ERROR ANALYSIS IN WRITTEN NARRATIVES BY THAI UNIVERSITY STUDENTS OF ELEMENTARY SPANISH AS FOREIGN LANGUAGE

Análisis de Errores en Narrativas Escritas por Estudiantes Tailandeses de Español como Lengua Extranjera

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ABSTRACT

In recent years Spanish as foreign language (SFL) has been the target of a steadily increasing demand in Thailand, especially in the tourism industry. Given this growing professional prominence, the acquisition of (some) Spanish has become much sought after in, amongst other contexts, tertiary education.

This paper addresses the issue of nascent error production by elementary Thai students of Spanish as foreign language. These students are also competent in English as foreign language. After an academic trimester at Mahidol University International College, error analysis in written narratives provided by 83 students has been meticulously applied. Results yield irrefutable evidence that interference from both mother tongue (L1) and foreign language (FL) -Thai and English- have a notable impact on the students' command of their written Spanish at this stage in their learning path.

Keywords: Error analysis; Thai university students; Spanish as FL

RESUMEN

Desde hace relativamente poco tiempo la enseñanza de ELE está experimentando una creciente demanda en Tailandia, especialmente en el sector turístico. Debido a esta situación, el aprendizaje de (algo de) español se ha convertido en centro de atención en la educación terciaria, entre otros contextos.

El presente artículo se centra en los errores que cometen los estudiantes tailandeses de nivel elemental de español como lengua extranjera (ELE). Estos estudiantes también dominan el inglés como lengua extranjera. Después de un trimestre en Mahidol University International College, se ha realizado un meticuloso análisis de los errores que aparecen en redacciones escritas por 83 estudiantes. Los resultados ofrecen prueba irrefutable de interferencia tanto de la lengua materna como de la segunda lengua –tailandés e inglés- en las redacciones escritas por estos estudiantes.

Palabras clave: Análisis de errores; estudiantes universitarios tailandeses; ELE

1. Error Analysis

The concept of error analysis (EA henceforth) in FL did not really start to be contemplated in a positive light in the research community until Corder (1967) pointed out its relevance in the foreign language learning experience. He challenged the traditional perspective of an error being perceived as an undesirable event –the prevalent view at the time- in favor of a more constructive view: errors as an indication that "(the learner) is in the process of acquiring language" (Corder, 1967: 165). Before Corder's pivotal theory attracted reputable academic attention, the approach known as Contrastive Analysis (CA henceforth), based on "views from structuralism in linguistics and behaviorism in psychology" (Heydari and Bagheri, 2012: 1583), was the device universally deployed by researchers to attempt to taxonomize the errors generated by FL students. CA rests largely on the assumption that inaccuracies can be explained by comparing the learners' mother tongue with that of the target language. For this reason, CA also lends itself to be utilized as a predictive tool: it can anticipate some of the problems that are likely to materialize in the FL context.

In the 1960s and early 1970s, CA was –not surprisingly- very attractive because it seemed to incarnate the stone with which to kill two birds: not only could it explain the learners' deviant responses but it could also predict (some of) them. Since then, however, CA has attracted consistent detraction because, after fine-toothed comb scrutiny, it surfaced that its predictions could often be either inaccurate or irrelevant (Kim, 2001). In fact, many errors appeared in areas that CA had not forecast, which meant that not all of them could be traced back to the influence of the mother tongue(s) (Dulay & Burt, 1973; Duskova, 1969; Penadés, 2003). As a result, the novel interpretation of errors in the FL learning environment put forward by Corder basically sprung out of a need to comprehend what CA could not encapsulate.

Corder's seminal 1967 paper spells out the very important distinction between systematic and unsystematic inaccuracies produced by language learners, not only in the FL context but also in children in L1 acquisition. He clearly distinguishes between an *error* and a *mistake*. An *error* is the product of incomplete learning of the target language. However, it unveils a certain degree of linguistic knowledge to date, ergo it "provide(s) evidence of the system of the language (the learner) is using at a particular point" (Corder, 1967: 167) in the learning process. This particular state of affairs is also referred to as *transitional competence* and it is typically systematic in its nature. Conversely, as Corder explains, a *mistake* is the product of factors such as a momentary memory lapse, lethargy, lack of concentration, etc. In other words, a *mistake* is usually considered a random or a *one-off* event, hence, characteristically unsystematic. *Mistakes*, unlike *errors*, do not yield reliable information about the level of proficiency of the language learner and are not considered significantly useful for research or statistical purposes.

