Mother Tongue Interference with Foreign Language: A Case Study about A2 Oral

Production in a Colombian Public University

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Abstract

This small scale case study attempted to understand the mother tongue interference with foreign language oral production of four beginner students in the A2 level of learning. These students are enrolled at a Foreign Language department in a Colombian public university. Three main themes of analysis were proposed: a) characteristics of the students' oral production, b) activities that encouraged oral production among students and c) the role of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language. Five class sessions were observed as a non- participant researcher, and the data gathered was supported by two semi-structured interviews to obtain the participants' own perspectives. Findings revealed some advantages and disadvantages of using the mother tongue as a reference to speak in the foreign language, identifying the syntactic and morphological failures in participants' speech.

Key words: Mother Tongue (MT) - Foreign language (FL) - Language Interference - Syntax - Morphology.

Resumen

Este estudio a pequeña escala intentó comprender la interferencia de la lengua materna sobre la producción oral de cuatro principiantes en el nivel A2 de aprendizaje. Estos estudiantes están vinculados al departamento de lenguas extranjeras en una universidad pública colombiana. Tres temas principales de análisis fueron propuestos: a) características de la producción oral de los estudiantes, b) actividades que fomentaron la producción oral entre los estudiantes y c) el rol de la lengua materna en el aprendizaje de una lengua extranjera. Cinco sesiones de clase fueron observadas como investigadora no participante y la información recolectada fue apoyada en dos entrevistas semi-estructuradas para obtener las propias perspectivas de los participantes. Los resultados revelaron algunas ventajas y desventajas de usar la lengua materna como referencia para hablar en la lengua extranjera, identificando las fallas sintácticas y morfológicas en el discurso de los participantes.

Palabras clave: Lengua materna - Lengua Extranjera – Interferencia de la lengua – sintaxis - morfología.

Introduction

Have you ever been influenced by your mother tongue when speaking a foreign language?

Many people hold on to their mother tongue while attempting to speak a foreign language. The production of sentences in a correct structural manner, added to the right pronunciation, make beginner foreign language learners experience frustration when they make an effort to communicate.

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According to Bhela (1999), although foreign language learners appear to be accumulating enough knowledge, they come across problems organizing coherent structures when speaking, relying on mother tongue structures in the foreign language, showing a gap between gathering knowledge and producing orally. In the cases in which the gap increases and becomes more complex to solve, the possibility of mother tongue interference emerges. Odlin, 1989, defined the mother tongue interference as the "negative transference of linguistic patterns", meaning that students take the structure belonging to the mother tongue to construct messages in the foreign language, constraining their learning about new elements, since they start making performance mistakes that gradually become competence errors.

This study was guided through stating the following grand tour question: How can mother tongue interfere with the A2 student's oral production in a foreign language? From which three sub-questions were derived: 1) How does the mother tongue interfere with English syntax and morphology when speaking? 2) What is the mother tongue advantage when speaking in English as a foreign language? 3) What is mother tongue disadvantage when speaking in English as a foreign language?

Consequently, this research aimed to describe the mother tongue interference focused on the experiences of four A2 beginner- level learners in the foreign language program at a Colombian public university. In addition, this study served as a vehicle to identify and describe the students' weaknesses when speaking. Hopefully, this will provide FL teachers with ideas on how to help their learners while teaching in the earlier stages of learning in order to avoid potential problems at advanced levels.

Theoretical Framework

Literature Review

Throughout this literature review, the main definitions and six previous studies on mother tongue interference over foreign language learning are presented. Mother tongue is the first language the individual learns when they are a child (Cambridge, pp.420.) On the contrary, foreign language is the language belonging to a country which is not your own (Cambridge, pp.263.) Both of them have their own features in structural factors such as syntax, the grammatical arrangement of words (Cambridge, pp. 647) and morphology, the use of verbal inflections such as modes, tenses, numbers, and subject verb agreement (Ameri & Asareh, 2010.)

Nevertheless some cases about the use of the mother tongue in an FL class are the result of the transfer of some structural features. According to Noor (1994), transfer can be positive "if any MT skills facilitate the learning of skills or parts belonging to the FL", because of the similarities they could present; however, transfer can be also negative "when it impedes the learning or has a negative influence over the FL" due to the differences in skills. For example, Odlin (1989, pp. 27) stated that "transfer resides in the influence of similarities and differences between the MT and the FL that has been previously acquired". In other words, if the transfer of a skill in the MT impedes the learning of a skill in the FL, there will be language interference.

