CATEGORIZATION OF WRITTEN COMPOSITION PROBLEMS OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

[1]SONIA LOPEZ PEREZ, [2]EDWIN SANTAMARIA-FREIRE, [3]J.A. MOCHA-BONILLA, [4]SUSANA A. ARIAS. T

[1,2,3,4] Universidad Tecnica de Ambato
E-mail: [1]sda.lopez@uta.edu.ec, [2]edwinjsantamaria@uta.edu.ec, [3]ja.mocha@uta.edu.ec, [4]sa.arias@uta.edu.ec

Abstract- Within the productive skills when learning a foreign language, is the writing skill. This skill helps you to detect the problems that students face when they write compositions. The present paper deals with the final term compositions of 256 students which were analyzed in order to find grammatical errors and indicators of evaluation used in the Specialized Language Department. The result of the analysis of each of the compositions showed that there are grammatical errors in adverbs, prepositions, determiners and pronouns. regarding the indicators of evaluations: the spelling and organization were the main problems observed. Despite the implementation of the feedback process in the non-control group, it was possible to reduce the number of errors, in relation to the control group measured by test t student, however, students continue making the same mistakes from level-to-level.

Keywords- Written Composition, language, English, University Students.

I. INTRODUCTION

The English language is considered as the scientific language [1]. Because the researchers generate the contributions of the areas of knowledge around the world in this language [2] state that it is used in several levels according to the topic that is studied. Thus, level A1 is based on personal information, level A2 describes about actions in the past and on various transportation problems. In level B1 is about future predictions and about important people in history, among the most relevant topics. However, it is observed that grammatical errors are kept in the levels because they are not corrected during the teaching process and they will be maintained during the profession. This is an issue that stands out in the teaching of the second language in the Spanish-speaking academic community.

Since 1995, the United Kingdom has recognized the importance of teaching foreign languages. This is based on studies carried out by and [3] who agree on the importance of correctly spelling English as a second language. Likewise, [4] consider the need of standardization for the development of foreign language books and levels established in educational institutions of the world, so as to ensure the acquisition of language competence.

Based on the above, it is necessary to identify the main difficulties of written communication in English language for people who speak Spanish, thus, it is posed as a question What are the main problems in the written composition of the English language?

The research seeks to answer the problem by means of the objective: to detect problems in the grammatical elements and the indicators of evaluation used for the evaluation of this language skill. For that, this work has taken into account the mistakes made by the students in the final exam, using the technique of Error Analysis, which seeks to identify and classify errors as it also refers to the teacher who should provide immediate feedback to students to improve language writing skills. In terms of grammatical errors it can be distinguished from [5], which maintains the challenge of Error Analysis (EA), which categorizes the error committed by a student in his communication process.

EA distinguishes between interlingual errors which are "attributed to the native language" and intralinguistic errors which are "those of the language that is being learned and have no relation to the mother tongue" [6, p. 92]. There are several classifications of errors, which obey both to the objectives of the researcher and the context in which they are studied. I n relation to the grammatical component [7] mentions that within the communicative competence the grammatical part is important. In the studies reviewed, a study on some grammatical elements [8] was found and among the mistakes that were made by students we found:the handling of articles, verbs, prepositions, pronouns articles (they are part of the determiners). Each study from its different approach agrees that the grammatical elements are difficult to handle in the writing skill of the English language.

Generally, the acquisition of a Second Language (L2) is associated with different factors such as: the input to which the student is subjected, the methodology used by the teacher and the motivation to study. However, this does not absolve the student from making mistakes during their training process based on their needs both orally and in writing. These errors are an important source for the teacher, because they provide the necessary information so that he can give to the student a correct feedback and, if necessary, vary both the methodology and the didactic material that he is using. It also tells you if the student is progressing or not.