Furthermore, Corder (1971) points out –though far from being a new concept- that the nature of some errors is *interlingual.* Shortly afterwards, error classification was elaborated further by the identification of *intralingual* errors (Richards, 1974). At first sight, interlingual errors appear to be in consonance with CA because of the inherent comparison between the mother tongue and the target language, however, this is not really the case. Interlinguality, as it were,

merely recognizes what elements of the L1 have played a detrimental role in FL productions; it lacks the prophetic dimension of CA because it does not predict what errors are prone to surface. Intralinguality, on the other hand, identifies what errors originate from the learners' fragmentary knowledge of the target language. Apart from the above, Corder (1971) also coins the term *idiosyncratic dialect.* In the particular context of FL, an idiosyncratic dialect refers to the linguistic devices or strategies a specific learner conjures up in order to communicate despite the fact they do not exist in the L1 nor in the FL. Selinker (1972) built on the error analysis approach of Corder and coined the term *Interlanguage,* which refers to an intermediate stage between the native and the target language. As the term idiosyncratic implies, each dialect is individually tailored and, as a result, some of the sentences defy straightforward interpretation. This is not to say, Corder maintains, that these sentences are wrong. Instead, they exhibit a grammar of their own and, as such, should not be considered "errors"; they should be seen as a rite of passage that all learners must go through before reaching (full) linguistic maturity. An *idiosyncratic dialect* is characterized by both its instability and its transience and, consequently, as the learners become more proficient in the target language, the fewer instances of this dialect should crop up.

2. Increasing Interest for Spanish in Thailand

A number of recent research studies in Spanish as FL in Thailand substantiate its exponential demand in both professional and educational contexts over the past few years. This interest began with the Barcelona Olympic Games in 1992, which invigorated Hispanic-Thai relations (Ramos, 2018). Since then the number of Spanish-speaking tourists that visit Thailand has steadily increased every year and, since many of them are not proficient in English, they prefer a guide who can communicate competently in Spanish (Tongwanchai & Fuentes, 2015). This is one of the main reasons why Spanish as FL has gradually found a more prominent place in the syllabus of both secondary and tertiary institutions. Furthermore, not only is Spanish currently perceived as an increasingly important language to master for professional reasons, but it is also a language which facilitates access to many appealing aspects of Hispanic culture: Latin music,

Hispanic dances (i.e: salsa, flamenco, etc), sports (i.e: football, tennis, etc. which inevitably evoke internationally acclaimed professionals of the caliber of Messi or Nadal) or the film industry, to name but a few.

Mahidol University International College (MUIC) has been offering Spanish as FL since September 2008. The table below shows the official number of students who have enrolled for -and successfully completed- Spanish for at least 2 trimesters during each academic year since its onset.
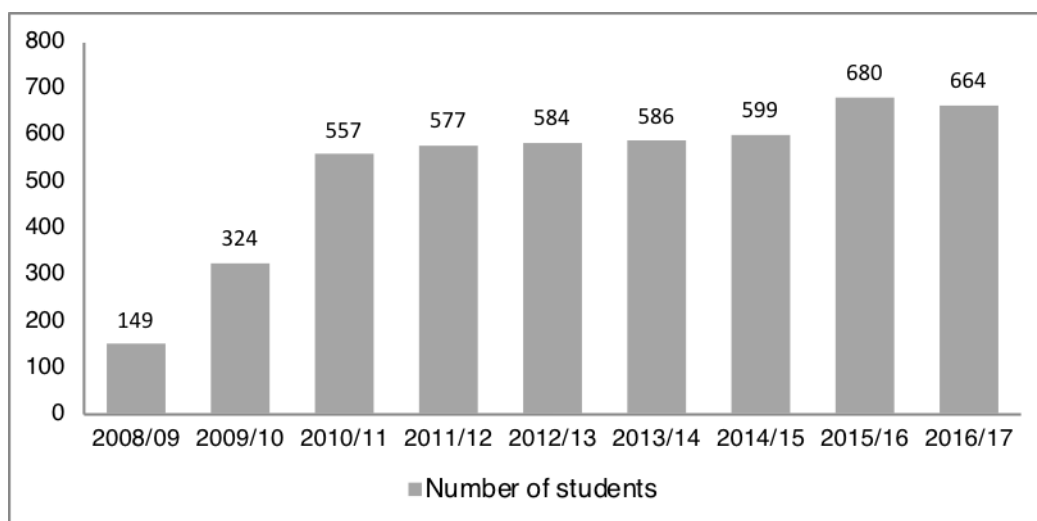
Table 1: Number of students in MUIC learning Spanish (per academic year)

As can be appreciated from Table 1, during the first year –comprised by 3 trimesters- a total of 149 students took Spanish (elementary levels only). In all subsequent years the numbers grew substantially until, in the academic year 2016– 17, a slight decrease occurred. Much of the interest for Spanish –as well as other languages in the Foreign Language program- has always come from students whose majors are in Tourism and Hospitality Management on the one hand, and International Business on the other. This is in keeping with the fact that in Thailand such prominent industries as tourism envisage a promising future[1]. As a result, a demand for staff fluent in foreign languages, other than English, is likely to expand.