This research was guided by the following projects, enriching my understanding, knowledge and domain about the issue in question.

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In their research studies, Bhela (1999), Al-Baldawi & Saidat (2011) and Enisa (2011), stated that learners brought into the form and meaning the MT through over generalizing the grammatical rules, to cover the structure of sentences that they did not know in the FL; as a result of the differences in syntactic and morphological structure, the difficulties that the authors found in FL students were verb omission when talking in imperative utterances, and verb placement in a) the presence of subject, object and adverb in declarative utterances; b) the presence of the object, even if the other constituents are missing in declarative utterances. Moreover, the authors found some other faults such as the addition of non-necessary prepositions, and the wrong use of personal pronouns, verb and number agreements, within the students' word-for-word translation as an attempt to communicate themselves in an FL.

Similarly, Alonso (1997) conducted a study in order to discover the main types of interference mistakes that beginner Spanish students made when learning English as foreign language. The author found that the phonetic, orthographic, syntactic, morphological and semantic features between the FL and the MT were problematic issues for the Spanish students, due to most mistakes being caused by transference of structures from the Spanish to the English language. Consequently, the author concluded that participating students generalized the grammatical rules of the mother tongue to cover the features in the FL that they did not know or they were not sure about.

In 2010, Ameri & Asareh conducted a study that showed the limitations of participants in their speech as well as multiple "grammatical non-conformities" related to the non-accurate use of verbs, the tendency to use general and simpler morphological structures and less comparative adjectives, time adverbs and the proper structure between

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noun and adjective. The author established the students' tendency to use their written work to support their speech, the misuse of successive answers to some questions or the production of successive sentences accompanied by syntactic disagreements among parts of sentences and semantic errors.

On the other hand, Horst et al. (2010), investigated how native language instruction helped learners to build their knowledge in acquiring a new language. The researchers suggested that making links between the mother tongue and the second language could be helpful to enrich the students' knowledge. However, the researchers found that even when stating that the use of MT in some cases was a positive point when learning an FL, the teachers they observed preferred not to use the elements belonging to native language to improve the students' level in the FL because of some apprehension towards possibility to get confused, raising interference in the students' minds.

The previous studies had a closer relationship with mine not only because they shed light on how the presence of MT structures influenced the FL structures, but also due to my attempt to understand how the same phenomenon emerge in the beginner students'process.

Methodology

Conducting this case study gave me the opportunity to "analyze different participants' experiences within a simple setting" (Baxter & Jack, 2008.) In other words, a "bounded system in time and space" case study (Creswell, 2005, pp. 439) was selected in order to explore, contrast and compare data. This research project was bounded in time because it lasted twelve weeks devoted to collecting and analysing data; and it was bounded in space because it took place in two FL classrooms.

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After doing the first non-participant classroom observation, in May 2012, four participants, Leonard, Daniel, Mary and Gloria (pseudonyms) were chosen through purposeful selection (Creswell, 2005, pp. 204.) The sample's selection was guided by the intent to describe and understand four different experiences from students who were pursuing a B.A. in foreign languages, with A2 level of proficiency (Common European Framework); and the following criteria was taken into account: the cases and fluency when using the FL in interaction with their teacher and their classmates.

Data was gathered through five non - consecutive classroom observations in May, June and July, 2012. The classroom observation protocol (see annex 1) was used as the main data collection instrument, to describe the activities and experiences participants went through in their natural setting. This allowed, as non-participant observer, to "illustrate and evaluate the phenomenon of interest" (Patton, 2002, pp. 21-23.)

In each classroom observation four specific objectives were included to keep me focused on the aspects, issues and factors that were attempted to identify. For example, describing the students' use of mother tongue when interacting with the teacher and among themselves; identifying what types of interactions were done either in the mother tongue or the foreign language; describing the students' general mistakes when speaking in the foreign language, syntactic and morphological mistakes; and observing the students' attitude towards the use of mother tongue as a reference to speak in the foreign language.