II. STAT OF THE ART

Studies on cognitive processes in children who are learning English as a second language have been developed. Canadian children were sampled to compare with Spanish-speaking children, the study analyzes the linguistic competence (vocabulary, phonological, writing of words); The results show that Canadian children present greater linguistic competence than Spanish speakers in relation to vocabulary and syntactic awareness [9]. On the other hand, we have examined the reports from teachers who evaluate the writing skill of foreign language, through tests carried out by university students, qualitative data were observed following the steps proposed by [10] on the reports focused on specific evaluation tasks, approved tests as wll as failed were analyzed. It is concluded that the weaknesses of the failed tests are the result of errors in the syntax, vocabulary and punctuation; While the strengths of the approved-corrected ones are the use of expressions and the specific vocabulary [11]. Perspectives for the improvement of students writing skills in English classes are related to pedagogical episodes, where the teacher's speech helps to fulfill the educational purposes of oral teaching [12]; in relation to the teaching-learning process, authentic materials are mentioned as an alternative to develop confidence and creativity in foreign-language students [13]. Creative writing in foreign languages has also been revealed, these new activities show that creative writing tasks should be a priority in the teaching process. In addition, the study encourages further research into this strategy as a personal choice of students to use and apply teaching situations in the tasks of creative writing of English [14].

Empirical work on the evasion of prepositions in the English language in university students with different levels of proficiency shows that low level students in English tend to avoid the use of prepositions especially in tasks and questionnaires. There are also other associated factors with mastery and linguistic complexity to avoid the use of prepositions within English writing [15]. A s for the argumentative essays of English language written by university students show some confusions of the lexical categories between adverbs, conjunctions, adverbs for gerunds of the nouns; it can be observed the lack of knowledge of grammar, morph syntactic properties and the lack of lexical knowledge in the different levels [16].

A s for the written composition developed in the classroom, it allows the teacher to correct the errors that students commit during the completion of the written work [17] and [18]. As a result of this process, students have a weakness in rewriting their assignments, identifying the failures of university students related to English language writing, using error analysis [19]. Therefore, correct and timely identification of failures will enable students to improve their academic performance [6].

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The work has a quantitative approach which has numerical data that serve to contrast the hypothesis [20], necessary elements to develop the research under the descriptive approach [21], where information was obtained through Information gathering tools used to identify grammatical errors.

The work was designed under a pre-experimental criterion, where we worked with previously formed parallels by registration process, which were based on the grade of the placement exam and the order of self-enrollment of the students in the respective levels of study of languages.

The study population consists of 16,000 university students aged 20, who take English as a second language for their professional training under the structure of study levels, according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, analyzed by [2]. F or the sample, students of levels A1 Beginner, A2 Elementary and Pre intermedie B1, randomly selected from all students enrolled in the period from October 2015 to March 2016 are considered. It is considered 6% error expected during the data collection, obtaining 256 students as representative elements in the study sample. The instrument is part of the differential skills test in the Language section under the methodology used by [22] for the determination of differences in cognitive abilities and academic performance in university students, where differences between men and women were observed.

The categories of the questionnaire were based on [8], the structure of the instrument is based on the process followed by [23] in teacher training research in attention to affective-sexual diversity. In the structured instrument, a pilot test was applied to 38 students with the same characteristics of the target group, where Cronbach's alpha of 0.836 is obtained, that is, the instrument has internal consistency, and therefore, there is validity and reliability to be applied. In addition, the questions were evaluated by four experts from the study area.

For the data collection, summarized in table 1, it was applied in two moments: 1) with 256 students, who answered the questionnaire containing questions of a structured type, about the student's perception of writing skills, student perception, And, teacher performance in relation to the skills and personal information of the respondents. 2) two independent groups are formed, who made the compositions in the written part of the final exam. The first one with 133 students without changes in their teaching process, and the second with 123 students, who are given feedback technique. Finally, the distribution of the activities carried out by the teachers during the face-to-face tutoring is analyzed.

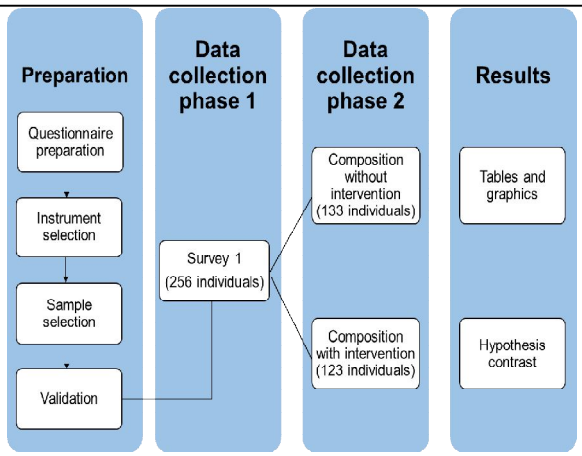


Figure 1. Process for collecting information

The questionnaire and test were applied in week 17, at the end of the term, that is, where it is possible to evaluate the acquired knowledge and learning processes developed by the tutor, which is expected to have been corrected and improved.