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[1] Garcia, G (2014) states that Thailand is amongst the 20 most visited tourist destinations in the world. Due to the country's natural resources and the investments recently advanced with the help of the government, Thailand expects to become the regional center of tourism.

3. Present Study

Some research has already been conducted into EA in Spanish as FL in Thailand (Srivoranart, 2011; Poopuang, 2013). However, in our view, it is worth exploring this field of research further in order to shed more light into the nature of these errors. A close scrutiny of the data we aim to obtain would hopefully yield further insight into the different processes involved in the initial stages of the SFL learning experience of Thai university students.

3.1. Methodology

3.1.1. Participants

The participants are a group of 83 students (54 female, 29 male) of Spanish as FL at Mahidol University International College (MUIC), with no previous formal knowledge of Spanish. The vast majority of them are of Thai origin but there are also participants from mixed backgrounds, as seen in Table 2.

NATIONALITY	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
Thai	67
Indian[2]	16

Table 2: Students' nationalities

Regarding the informants' linguistic background, we documented that all of them are Thai native speakers. Furthermore, 16 students considered themselves proficient in other languages, as presented in Table 3. With the exception of one of the students –who has English as L1- all of them know English as FL but with different levels of mastery, ranging from advanced to proficient. It is important to mention again that even though the students are not native speakers of English, all of them demonstrate a high communicative competency, which makes Spanish at least the third language in their linguistic repertoire.

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[2] These participants are 2nd or 3rd generation Indian students born and educated in Thailand.
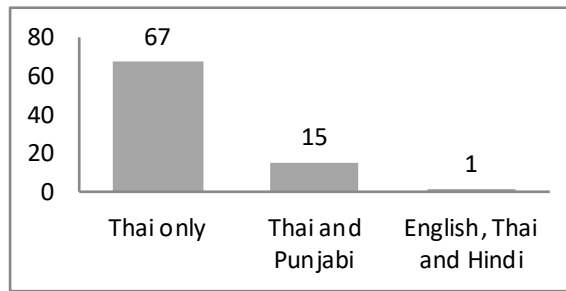
Table 3: Students' mother tongue(s)

There are 3 major courses that include languages as a compulsory subject in their programs. These are International Hospitality Management, International Business and Intercultural Studies and Languages. It should be noticed in Table 4 these are precisely the 3 majors with the largest number of students.

	MAJOR	NUMBER OF STUDENTS
1	International Business	26
2	International Hospitality Management	18
3	Intercultural Studies	9
4	Finance	7
5	Biological Sciences	5
6	Social Sciences	5
7	Business Economics	4
8	Marketing	3
9	Food Science and Technology	2
10	Chemistry	2
11	Communication Design	1
12	Media and Communication	1

Table 4: List of students' majors

MUIC divides the academic year into 3 trimesters. Each trimester comprises 12 teaching weeks followed by a final exam week. Furthermore, (nearly) every August, MUIC offers an intensive summer course where all the tuition time delivered in one trimester is condensed into 4 weeks.

The participants in the present study have just completed the first trimester of the academic year 2017-18; that is, they were taught Spanish formally for 12 consecutive weeks (4 hours a week delivered in 2 classes of 2 hours each). The book they have followed is *Aula Internacional 1, Nueva Edición*, units 1 to 3. By the end of the trimester, the students had been exposed to a total of 48 hours of formal instruction.

3.1.2. Approach to teaching

All the participants in this study possess a high level of English and, although efforts were made to ensure as much teaching in Spanish as possible, the fact remains that the students are (near) complete beginners. Hence, it was often necessary to resort to English as the vehicular language in the classroom to maximize clear understanding.

Also, due to a number of historic as well as sociocultural factors (i.e: the Thai education system, Buddhist beliefs, faithful obedience to the monarchy, etc.), the vast majority of Thai students are naturally inclined to respect the status of the lectures unquestioningly. Furthermore, since the Thai education system encourages parrot learning, the students display a strong tendency to memorize the information provided in the classroom by their teachers. In a nutshell, Thai culture –and, consequently, its approach to learning or acquiring new knowledge- is based on a system of beliefs rather than personal or mature reflection (Srivoranart, 2011: 273).

The Spanish team at MUIC, whenever possible, endeavors to minimize systematic memorization in favor of active reflection, not only in the limited context –in terms of time and location- of the classroom but also during the students' own time. In our view, the process of acquiring foreign languages is more effective if the students themselves take direct responsibility for their own learning by actively engaging their intellectual abilities. This is not to denigrate the importance of committing information to memory –which is also part and parcel of FL learning- but, rather, to complement it.