Taking into account the aforementioned facts, this research project sought to obtain enough information to describe, analyse, contrast and compare the results about the mother tongue interference phenomenon; two semi-structured interview protocols (see annex 2)

complemented the data collection process through "a structured but flexible process" (Turner, 2010.) Although two sets of questions were planned, I was prepared for emergent additional questions whilst interviewing the participants.

Interviews were carried out after the second observation in June, 2012, and before the last observation in July, 2012. Using purposeful selection (Creswell, 2005, pp. 204.) four participants were chosen with the following criteria: two students that always took part in oral activities and two students who made morphological and/or syntactic mistakes in any speaking activity previously observed.

Videotaping was adopted in order to store sounds/images and information about conversations or activities in each class session (Hatch, 2002, pp. 100.) It provided me with accurate, subtle details, facial expressions, non-verbal communication and emotions experienced in the classroom. Thus, both observations and interview sessions were videotaped with a prior permission from the teacher and participating students.

Description of the setting

Data to support this research project was gathered in the following two settings: 1) a foreign language laboratory equipped with thirty computers distributed into five horizontal rows on the left and the right part of the classroom. The whiteboard was located in front of the classroom where there was little space for teacher's placement. 2) A classroom with thirty five or thirty eight desks, a teacher's desk and a whiteboard, located in front of the classroom.

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Data analysis

The Interpretive Analysis (Hatch, 2002, pp.179) helped me make sense of the whole data. Eight steps suggested by this model were followed. In doing so, memos about relevant aspects were recorded, participants' impressions were identified from their own voices, and summaries which supported my interpretations about the issue in question were written. Before starting the analysis of data gathered, it was entered into the software called MAXQDA that helped me to code and reduce data in the light of the research questions.

Findings

After having analysed the data, the following three things emerged: a) characteristics of students' oral production; b) activities that encouraged oral production among students; c) the role of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language.

a) Characteristics of the students' oral production:

In a foreign language classroom the greatest attempt should be to make the students communicate their ideas orally in the language they are studying. When being interviewed, Mary stated that *"el profesor no nos deja hablar en español entonces toca preguntar en inglés…"* This proved that the teacher's goal was improving the students speaking through the use of a FL instead of the MT. When observing this classroom, it was found that the teacher adopted the use of the FL by using oral encouragement. For example, during one

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classroom observation, while students were required to answer to a teacher's question, he adopted the use of the foreign language by saying: *"I can't comprehend what you say" "I don't understand" "Tell me in English, please",* which forced them to always use the FL.

Although the result of the teacher's encouragement was the beginner students attempting to speak in English (FL), they tried to avoid saying incoherent phrases; first through interacting in Spanish (MT) with their peers, socializing and organizing any idea they had into a written text in English that helped them to talk.

It was found that writing could be a tool for students to recognize the mistakes they made or to analyse if they had organized the sentences in the right structure; according to Mary's statements *"siempre que escribo la frase la leo para ver si tiene concordancia o no…" "Para… mirar la estructura, a ver si… sale también con lo mio",* writing guaranteed successful speaking, whilst beginners were not aware of the mistakes they made while only performing orally. In contrast, writing could implicate not only the students holding on to their MT to speak in the FL but also their speech's dependence on writing.

Although, it was found how the students were willing to speak in English as they were talking about the classes themes, the exchange between the teacher and the students revealed that even if students were able to produce a simple answer they avoided giving more detailed information; For instance, the answer *"I can't remember"* to the teacher's demand for more information through the question *"What was the main reason?".*

Consequently, oral interaction when using longer and more complex statements in the foreign language seemed to be complicated for the A2 level students when trying to have an informal conversation about their daily life. This was the reason for students'

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interaction in their mother tongue, when sharing with other classmates their personal experiences, opinions or points of view. However, they adopted short and non-concrete English utterances to interact with their teacher towards his reprobation of Spanish speech.

On the other hand, other students demonstrated certain apathy to speak in English from the beginning of the activities. I found that students went through long periods of silence or avoided answering after being asked by the teacher questions like *"Who can interpret that dream?" "Any interpretation of the dream?"* Based on their body language it was established that their frustration emerged as a result of their lack of accurate words to express what they wanted to say. In Leonard's statements: *"Profe… venga hagame un favor…" "Teacher, cómo digo fútbol Americano"*, his tone of voice showed certain annoyance after having tried to communicate the expression for almost 10 minutes. Before asking his teacher, he had made mistakes such as saying *"Football American"* as the literal translation from the mother tongue, instead of "Football" as the correct structure in the FL.

b) Activities that encouraged oral production among students:

In order to notice the most common situations in which participants experienced interference, it was necessary to identify activities that encouraged their oral participation during the class sessions.