For the information process, the Statgraphics program provides tables and graphs necessary to characterize the problems of composition and at the same time inferential statistics are made through the student t test for independent samples that allows to check the hypotheses of study: The number of errors in the written composition and evaluation indicators, in the three levels decreases with the feedback technique.

IV. RESULTS

Of the data collected by the questionnaire, 53% of students indicate that grammatical errors influence their compositions even though the teacher spends more than 50% of the time with activities related to writing in English. Because of their shortcomings in this skill, students express their interest in learning and show that their weaknesses are brought on from their secondary education. Another factor that influences their development within the written skill is: teachers make the compositions in the last quarter of an hour of classes with individual or group exercises to cover the contents that must be fulfilled in a period of six months. I n addition, it must be taken into account that each student has a style of learning of his own [1], so it uses different techniques to fulfill the assigned written tasks, grammar and punctuation. However, it is the teacher who, exercising his / her freedom of teaching, uses the methods or methods that he / she deems appropriate for his / her group according to the objectives set for their class hours. To correct the written works, the teacher uses symbols, codes or punctual corrections socialized with the students. The progress of the student is evidenced by the number of errors or successes in his works written in grammar and punctuation. Therefore, a study of means of the errors found in the written studies at the levels studied, shown in Figure 2.

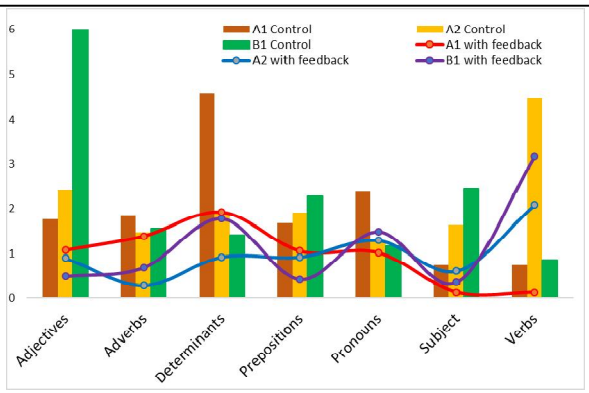


Figure 2. Comparative grammatical elements

Moreover, it does not guarantee that they take into account the information provided , as it depends on the motivation or interest, as well as the difficulty that the student has in understanding the different topics treated in class or outside it by means of the language English.

The mean differences between the intervention and control groups for each level are presented. At the grammatical level we find that the mean $(\bar{x})$ of the grammatical elements in the intervention group is lower in all elements than in the nonintervention group. it's finding significant differences in the characteristics of determining adjectives, pronouns, subjects and verbs.

This result was similar to that obtained in the evaluation indicators in Figure 3, used by the department, where statistically significant differences were found in favor of the fluidity, organization, score and vocabulary intervention group as a consequence of the feedback effect. In terms of spelling, the groups are statistically the same, with no significant differences between the error rates.

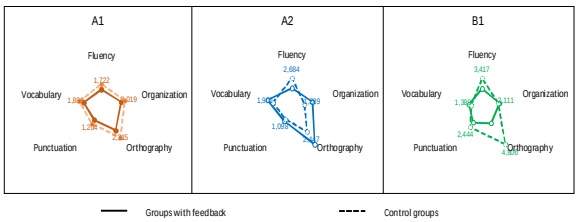


Figure 3. Comparison of Assessment Indicators

The same instruments were applied in the other groups with similar results, of which, in A2 it is emphasized that in all indicators there are statistically significant changes. While in group 3 it is observed that the means of the intervention group of the adjectives, adverbs, prepositions and subjects are smaller than those of the nonintervention group. On the other hand, we have that the means of the nonintervention group in determinants, pronouns and verbs are smaller than those in the intervention group.