3.1.3. Error classification

There are a few lists aimed at error classification in written (and oral) narratives of Spanish as FL (Fernández, 1991; 1997; Santos Gargallo, 1991, 1993; Vázquez, 1991, 1999; Lennon, 1991; Poopuang, 2013). However, there is not a general consensus when it comes to error interpretation: linguists often express discordant opinions as to how to define the exact nature of an error. For example, *el escena*[3] is classified as a lexical error by Fernández, whereas Penadés (2003) would categorize it as a gender agreement error. In our view, the fact that different researchers would place the same inaccuracy in different categories should not descend to a bone-of-contention scenario but, rather, become the spark to ignite a constructive debate. In this context, maybe the proposal put forward by Lennon (1991) facilitates a satisfactory solution: in many instances, errors can be grouped in more than one category.

For the purpose of the present study and given the nature of the participants –near beginners with only 12 weeks of formal instruction- it was decided to scrutinize the narratives produced by the students first –rather than predetermine the nature of the errors they might incur in- and, then, either find a list that better suits our findings or, quite simply, create our own list if deemed appropriate. In this respect, our approach is aligned to that of Poopuang (2013: 25), that is, we apply an *a posteriori* methodology, which aims to discover the origin of the errors together with an analysis of the (possible) source(s) of interference. A comprehensive list of the error classification used in this study is included in Appendix 1.

It should be noticed that items such as "sociolinguistic errors" or "global coherence", etc. have not been contemplated on the list. This exclusion has been done on purpose. Although it is sometimes thought these items are not important in elementary levels, we beg to disagree. In our view, these pragmatic dimensions are always important –they are also included in all six levels, from A1 to C2, in the *Plan Curricular del Instituto Cervantes*- but we feel they are beyond the scope

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[3] The correct form of "El escena" would be either "La escena" or "El escenario". Since we do not have access to the context in which this error appears, we cannot be sure of what the right answer might be.

of the present analysis. In future research, we hope to scrutinize these items we have knowingly left out.

3.1.4. Data collection

All students take the Spanish final exam at the end of the trimester, in week 13. One of the questions included in the exam requires the students to produce a written narrative. In this particular case the question was:

> **Tu amigo y tú estáis buscando dos amigos que hablen español para practicar en un grupo de Facebook. Preséntate y después presenta a tu mejor amig@ (mínimo 100 palabras en español). Incluye como mínimo la siguiente información sobre ti y tu amigo.** *(You and your best friend are looking for two Spanish-speaking friends to practice your Spanish in a Facebook group. First introduce yourself and then introduce your best friend (minimum 100 words in Spanish). You must include at least the following information about yourself and your friend):*

- **Nombre completo** *(full name)*
- **Nacionalidad** *(nationality)*
- **Edad** *(age)*
- **Cumpleaños (***birthday)*
- **Profesión** *(occupation)*
- **Aficiones** *(hobbies)*
- **Cualquier otra información relevante** *(any other relevant information)*

Below there is an anonymous example of a typical narrative provided by the students:

> *Hola, me llamo ……….., soy de tailandia. Yo tengo diecinueve años. Me cumpleaños es 14 Julio 1998. Soy estudiante en la Universidad de mahidol y estudio turismo. Me aficiones es dormir y montar a caballo y jugar con mis perros, Rocky y Nelson. Me gusta dormir y relajarse. Soy no activa. Yo vivo en Bangkok. Mi amiga es Ploy. Ella es tailandes. Ella diecinueve años. Ella cumpleaños es fin de semana. Ella estudiante en al Universidad de Chulalongkorn y se gusta jugar de tennis y jugar de violin. Ella vives en Bangkok. Mi amigo y yo estamos buscando dos amigos hablen español para practicar. ¡Gracias!*

4. Results

The table below provides a summary of the results of the EA conducted with the group of students described above. The list has been organized in order of occurrences, that is, from the most frequent type of error –first item on the list- to the least common. Notice that the last item on the list comprises what we consider to be instances of *idiosyncratic dialects* and, as specified by Corder (1971) and stipulated in the Error Analysis section of this paper, they are not considered errors. They are included here, however, because we think they deserve attention. Comments on several examples of *idiosyncratic dialects* we have detected will be provided at the end of the next section.

TYPE OF ERROR	NUMBER OF OCURRENCES	PERCENTAGE
Spelling	366	33.609 %
Verb	198	18.181 %
Preposition	115	10.560 %
Pronoun	103	9.458 %
Article	97	8.907 %
Agreement	81	7.438 %
Word order	69	6.336 %
Idiosyncratic dialect	60	5.509 %
TOTAL	1089	100 %

Table 5: Occurrence of errors

5. Discussion

Table 5 provides us with a clear view of the major areas where the students experience difficulty. In the next sections we will discuss, in turn, each one of the error categories contemplated above.