When observing, it was found that the oral activities aimed to encourage learners to improve their oral skills, making them fluent, fearless, and eager to use the right intonation when speaking. According to Leonard's opinion: *"El profesor está tratando que tengamos más habilidad para hablar, como perder el miedo al momento de hablar en inglés"*. The

challenge of A2 students was to elude gradually the MT as a reference to construct a fluent speech in the FL.

During the five class sessions observed, seven different types of activities carried out by the teacher, to foster the students' oral production were identified: 1) leading questions, 2) flashcards and oral instructions, 3) debates, 4) oral reports or expositions, 5) role plays, 6) riddles, 7) informal class participation in discussions.

The first activity carried out by the teacher was asking leading questions. According to Gloria's explanation *"El profesor nos hace preguntas y nosotros decimos sí o no; al final nos dice que qué es eso otra vez y nosotros le decimos que es; a lo último todos repetimos"* . In this activity, the teacher gave students the images of two different objects: a motorbike and a bicycle; he asked the students "*What is this?"*, making the correct option evident to produce the students answer "It's a bicycle"; then he showed the bicycle image and he asked: *"Is it a motorbike?"* to make the students answer *"No, it's a bicycle"*; consequently, he stated the same question: *"What's this?"* to receive a longer answer from the students: *"this is a bicycle".* Subsequently, he showed the motorbike image to ask them the same questions. Although these kinds of exercises contributed to the students' mechanization of the right pronunciation and intonation of vocabulary, the sentences were not long enough. Consequently, the exercise seemed to be limited and did not allow students the use of more grammatical elements that would help them to practice the foreign language more realistically.

The second type of activity involved the use of flashcards and instructions. The teacher showed the students the flashcards and demanded the learners say as much

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information as possible about them. It was observed that students had the possibility to speak more and use complex sentences while providing more detailed information about the name of the character they imagined (if it was a person), describing the actions they were doing and stating when they were performing the action, *"Diana was doing the dishes yesterday"*; if it was an object, they had to describe, the type of object, its characteristics, where they imagined the object was and why it was there *"It was a red car, a Mercedes Benz, it was at the garage because it was damaged"*.

Debates about daily life situations were the third type of oral activities. Students had the possibility to make a link between the topic belonging to the class (e.g. music or everyday situations), and their own life experiences; students shared an informal speech with their peers and their teacher. During the development of this activity, it was found that when speaking, students felt more relaxed and comfortable. It was easier to notice the students' progresses in pronunciation, fluency and syntax. However, their production was not as expected. Students avoided giving deeper details that were replaced by more general sentences and short answers; for example to the teacher's question *"Why do teenagers have conflicts with their family and the family with the teenagers?"* Daniel answered *"Because of hormones"* and Gloria said *"Because they think they can't do everything"*.

The fourth activity required the students to previously prepare an oral report based on a chosen topic. For example, Leonard shared his experience when being interviewed: *"también nos hizo hablar sobre un cantante, una biografía y cantar…"* In this brief remark, he emphasized that this activity helped him to work on the foreign language oral production. In other words, through these types of activities, the students were allowed to speak as much as they were able to, showing their skills in a more complex and formal

manner. Leonard recognized the importance of preparing an oral presentation before performing it in front of others. *"La verdad… yo escribo bastante… y… comenzaría escribiéndola, y después… la voy leyendo en voz alta"*. It is very important to take into account that oral reports were obviously prepared previously; In this case, the students natural and fluent speaking could be interfered with by writing before speaking, where it could be a possible translation from the MT to the FL, to correct what they considered was wrong then, making them feeling more confident about not making mistakes due to having perfected and learned by heart the structures and pronunciation in advance.