The results found in the indicators indicate that in the differences of means in the indicators of fluency, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary are significant.

Focusing somewhat more on one of these aspects, it can be seen that, in the case of vocabulary, the differences are not the expected ones and the lowest mean (errors found) corresponds to the non-intervention group. As for organization, it can be observed that the groups are statistically equal, which means that the method implemented has not influenced the management of the grammatical elements studied in the performance.

In Table 3, is presented of the grammatical elements synthesized in the three levels where the work done by the students and the implementation of the feedback process are evidenced. In the Elementary level A2 it was possible to reduce the amount of errors in all the grammatical elements. Whereas in the levels Beginner A1 and Pre intermedie B1, it was agreed in subjects and verbs, whereas in the other elements variations between the other elements were presented.

Table 3. Mean difference in the three levels

LEVEL	ADJECTIVES	ADVERBIOS	DETERMINANTS	PREPOSITIONS	PRONOUNS	SUBJECTS	VERBS
A1	0,033	0,223	**0,000****	0,055	**0,000****	**0,004****	**0,004****
A2	**0,000*****	**0,000****	**0,008****	**0,008****	**0,004****	**0,001****	**0,000****
B1	**0,000*****	**0,001****	0,299	**0,000****	0,302	**0,000****	**0,000****

* Significant at 5%
** significant at 1%

Equal work is done for the evaluation indicators worked in Table 4. In the Elementary level A2 it was possible to achieve significant changes in its handling while in the Beginner A1 and Pre intermediate intermediate B1, positive changes were obtained in four of the elements.

Table 4. Control indicators at all three levels.

LEVEL	FLUENCY	ORGANIZATIÓN	ORTHOGRAPY	PUNCTUATIÓN	VOCABULARY
A1	**0,001****	**0,008****	0,098	**0,000****	**0,003****
A2	**0,000****	**0,001****	**0,000****	**0,030***	**0,000****
B1	**0,005****	0,0624	**0,000****	**0,000****	**0,018***

* Significant at 5%
** significant at 1%

CONCLUSIONS

After the process we have been able to determine that the problems of writing English language in university students when working with English language learning are: adverbs, prepositions, determinants and pronouns at different levels and level of evaluation indicators In spelling and organization on two levels.

It has been identified in written compositions by means of the mean of errors between the participating groups are at grammatical level; the errors are present after the feedback process of the teacher with the students in the three levels.

T he correct use of the grammatical elements was indicated by [6], in its classification of the thirteen errors, among them are verbs, prepositions, articles, spelling. Hence it is possible to compare the results obtained through the written work of the students who present difficulties in similar grammatical aspects in the different levels of teaching.

In the Beginner A1 level, the difficulties in the handling of adverbs and prepositions, similar to the one proposed by [19], specifically in relation to the handling of the adverbs. In the Elementary level A2 positive results were obtained in all the grammatical elements and of evaluation with respect to the written work of the intervention group.

While in Pre intermedie B1 the shortcomings were found in the management of determinants and pronouns. Following the work of [13], it is found that the mistakes of the Chinese students in the handling of the prepositions, which forms part of the group of determinants, coincide. The classification of the grammars is based on the respective levels contained in the guide books of the English Unlimited series for each level.

The evaluation elements used by this academic unit (fluency, organization, spelling, punctuation and vocabulary) by the data obtained in the present research, were established at the level of vocabulary. It coincides with the work done by [18], both in the Beginner A1 and Elementary A2 levels, a limited use was detected based on the practice of a guided or controlled composition by the teachers during the class hours.

[18] notes that spelling is difficult to manage. This is a problem that could not be overcome in the levels Beginner A1 and Pre intermedie B1 because it is present in the various elements studied. At Elementary level A2, although this error was not eliminated if it was possible to decrease its presence in written works.

It is established that the groups present failures in the elements studied in various forms at each level by means of the student t test results of independent samples and are represented in the p values of the error means as shown in Table 4.

It is proposed for future research, the implementation of a module for the consecutive teaching of writing skills. The same that would form part of the syllabus that each teacher makes at the beginning of the semester and which should be followed, regardless of the change of teacher, as well as the frequency of study of students.