5.1. Spelling

A cursory look at Table 5 informs us right away that *spelling* is the area where the students experience more difficulties by far. The most common problem is the undue absence or presence of a written accent. Out of the 366 spelling inaccuracies found in this study, 153 of them are directly related to this

characteristic in the Spanish writing system. That figure represents just over 14% of the overall number of errors, which is, it seems to us, a relatively high percentage for just one specific type of error. Srivoranart (2011: 314) found a similar trend, that is, the mastery of the Spanish written accent entails pronounced difficulties, especially in the elementary groups. She also observed that as the students became more proficient, they showed a notable improvement in this particular area. The participants in the present study have only had a 12-week period of exposure to Spanish as FL, that is, they are barely post-beginners. This rather limited experience with the language together with the fact that in both, Thai and English, written accents do not exist, can largely account for the provenance of this error.

There is also another source of confusion for the students regarding the written accent. They, very early on, learn to answer *Bien* (no accent) when asked *¿Cómo estás?*. Shortly afterwards they are introduced to *También* (accentuated). There are other similar pairs such as *tu, tú; el, él; dos, veintidós; tres, veintitrés; tailandesa, tailandés; donde, ¿dónde?; que, ¿qué?,* etc. where one of the forms is accentuated while the other is not. Understandably, the elementary learner is often confused by this apparent lack of consistency and although attempts may be made to explain the difference, in most cases it does not seem to register at this early stage in the learning process.

The second most salient type of error involves the (mis)use of capital letters. This is very likely an interlingual error due to the interference of both Thai and English. On the one hand, in Thai there is no distinction between small and capital letters; conversely, English spelling rules regarding capitalization often differ from those of Spanish. An obvious case in point is the use of demonyms: they are capitalized in English (i.e: *Thai*) whereas they are not in Spanish (i.e: *tailandés*). Other instances of this involve names of countries, languages, months and days of the week.

The last considerable group of spelling errors involves the addition, omission or use of wrong letters in many of the words. We found evidence of interference from English (i.e: *afficion* [afición]*, *attention* [atención]*, *tennis* [tenis]*, *Thailandia* [Tailandia], etc) and intralingual errors (*españolos*

[españoles], *estudianta [estudiante], *interesanta [interesante], etc). There is also a large battery of words wrongly spelt for reasons which are not entirely clear, however, they at least reveal partial knowledge of the correct form (i.e: *intelegente [inteligente], *cociner [cocinar], *lituratura [literatura], *camerero [camarero], *decinueve [dieciniueve], *chantar [cantar], etc). From our perspective, these are not serious errors. The wrong spelling of these words tells us that the correct form has not been fully assimilated yet.

5.2. Verbs

During the 12- week trimester, the students have worked with the three regular conjugations of the present tense (indicative mood) and a few irregular verbs, namely, *ser, estar, tener, querer* and the infinitive form of *ir.* After data collection, when the errors in this area transpired, it came as no surprise that the students display a series of problems associated with the Spanish verb system. The concept of *verb conjugation* does not exist in Thai and, in English, though verbs are indeed conjugated, they are far less variable than their Spanish counterparts.

To begin with, out of the 198 errors seen in this field 144 of them involve wrong verb conjugation. This figure represents well over 13% of all the errors mentioned in Table 5 above. Given the grammatical background of the L1 and FL of the participants in this study together with the fact they are near beginners, this high percentage of errors in verb conjugation should not come as a surprise. Combinations such as *Mi amigo vivo [Mi amigo vive], *Ella eres [Ella es], *Mi profesión soy [Mi profesión es], etc. are not unusual. Occasionally, students do not conjugate the verb and choose the infinitive form (i.e: *Yo beber [Yo bebo], *Ella jugar [Ella juega], etc). This last scenario replicates the Thai grammar since, as stipulated before, it does not conjugate verbs at all.

It is also rather common to come across sentences without any verb(s) in it: *Yo 17 años [Yo tengo 17 años], *Mi amigo Mark y vive en Bangkok [Mi amigo se llama Mark y vive en Bangkok], etc. We noticed here a propensity to omit the verb *ser* in constructions like *Tailandia fabulosa [Tailandia es fabulosa], *El español difícil [El español es difícil], *La isla de Koh Tao bonita [La isla de Koh

Tao es bonita], etc, which seemingly are a direct translation from the L1[4]. Conversely, there are also instances of too many verbs (i.e: *Soy estudio español* [Estudio español], *Me llamo es …* [Me llamo…], *Somos gusta la clase* [Nos gusta la clase], etc). It is not obvious what triggers the use of undue verbs here since there are no parallel constructions in Thai nor English.

Clear evidence of interference from English is specially seen in sentences like *Ella es 18 años* [Ella tiene 18 años]. There are also instances of intralingual errors such as *Lucía y yo gustamos…* [A Lucía y a mí nos gusta…], where the students conjugate *gustar* like a normal, regular verb.

Rather surprisingly, we only found one single example of confusion between *ser* and *estar: *Ella está estudiante* [Ella es estudiante]. We conjecture that at this early stage the students have internalized –possibly through sheer practice in the classroom and in their homework- the very few contexts in which these verbs appear.

