needs to be learned further".

Consequently, metacognitive skills in Interlanguage mean being aware of its existence and of the fact that users can change it. The next step would be the identification of strategies to improve the language learning process.

## 7. Classroom implications of Interlanguage awareness

The process of (foreign language) writing is both creative and constructive. From a cognitive psychology angle (Braisby and Gellatly 2005), writing implies a planning process, a ‘from-idea-to-word’ translation and a final revision of the written outcome. All these processes are not lineal but intermixed and overlapping. On the other hand, sociocultural theories (Lantolf and Beckett 2009) take subjects’ contexts into account; in this case, students’ previous experience in English writing clearly determines their production. From either perspective, writing is a procedure of constant transformation and creativity which requires specific academic formation.

The active role of learners in their production of L2 leads to a constant process of error analysis, and consequently, to the learning from those mistakes for future language productions. In this case, errors are not considered as negative interferences but as constructive steps towards L2 acquisition. In order for students to learn from their own production, they have to learn a new role: the role of researchers.

Lam (2009: 130) recently proposed several metacognition strategies for students to be more aware of their own SL production and thus to be able to consciously modify it. These strategies were: “problem identification”, “planning content” and “planning language”. In addition, since we are dealing with written outcomes, I would add another strategy to Lam’s sequence: individual proof-reading.

Nevertheless, not all fossilized items have to be removed from students’ range of academic expressions; even though some of them might not sound ‘English’, they very often transmit what students want and consequently fulfil the teacher’s expectations. Therefore, the pedagogical dilemma arises when deciding which of those features should be corrected and which ones should not.

Interlanguage pedagogical implications were left clear by Selinker himself (1992: 218): “no other subject matter needs to integrate pedagogical concerns as we do, i.e. in the ways that we seem to have to”. In integrating both research and pedagogical implications, they can benefit from each other finally improving the process of L2 learning and performance. Later on in the same publication, he actually makes a direct association between Interlanguage and TESOL, SLA and LSA (Selinker 1992: 223).

The concepts of cross-linguistic influence and transferability can be very useful in pedagogical terms. Teachers may want to establish comparisons between L1 and L2 in order to raise language awareness in their students. Consequently, they are favouring the positive kind of linguistic transfer that helps to understand L2 better and that benefits coherent textual creation.

When correcting and marking students’ written samples, teachers often face an evaluation dilemma in which they are uncertain of which linguistic features they should correct and which ones are academically acceptable even though they are not native-like. Discursive features in written language seem to be available only to high-level students. Weak learners do not take any discursive risk, staying in a more basic lexical stage. The purpose then for teachers would be to combine both grammatical and discursive processes in order to get better results in all learners.

However, when looking for real applications in the classroom, teachers have big student groups to deal with. According to new curricular designs at Málaga University, English for specific purposes provides a closer approach to individual teaching since it identifies learners’ needs from the very beginning of the teaching process; moreover, groups become smaller in the new university degrees.

These external considerations such as class size and curriculum design do affect the teacher education policy agenda. The type of methodology used in the classroom is very often the only alternative to cope with syllabus objectives (Earley and Schneider 1996: 310; Fitz 2006). In this case, the consideration of Interlanguage in the class reflects a more open perception of how a foreign language should be taught and spoken.

Humanist and affective strategies help teachers to perceive Interlanguage not as discouraging samples of linguistic failure but as signs of individual identity and needs. For that purpose, teachers have to be reflective practitioners in order to bring cognitive research into the classroom and raise Interlanguage awareness.

A reflective teaching attitude depends on practitioners' professional beliefs. Teaching principles lead every step in this profession. Following certain linguistic and teaching beliefs, Interlingua can be then interpreted as a flexible grammar containing key features of English as an international language.

In this paper, I propose to use students' individual and shared Interlanguage features to build up "a serious empirical pedagogy (that) would have Interlanguage analysis as central and basic to both pedagogical decision-making and the assessment of its efficacy" (Han and Selinker 1999: 249). This idea goes in favour of Kamil and Troudi's (2008: 6-7) new teaching model for writing in EFL, which takes into account the individual performing the task, his/her cognitive processes, motivation and needs.

This interest in individual cases is closely related to alternative ways of teaching, which, at the same time, clearly depend on teachers' educational beliefs. A closer focus on constructivist theories of learning will lead to a better understanding of particular cases. And ultimately, "case purpose will help define the field at the same time that the field will help define the purpose of cases" (Merseeth 1996: 727). Together with inherent teaching beliefs, it also requires awareness and specific formation (Garcia 1996: 808).

Another suggestion is made by Ecke (2008: 517), who proposes to "keep a cognitive diary"; Ecke's pedagogical purpose is related to SL word retrieval and cross-linguistic influence between L1 and L2, and his didactic intention can be applied to this case. Diaries can help teachers to keep track on weaknesses and strengths, and they are especially useful for keeping record of feedback. Although this may seem rather time consuming, I believe it can offer very positive feedback if it is done regarding each individual student.

Together with this recording technique, linguistic curricular items should also be changed. Practitioners should try to combine lexical elements together with discursive ones, in an attempt to make L2 curriculum design richer. Consequently, we would be giving weaker students opportunities to develop their discursive competences, making their written production more elaborated.