REFERENCES

[1] U. Ammon, Global Information on the Social Sciences -2010 Spanish., Méxixo: Unesco, 2010.

[2] J. Muñoz-Basols, Y. Pérez y M. David, Developing writing skills in Spanish, New York: Routledge, 2012.

[3] C. Méndez, Educational convergence and cultural diversity in the EHEA. From multicultural second language university classrooms (E / LE) to intercultural competence, Salamanca: Universidad de Salamanca, 2012.

[4] J. Valle, «Actions of the European Union in the field of educational innovation» Estudio sobre la innovación educativa en España, nº 17, pp. 460-463, 2011.

[5] T. Odlin, Problems with contrastive analysis. En Language transfer: Cross-linguistic influence in language learning, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

[6] S. Gass, J. Benney y L. Plonsky, Error analysis. En Second language acquisition: An introductory course, Collepino: Routledge, 2013.

[7] E. Mestre, «Error in the learning and teaching of English as a second language at higher education level,» Tesis doctoral. Universitat Politécnica de Valencia, Valencia, 2011.

[8] M. Taghavi, Error analysis in composition of Iranian lower Intermediate students, Rasht: Guilan University, 2012.

[9] I. S. L. S. J. J. E. &. M. S. O'Shanahan, «Analyzing cognitive and writing processes in English-speaking children who learn English as a second language and Canadian English-speaking children,» European Journal of Education and Psychology, vol. 3, nº 1, pp. 45-59, 2015.

[10] Z. Han, Fossilization in adult second language acquisition, New York: Cromwell Press Ltd., 2003.

[11] J. I. S. J. &. C. A. D. L. Á. Martínez, «Assessment of writing in foreign language (English) in the upper level: analysis of teaching reports,» Actas Congreso Nacional Subsede Cátedra Unesco UNR – octubre 2014, pp. 1-8, 2015.

[12] M. A. &. H. F. Kiasi, «The Importance of 'Teacher Talk'in Teaching EFL Writing,» Porta Linguarium, nº 22, pp. 95-108, 2014.

[13] I. Y. A. Z. J. X. B. D. V. M. A. &. D. C. O. A. Díaz, «Authentic materials in the learning of foreign languages. A need for the current Ecuadorian University,» Revista Didasc@lia: Didáctica y Educación., vol. 7, nº 6, pp. 229-236, 2016.

[14] R. Karjalainen, «" Write in English on your notebook": analysis of creative writing exercises in a Finnish EFL workbook.,» Department of Languages. University of Jyväskylä, pp. 3-25, 2016.

[15] J. Zhang, «An Empirical Study of Avoidance of Prepositions in English Writings by Chinese Higher Vocational College Students,» English Language and Literature Studies, vol. 6, nº 1, pp. 117-124, 2016.

[16] S. Kim, «Revisiting Causes of Grammar Errors: Commonly Confused Lexical Category Dyads in Korean EFL Student Writing,» ENGLISH TEACHING (영어교육), vol. 71, nº 2, pp. 61-85, 2016.

[17] A. Camps, J. Dolz, G. O., A. Martínez, R. Fort, C. Rodriguez, M. Milian y N. Farrera, «Seqüències didàctiques per aprendre a escriure,» de Serie didáctica de la Llengua i de la literatura, Barcelona, Grao d´lRIF SL, 2003, p. 153.

[18] J. Harmer, How to teach English, Oxford: Ocelot Publishing, 2010.

[19] C. James, Errors in language learning and use. Exploring error analysis, New York: Routledge, 2013.

[20] R. Hernández, C. Fernández y P. Baptista, Investigation methodology, México: McGraw Hill, 2010.

[21] C. Méndez, Methodology. Design and development of the research process, México: Limusa, 2011.

[22] M. Echavarri, J. Godoy y F. Olaz, «Gender differences in cognitive abilities and academic achievement in university students» Univ. Psychol. Bogotá, vol. 6, nº 2, pp. 319-329, 2007.

[23] M. Penna Tosso, «Teacher training in attention to affective-sexual diversity» Tesis doctoral, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, 2012.

★★★