5.3. Prepositions

The most prominent error in this area is the absence of the preposition in sentences of the type *Me gusta jugar fútbol* [Me gusta jugar al fútbol]. This omission of *al* can be attributed to a direct translation from English, where no preposition nor article are needed. We also missed the presence of *de* in constructions like *Universidad Mahidol* [Universidad de Mahidol], *Mi número teléfono* [Mi número de teléfono], which can be explained as interlingual errors, but we also came across instances like *Ella es España* [Ella es de España], *Somos el mismo país* [Somos del mismo país], etc., which are not so easy to explain.

There was also, albeit to a much lesser degree, the undue addition of prepositions (i.e: *Visitar a España* [Visitar España], *Me gusta en cantar* [Me gusta cantar], *Él es en futbolista* [Él es futbolista], *Soy de tailandés* [Soy tailandés], etc) and use of wrong prepositions (i.e: *Soy estudiante a la universidad* [Soy estudiante en la universidad], *Quiero trabajar por España*

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[4] The Thai sentences ประเทศไทยเป็นอะไรที่สวยงาม, ภาษาสเปนนั้นยาก and เกาะเต่าสวยงาม literally mean *Thailand fabulous, Spanish difficult* and *Koh Tao island pretty* respectively.

[Quiero trabajar en España], *Me gusta la clase en español* [Me gusta la clase de español], etc) whose origin is, once again, difficult to explain.

5.4. Pronouns

The most common error in this area is, by far, the use of the wrong pronoun (i.e: *Yo cumpleaños* [Mi cumpleaños], *Nosotros cumpleaños* [Nuestro cumpleaños], *Se gusta bailar* [Le gusta bailar], *Su gusta el chocolate* [Le gusta el chocolate], *Se nombre es* [Su nombre es], etc).

Secondly, the omission of the pronoun, especially with *gustar* (i.e: *A ella encanta* [A ella le encanta], *A mi gusta leer* [A mí me gusta leer], etc) but also, occasionally, in other contexts (i.e: *Mi amiga llama* [Mi amiga se llama], *Soy Joy y correo es* [Soy Joy y mi correo es], etc).

5.5. Articles

There is an overwhelming number of omissions of articles (i.e: *Soy estudiante en universidad* [Soy estudiante en la universidad], *Me gusta música* [Me gusta la música], *Mi cumpleaños es 25 de enero* [Mi cumpleaños es el 25 de enero], *Bangkok es la capital de país* [Bangkok es la capital del país], *Aficiones de Joy son* [Las aficiones de Joy son], and many more. This tendency to omit articles has also been reported by Tongwanchai (2011) and Srivoranart (2011). There is clearly a strong interlingual influence here because in the students' L1 articles do not exist and in English articles behave differently.

There is, on the other hand, a small number of examples where students use articles when they are not required *Ella es la estudiante de la universidad* [Ella es estudiante en la universidad], *Quiero ir a la España* [Quiero ir a España], etc.

5.6. Agreement

Another important feature in Spanish is the agreement, in terms of gender – masculine, feminine- and number –singular, plural- between a noun and the adjective(s) associated with it. Thai adjectives have no markers for gender and/or number, and English only has the marker for number, not gender. It is not

surprising, then, that this particular area of Spanish grammar proves challenging to the Thai learner.

It is common to stumble upon phrases like *amigos nuevo [amigos nuevos], *país favorita [país favorito], *muchos fotos [muchas fotos], *mucho platos típicos [muchos platos típicos], etc. This problem is not only confined to the noun-adjective pairing, it also pervades other areas, such as the agreement between subject and noun *Ella es cocinero [Ella es cocinera], *Él es mi amiga [Él es mi amigo], etc. the agreement subject-adjective *Ella es simpático [Ella es simpática], *Ellos son alta [Ellos son altos], etc. and the agreement pronoun-noun *Mi amigos [Mis amigos], * Tus nombre es [Tu nombre es], etc.

We looked at the amount of errors in both areas of agreement –number and gender- and found that there is a higher incidence of errors in the former. In Table 5 we have a total of 81 errors related to agreement: 48 pertain number, the remaining 33 pertain gender (from a percentage point of view these figures represent 59.259 % and 40.74 % respectively). This difference seems significant to us. A closer look at the data at our disposal revealed that most of the errors in this concrete area are of the type *Mi amigos [Mis amigos], *Mi aficiones [Mis aficiones], etc. which are clear examples of interlingual errors, presumably from the both the students' L1 and FL, since in both languages the pronoun does not alter its form when followed by either a singular or a plural noun.