The fifth activity consisted of performing sketches or role plays. Although I was aware of the students' effort and engagement to improve their pronunciation, I noticed that in each performance the groups repeated what the other students had done. I became aware that the students were not working on a free topic at all, but the teacher assigned the topic chosen from a TV program that was supposed to be known by most of the teenagers. Regarding this program, Leonard mentioned *"en la tarea que nos deja el profesor, debemos escuchar un video que es de … y transcribirlos, sacar lo que podamos y después actuarlo; como un role play pero ya hecho"*.

Also, it was found that role plays could be appropriately implemented to learn vocabulary and to contextualize the knowledge into a real setting and a daily situation. For instance, several scenarios could be re-created in class: at the airport, at a travel agent, at a restaurant, in the classroom or in a friend's house. However, although it seemed that students learned their scripts by heart in advance, the activity was not as productive as expected. While performing in front of their classmates they went through long periods of silence, hesitation and some even forgot or changed words that altered the meaning of what

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they were saying. When being interviewed for the first time, Leonard said *"a veces es como difícil para mí aprender así de memoria… entonces… debo repasar bastante…siempre comienzo es… escribiendo"*. There were certain similarities in the process students went through while performing sketches and oral reports. In these two activities, students were able to prepare their scripts in advance. Sometimes, they would previously translate or at least refer to their MT as a way help themselves with the use of grammatical structures. On the contrary, when role plays were improvised and presented in the same class session, the students showed their real oral skills displaying more weaknesses in a more realistic oral production.

The sixth activity was about riddles, in which *"the students had to hold up a flashcard which contained an action and the others had to guess what the student who was holding up the flashcard was doing the day before or the week before"*. From this activity it was observed that riddles encouraged the beginner students to produce orally, given that improvisation is a real challenge for students, and where they show their real skills. In fact, the situation impeded them from writing paragraphs beforehand or thinking so much about sentences before saying them. It involved an immediate production in the foreign language as it was being asked in the same language, without them having enough time to analyse sentences in the mother tongue. As a matter of fact, it might have helped beginner students to think in a foreign language.

The last activity used by the teacher required students to participate in discussions about different themes during a class session. During that class, the topic for discussion was "the problems that teenagers have with their parents." Although the students did not give detailed information, they orally produced at least short sentences that showed their

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thoughts and speaking skills in the foreign language; as it happened to a student who answered *"My brother take my cell phone or my computer"* to the question *"What drives you mad about your family?"* This activity encouraged her participation in a natural manner. If the teacher would have given this student the opportunity to write it first, maybe, she would have noticed her mistakes, and attempted to state a correct sentence reflecting a wrong idea about her real oral productive skill.

c) The role of the mother tongue while learning a foreign language:

Taking into account that participants used their MT during their learning process, I identified the advantages and disadvantages when learners used their mother tongue during class sessions. The failures they experienced when speaking in the FL in order to determine the MT interference were highlighted.

 Although some participants' level in speaking was higher than expected, it was found that their mother tongue helped them to comprehend FL meanings, which in some cases were difficult to deduce using only their prior knowledge. For instance, before starting his studies at the university, Daniel took eighteen levels of English at another institution which allowed him to become interested in academic texts whilst being at the present beginner level; nevertheless what he called *"el lenguaje técnico"* forced him to work on translation from the foreign language to the mother tongue.

Similarly, it was found that some aspects associated with the foreign culture did not make sense in their native language. Consequently, the MT became useful within the A2 level classroom, as a tool to help the teacher and the students to construct a meaning about

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a real social concept such as, *"las chuzadas"* (a political and social event about a Colombian president who infringed the privacy law for the governmental entities, when tapping their calls and e-mail messages), that the teacher explained in Spanish maybe because it could not be explained at the time with an accurate term in the FL to make it understandable enough for students.

Additionally, it was found that the use of the mother tongue was advantageous when both teacher and students needed to compare the use of certain words. For instance, the use of: still, yet, already. Here, they translated those words into the mother tongue, and realized that it had certain variations in use.

In some other cases, the teacher used Spanish to explain grammar, or when the mother tongue was required as an instrument to support the messages in order to reinforce the topics that students were not able to comprehend at all.