In this search for pedagogical answers, English for Academic Purposes offers us some insights that take our concerns to the field of needs analysis. Molle and Prior suggest that teachers have to start accepting the fact that no generalised solution is possible in a group of students; there is a "heterogeneous blend of discourses appearing (and being accepted)" in the students' texts (Molle and Prior 2008: 244). As a consequence, the task of error correction has to be done individually, in relation to the type of Interlanguage hybridity each student has.

Interlanguage and fossilized items in L2 production advocate the fall of the traditional English model, offering a whole range of valid alternatives regarding a foreign language. The aim now is focused on the individual weak areas and difficulties rather than on a target native-like model to be accomplished.

## 8. Conclusions

In this initial analysis of these students' written output, I have discovered that Interlanguage provides a complex, unique and rich linguistic environment from where teachers can withdraw students' weak areas of development in L2. Moreover, from a research perspective, Interlanguage offers genuine rules governing English as a lingua franca, since it is the kind of L2 foreign users choose to communicate.

The direct implications of this linguistic diversity affect the analysis of written texts as well as all other pedagogical processes. Drawing on arguments of hybridity and comprehensibility, variation in Interlanguage within academic contexts is defensible and indeed stylistically laudable.

This study is but a tentative probe which suggests topics for further research. The exams analysed here certainly do not cover all possible errors or situations. After comparing students' Interlanguages and their implications regarding academic marks, I conclude that discursive proficiency is only accessible for those with well-developed L2 lexical knowledge. Therefore, regarding my own teaching practice, I aim at introducing more discursive items when teaching writing; it would be positive to combine the lexical and the discursive stage as that would make final outcomes richer.

This revision of Interlanguage theory in the light of academic written scripts provides a more comprehensive way of dealing with learners' errors. They are not perceived as something negative but as a construction of their own process of learning. At the same time, this initial analysis brings new topics for reflection and further research in the field of discourse and error analysis for the teaching of L2 writing.

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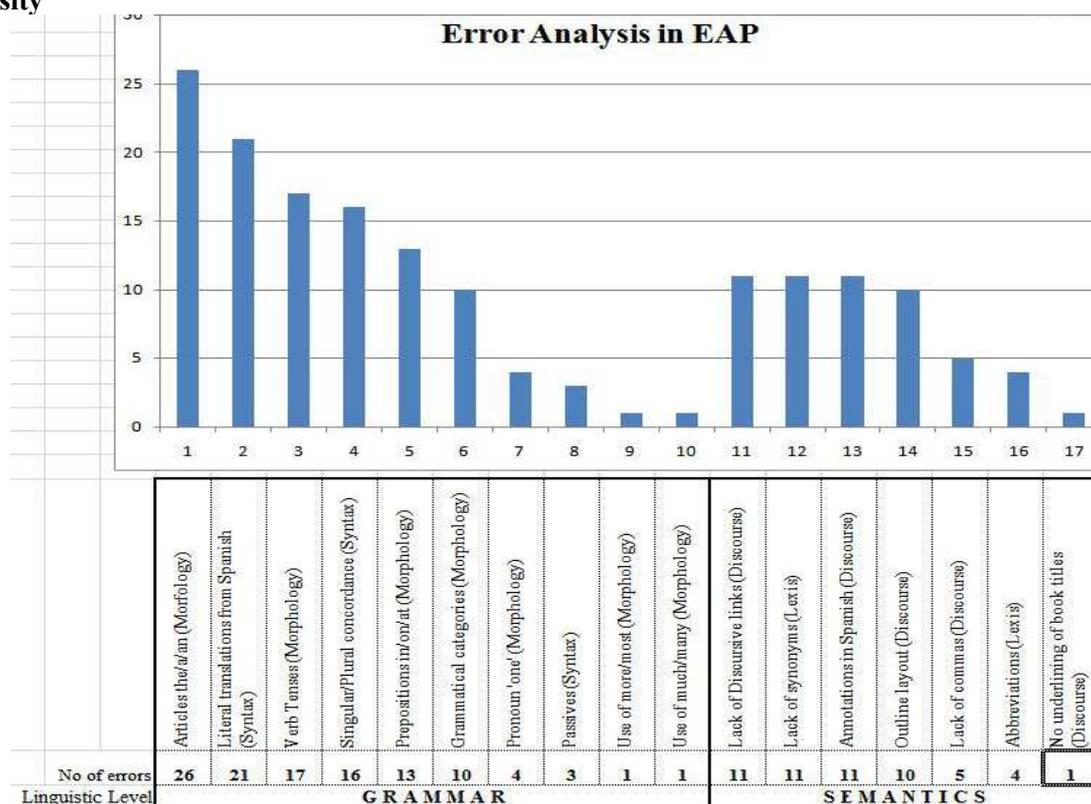
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## 11. Appendices

### 11.1 Words containing the most common errors produced by the students in their exams of English Applied Linguistics at the University of Málaga

A	B
Linguistics	Achievement
Dichotomy	Standard
Questionnaire	Isolating
Phonetics	Handwriting
French, Greek, German	Rationalisation
Psychology	Try
Anthropology	Itself
Establish	Iniciated
Successful	Arbitrarily
Conscious	Origin
Empirics	Language
Distinction	Philology
Apart	Chaos
Concrete	Conditioned
Dialogue	Operation
Whether	

### 11.2 Chart showing a basic Error Analysis in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) at Malaga University



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