5.7. Word order (syntax)

The most common error here can easily be traced back to the interference of English. This is evidenced in ubiquitous constructions like *Estudio en Mahidol Universidad [Estudio en la Universidad de Mahidol], *Mi amigo cumpleaños [El cumpleaños de mi amigo], *Mi teléfono número [Mi número de teléfono], and many others. This type of error was also observed by Srivoranart (2011; p. 320). Moreover, we also noted a few errors in negative sentences, mainly the misplacement of the word no (i.e: *Es no dificil [No es difícil], *Soy no alto [No soy alto], etc,) very likely emulating the equivalent English construction. Interestingly, we also found that the verb gustar was problematic *Me no gusta [No me gusta], *Le no gustan [No le gustan], etc). This might easily be an

intralingual error: the students are already familiar with sentences like *No quiero, No estudio mucho, No sé,* etc. and they simply add *no* just before the conjugated form of *gustar* to make it negative, as they do in all other instances.

5.8. Some observations on interlingual and intralingual errors.

Due to the influence of CA, the learners' mother tongue used to be perceived as the main culprit in error production in the FL environment. A number of empirical studies since the 1970s, notwithstanding, have proved otherwise: Dulay and Burt (1973), Mourssi (2013), to name but a few, found that actually less than 10% of the learners' errors are caused by L1 intervention.

In this study we have found irrefutable evidence of both interlingual and intralingual errors in the students' written narratives. It is difficult to quantify reliably to what extent each one of them plays a part. It seems safe to state, however, that interference from English, the students' FL, is greater than that of Thai. Although at first sight this might come across as an unexpected finding because of the similarities between Spanish and English (i.e: both languages use the same alphabet, use articles, conjugate verbs, have number markers, etc), it is precisely these shared attributes that originate most of the errors. There is clear proof of this FL interference in the spelling (i.e: *attention* [atención]*, *tennis* [tenis]), use of some verbs (i.e: *Ella es 18 años* [Ella tiene 18 años]), absence of some prepositions (i.e: *Jugar fútbol* [Jugar al fútbol], and in the syntax (i.e: *Mi amigo cumpleaños* [El cumpleaños de mi amigo]). Interference from L1 is also appreciated in the lack of verb conjugation (i.e: *Yo beber* [Yo bebo]) or omission altogether of verbs (i.e: *Tailandia fabulosa* [Tailandia es fabulosa]) and absence of articles (i.e: *Soy estudiante en universidad* [Soy estudiante en la universidad]).

Apart from the two above-mentioned types of errors, there is also a significantly large third group which resists clear-cut categorization. This group represents a grey area because we cannot be sure whether the errors stem from L1 or FL intervention (or both, as the case may be). It is not possible to advance an accurate prognosis in cases such as the misuse of capital letters, the use of wrong verb conjugations, the omnipresent problems with agreements and

articles, etc. Given this rather messy state of linguistic intercourse, we cannot be 100% sure where the errors come from.

In light of all the discussion above, it is safe to claim that no area of an FL is immune to the intrusion of errors, at least in the early stages of its acquisition. In a nutshell, we have found concrete evidence of interlingual and intralingual errors as well as other types of inaccuracies that have ubiquitously percolated into all the aspects of the language: spelling, verbs, prepositions, pronouns, etc. Many of the errors we have unburied and discussed are an indication, as Corder (1967) would likely argue, that the learners are in the process of acquiring language. That is, it is just a matter of time before the students improve their overall knowledge of Spanish and, in this particular instance, the partial proficiency will, in time, ideally metamorphose into a fully-fledged, correct mastery of the FL.

5.9. Comments on idiosyncratic dialect

There are a few instances of phrases and sentences which certainly do not follow any conventional Spanish rule and, furthermore, their underlying structures cannot be the result of interference from the students' L1 nor FL. We think they are the result of what Corder (1971) terms *idiosyncratic dialect* because they seem to display an "imaginary grammar" –our terminology- which, presumably, makes some sort of sense to their respective creators. Inevitably, it is often difficult to discern what causes this type of error. Maybe, factors such as cultural background, personality, motivation, age, etc. (Poopung, 2013), as well as lack of knowledge of (many) Spanish grammar features, play a role in the production of these unorthodox examples.

A sentence like *Me amor mi amiga* betrays some command of Spanish grammar but it does need an effort on the part of the reader to figure out its meaning [probably: Yo quiero a mi amiga]. Other examples show similar trends, with varying degrees of difficulty regarding their intended correct interpretation: *Nosotras quieres hablan español tienes amigos* [maybe: Nosotras queremos hablar español con tus amigos ?] or *Nos hace viajamos en España* [maybe: Nosotros queremos viajar a España ?], etc. According to Corder, these kind of

sentences should not be considered "errors" because they show a grammar of their own. It is clear, however, that they display elements of erratic linguistic behavior.