When observing a class, I noticed that students took advantage of the similarities between their mother tongue and the target language. For example, when using deductible meanings, such as "important", "comfortable", or "famous". In this case, the use of words that had a similar spelling in both languages improved the students' fluency, and helped them structure their speech; they became more secure and kept their concentration when presenting orally. However, they should be warned that in order not to be trapped by a false cognate, due to the fact that not all the words that seem to be similar between both languages have the same meaning; for example, the word "actually" that could be translated to the MT as "actualmente", when its real meaning is "en realidad/ en verdad/de hecho…".

Consequently, in some cases it was positive if the beginner students thought in the MT as a way to guarantee an advance in their knowledge about concepts, vocabulary, and contexts to be taken into account while speaking.

Nevertheless, the use of MT was disadvantageous when translating complete sentences from the MT to the FL. The result had no agreements, was non-accurate and presented incorrect structures, resulting in speaking inaccuracy. As Daniel said *"palabras que se forman a partir otras que al traducirlas en español no tienen ningún significado; no concuerdan"*. Hence, the main source of mistakes in beginner students' oral production came from their thought process in their mother tongue or from making a literal translation from their native structures into the target language.

According to Mary's statement *"uno piensa más hablando la otra lengua; en español uno piensa normal, pero en inglés tiene que pensar lo que va a decir y si está bien estructurado"*. I found that the students established relationships between Spanish, mother tongue and English, the foreign language, in order to construct their speech, analysing and building an appropriate structure to speak. As I observed, some students were hesitant or less fluent when improvising the oral production, such as in Daniel's case when stating *"The weather was terrible because it rain… it ran…eh…it was raining the… the entire day and in the night… so the streets was like… were like... wet...";* subsequently, the MT was used as way to overcome students' linguistic deficiencies when preparing themselves to speak in the target language.

In some other cases, I realized that it was easier for the learners to deal with FL activities when they were given enough time for preparation; when being interviewed for

the first time, Mary assured me *"no preparamos en español sino preparamos de una vez en inglés"*; therefore, they had the possibility to review, analyse and correct what they did in the FL, without experiencing the necessity to think in the mother tongue as a reference to structure their ideas.

On the contrary, when talking about the improvisation she said *"digamos si se le olvida… el otro improvisa y pues uno lo traduce; entonces piensa uno que va a decir en español para luego decir en inglés"*.This indicated that the MT was taken as a reference when the students needed to comprehend and to organize immediate sentences in the FL. Therefore the issue emerged when sentences in the Spanish structure did not correspond to what the English structure should be.

It was found that mispronunciation and grammatical errors were the most common types of interference between the mother tongue and the target language. Mispronunciation concerned the omission of morphemes and subjects in sentences that affected the meaning of the message expressed orally by the students. For instance, when observing a class, I noted some sentences such as *"she was crying lie a baby", "because I don't lie dance", "Do lie a famous actor?"* as a result of the translation from the MT. This was due to two main factors: the first one is the way people speak Spanish in some Colombian regions that is a part of their native accent such as the omission of some morphemes in words; at this stage of the learning process, the students have not been trained to neutralize this accent while speaking in the FL, generating their mispronunciation. The second factor involved the possibility to eliminate the subject in the sentence without affecting syntax in the MT, which for the FL is wrong since the subject must always be stated.

With regards to the grammatical errors it was found that: 1) The wrong insertion of morphemes that distorted the message (*"I was addressed of green"*); 2) The mistaken use of gerunds (*"hey! Andrea, are you ready for go to shopping?" "I'm here to buying a ticket"*); 3) the incorrect use of prepositions (*"I was addressed of green" "have you ever think in go to London?"*); 4) the erroneous use of verbs in the third person (*"My brother take my cell phone…", "I think you was at fashion show"*); 5) the incorrect use of verbal tenses (*"Why did you bought it?"*); and 6) the incorrect organization of a sentence which used all of the elements (*"I'm going to stay hotel comfortable in"*).

It is important to highlight that although the previous failures experienced by the participating students were the most important findings in my study, they were not the central phenomenon under study. Therefore, I suggest a deeper level of analysis in a further investigation.

Conclusion and discussion

This study provided insights on how FL learners were affected by the use of their mother tongue when orally producing in a foreign language. This process of thinking in Spanish (MT) to translate into English (FL), followed by the analysis of the accuracy of statements was the main disadvantage for the participants. In other words, when the mother tongue was used as a reference to overcome difficulties or lack of knowledge, it resulted in a negative effect because of the time spent to complete a statement. For example, this made students experience long periods of silence followed by hesitation when speaking that impeded the students' development of their spoken skill.