5.10. Final observations

There is also evidence that some errors are likely to be caused by such factors as tiredness or carelessness. In other words, the participants know the correct form but for some reason they have had a temporary lapse and momentarily forgot to supply a correct version. An interesting case in point is when some students first write, for instance: "Tengo 19 años de edad", only to be followed -a few lines- later by "Mi amiga es 19 *anos". The former statement is correct but the latter is not (wrong verb and omission of ~ on the letter "n"). Clearly, there is evidence that the students who have facilitated these productions know the correct form in the 1st person singular ((Yo) tengo …), however, they fail to provide it again when there is a change of context, the 3rd person singular: ((Ella) es 19 *anos). It is not immediately obvious why this happens but we conjecture these students resort to different mental processes in order to produce each statement. Corder (1971) hypothesizes that the fact learners use a grammatically correct structure does not necessarily mean they have internalized its L1 governing rules. In this context, Corder argues, these learners may be just repeating something they have seen before but have not really understood the system behind it. Hence, when the same structure appears but in a different context, errors appear. In our view, this can conceivably be the case with the example above. Then, the sentence "Tengo 19 años de edad" is probably regurgitated from memory whereas "Mi amiga es 19 anos" is more likely to be a near-direct translation from English.

On a final note, it is our hope that, in the not-too-distant future, research related to Spanish as FL in Thailand feeds into the design of textbook(s) and/or other didactic materials targeted specifically at a Thai audience. This type of enterprise has already been done successfully in other Asian countries, such as Japan (Moreno et al, 2013) and, in our view, it would be immensely beneficial for

the ever-increasing number of students of Spanish as FL in Thailand to have access to resources specially created for them.

6. Conclusion

The present paper has scrutinized the type of errors that Thai university students of Spanish as FL make in the early stages in the learning process. These students know Thai as L1 and English as FL. The results of EA give us evidence of both interlingual and intralingual errors as well as what Corder calls *idiosyncratic dialect*. Most interlingual errors are the product of the students' FL interference; there is also proof of transfer from L1 but to a much lesser degree.

Lastly, there is also a substantial amount of errors whose origin –from L1 and/or FL intervention- cannot be ascertained with absolute certainty. Lastly, there is also a small number of idiosyncratic productions which, although not considered errors, are not correct either. These instances are seen as transient in the FL learning experience.

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Appendix 1

TYPE OF ERROR		EXAMPLE
SPELLING	Addition/Omission of capital letters	• Soy Tailandesa
	Undue absence/presence of accents	• Tambien • historía
	"N" instead of "Ñ"	• Cumpleanos
	y hi/I	• Estudio español y inglés
	Wrong letter(s)	• Intelegente • Interesanta
	Omission of letter(s)	• dicinueve
	Addition of letter(s)	• Thailandia
	Wrong letter order	• viente
	Letter(s) in wrong place	• "jugaRdo" instead of "jugador"
	Separation "por que" instead of "porque"	• Estudio español por que me gusta.

TYPE OF ERROR		EXAMPLE
VERBS	Confusion SER / ESTAR	• Estoy estudiante
	Use of wrong verb	• Leer el vino • Me llamo cocinar
	Wrong conjugation	• Él quieres
	Made up "verbal periphrasis" (I.e: Me llamo es etc / Soy vivo en etc)	• Me llamo es • Soy vivo en
	Missing verb	• Yo… estudiante en

	TYPE OF ERROR	EXAMPLE
PREPOSITIONS	Addition of preposition	• Él es en futbolista • Bailar a música
	Omission of preposition	• Jugar … el baloncesto • Viajar… playas
	Use of wrong preposition	• Soy estudiante a la Universidad

	TYPE OF ERROR	EXAMPLE
PRONOUN	Use of wrong pronoun	• Yo cumpleaños • Yo gusta • Ella teléfono es
	Omission pronoun	• y … cumpleaños es • Ella … gusta
	Confusion between ME and MI	• Me amigo
	Confusion between LE and EL	• El encanta leer
	Other confusions	• Le cumpleaños es • Te afición es
	Addition pronoun	• Nos queremos viajar • Me vivo

	TYPE OF ERROR	EXAMPLE
ARTICLE	Addition of article	• Soy el estudiante de Mahidol
	Omission of article	• mi cumpleaños es … 7 de etc • estudiante de … Universidad de Mahidol

	TYPE OF ERROR	EXAMPLE
AGREEMENT	Gender (masculine / feminine)	• favorite país • ella es simpático
	Number (sing. / plural)	• mucho platos • mi amigos

	TYPE OF ERROR	EXAMPLE
WORD ORDER	Reversal noun / noun	• Mahidol Universidad • Mi amiga nombre
	Order of pronouns	• Yo y Tommy …
	Reversal noun / adjective	• Tailandesa nacionalidad
	Dates	• Mi cumpleaños es en septiembre de uno

With GUSTAR	• Me mucho gusta…
In a superlative sentence	• Es más bonita ciudad
Reversal noun / noun	• Mahidol Universidad
	• Mi amiga nombre

	EXAMPLE
IDIOSYNCRATIC DIALECT	• Me amor mi amiga • Nosotras quieres hablan español tienes amigos • Nos hace viajamos en España • Queremos hablar España en Español