Therefore mother tongue interference over the foreign language oral production in the A2 classroom affected the students' fluency when trying to avoid morphological mispronunciation or wrong syntactical statement, forcing students to reduce their oral participation or to exchange information with other individual using their mother tongue.

On the other hand, the advantage of using the mother tongue was evidenced as it served to support the construction of the student´s learning on the FL; when developing oral production or facilitating the acquisition of FL meanings.

Previous studies found that "learners brought into the form and meaning the MT through over generalizing the grammatical rules, to cover the structure of sentences that they did not know in the FL" (Bhela, 1999; Alonso, 1997; Al-Baldawi & Saidat, 2011; Enisa, 2011). This case study coincided with them in the sense that the students observed and constructed their own rules in the FL spoken tasks, taking as a principle the structures belonging to the MT, mainly in the situations requiring improvisation, more than in the situations requiring previous preparation.

In addition to the previous studies that showed the "verb omission when talking in imperative utterances, difficulties with the verb placement in students' productions, as a result of the differences in syntactic and morphological structures" and some other faults concerning "the addition of non-necessary prepositions, the wrong use of personal pronouns, verbs and number agreement, within the students' word-for-word translation as an attempt to communicate themselves in a FL" (Bhela, 1999; Alonso,1997; Al-Baldawi & Saidat, 2011; Enisa, 2011), this case study found the omission or addition of morphemes, the omission of subjects, that affected the meaning of the message expressed orally by the

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students, errors when employing gerunds, wrong use of verbs in the third person, the wrong statement of verbal tenses and general syntactic disorganization in sentences.

Findings of this study also coincided with what Ameri & Asareh (2010) found; in both studies, students' oral participation decreased due to the "misuse successive answers to some questions" or the "production of successive sentences accompanied by syntactic disagreements" in the students attempt to provide detailed information in an oral manner.

Another similarity between these two studies was the fact that students assumed that writing would guarantee successful speech.

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Annex 1

Classroom Observation Protocol

Mother Tongue interference on A2 students' oral production of a Foreign Language

Date:_____   Hour: _____   Focus: _____

Observer: _____   Site: _____

Semester observed: _____   Institution: _____

Observation N°:   _____   N° of students: _____

Objective:

_____
_____
_____.

Description of the setting:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____.

	Description of objects	Reflective notes
Time		

Annex 2

Semi structured interview Protocols

Interview N°1

Mother Tongue interference on A2 students' oral production of a Foreign Language

Date: _____   Hour: _____

Interviewer: _____   Site: _____

Interviewee: _____   Institution: _____

Focus: _____

Objective:_____
_____
_____

Description of the setting:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____.

Questions	Participant's Answer	Reflective Thoughts
1. Cuénteme sobre las actividades que ustedes desarrollan en clase.		
2. ¿Cómo prepara usted las actividades orales? / ¿Cómo preparó usted su última actividad oral?		
3. ¿Cuénteme sobre las ayudas que usted considera necesarias para aprender a hablar en una lengua extranjera?		
4. ¿Podría darme un ejemplo de los errores que comete cuando realiza una presentación oral en la lengua extranjera?		
5. ¿Cómo sabe usted que comete esas equivocaciones cuando habla?		
6. ¿Cómo corrige sus errores?		

Interview N°2

Mother Tongue interference on A2 students' oral production of a Foreign Language

Date: _____   Hour: _____

Interviewer: _____   Site: _____

Interviewee: _____   Institution: _____

Focus: _____

Objective:_____
_____
_____
_____.

Description of the setting:

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Questions	Participant's Answer	Reflective Thoughts
1. ¿Cómo podría organizar una presentación oral en una lengua extranjera?		
2. ¿Qué diferencias encuentra entre hablar en la lengua materna y hablar en la lengua extranjera?		
3. Cuénteme sobre las limitaciones que encuentra al hablar en la lengua extranjera.		
4. ¿Qué aspectos de la lengua materna podría usted utilizar como ayuda o guía para hablar en la lengua extranjera?		
5. ¿Qué aspectos de la lengua materna podría usted apartar, abandonar o no utilizar para hablar en la lengua extranjera?		