



Syntax interference caused by Kichwa and Spanish when writing in English

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There have been important contributions in regard to syntax interference in the last decades, especially in Peru. A wide variety of research about Quechua and Spanish, which are related with the Ecuadorian Kichwa, have been published. In terms of making a contextualized study, the present work aimed to identify the syntax interferences of Kichwa and Spanish when writing in English. In order to get this information, a set of 90 short paragraphs written in English were taken from 30 students of an English program at the Technical University of Ambato. This data was collected in three different moments. The paragraphs were analyzed based on the syntax in their contents. A quantitative and qualitative system was applied to analyze and classify the information from the students' paragraphs. Besides, these results were used to set a sub-categorization of positive and negative syntax interference when communicating in a written way. The conclusions synthesized the results based on the findings of the analysis made to the structure of each language. The findings showed a moderately negative syntax interferences in some cases, and in other cases moderately positive syntax interference. This also helped to consider some other morfosyntactic effects that mother tongues cause on a new language or a third one.

Key words: syntax interference, Ecuadorian Kichwa, Kichwa



Interferencia de sintaxis causada por Kichwa y el español al escribir en inglés.e.

RESUMEN

Ha habido contribuciones importantes con respecto a la interferencia sintáctica en las últimas décadas, especialmente en Perú. Se ha publicado una amplia variedad de investigaciones sobre quechua y español, que están relacionadas con la kichwa ecuatoriana. En cuanto a la realización de un estudio contextualizado, el presente trabajo tuvo como objetivo identificar las interferencias sintácticas de Kichwa y español al escribir en inglés. Para obtener esta información, un conjunto de 90 párrafos cortos escritos en inglés fueron tomados de 30 estudiantes de un programa de inglés en la Universidad Técnica de Ambato. Estos datos fueron recogidos en tres momentos diferentes. Los párrafos se analizaron en base a la sintaxis de sus contenidos. Se aplicó un sistema cuantitativo y cualitativo para analizar y clasificar la información de los párrafos de los estudiantes. Además, estos resultados se utilizaron para establecer una sub-categorización de la interferencia de sintaxis positiva y negativa al comunicarse de una manera escrita. Las conclusiones sintetizaron los resultados a partir de los hallazgos del análisis realizado a la estructura de cada lengua. Los resultados mostraron una moderada negativa sintaxis interferencias en algunos casos, y en otros casos moderadamente positiva sintaxis interferencia. Esto también ayudó a considerar algunos otros efectos morfosintácticos que causan las lenguas maternas en un nuevo idioma o en un tercero.

Palabras clave: interferencia sintáctica, kichwa ecuatoriana, kichwa



1. INTRODUCTION

Ecuador has been categorized as a multicultural and multiethnic country. It has three recognized official languages which are used for their intercultural relationship¹, these are Spanish, Kichwa, and Shuar. These active languages have been used for centuries in the same places under different cultural conditions. Furthermore, the new political and legal requirements for higher education made the learning of a foreign language² mandatory and set the conditions and details to achieve this educational objective³. With this antecedent, most of the universities prioritized the learning of English as one of the strongest languages to be taught and learned in universities. As a consequence, the linguistic interaction of these languages has caused positive and negative language interferences in different language areas. In this study, the focus was given specifically on syntax interference when writing in English.

In order to support the first part of this study, an important contribution made by Ellis (1993:45) was taken, “They arise not from new thought but, on the contrary, from a strict adherence to the old”. This shows how a mother tongue influences on a new language because the first one is taken as a pattern to form analogies based on certain linguistic structures. These analogies work very well when there are similar structures, but in the same way they could affect the comprehension of an idea when it has a different structure. Furthermore, a syntax structure responds in some way to a way of thinking which is built by the cultural and geographical environment. In this area a very important study about an ethnic group named Cha’palachi was made in Ecuador by Bernardez (2013:4) who stated that “Spatial and geographic relations are also of extreme importance for other American Indian cultures.” Effectively, one of the main bases when learning a language is the environment as well as the cultural influence because it helps to communicate and understand it in a more effective way.

Another important detail that was taken into account in the present research was described by Lennberg who takes Ellies study in Bernanrdez (2003:57) “We can say

¹ Constitución de la República del Ecuador of 2008 in its art. 2 mentions the official languages used in Ecuador.

² Ley Orgánica de Educación Superior, art. 124 declared the management requirement of a foreign language.

³ Reglamento de Régimen Académico, art 31 declared the B2 foreign language level according to the CEFW.



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anything we wish in a language” position that was supported by Kulka-Blum and Levenston, (1983) who were cited by Bhela when saying that “all second language learners begin assuming that for every word in L1 there is a single translation equivalent in L2”. As it can be seen most of learners pretend to translate every single word based on their mother tongue structure. Very frequently, this causes problems when communicating ideas because there are words that do not even exist in either language, for example the word “engrapadora” or “stapler” which exist in Spanish and English, but in Kichwa it does not, so it is understood that words like the one used in this example can be explained, but not translated.

Cases like the ones explained are some of the reasons why learners make mistakes and errors when communicating, as it was mentioned by Skiba (1997) who was cited by Dechert (1983) “further apart the two languages are structurally, the higher the instances of errors made in L2 which bear traces of L1 structures.” This study showed a very important detail which is centered again in analogies learners form to be able to communicate, but if that language transfer is not stopped or explained, those errors get fossilized. In the same line Berthol (1997) makes an important contribution when mentioning that “interference may be viewed as the transference of elements from one language to another at various levels including phonological, grammatical, lexical and orthographical”. This explanation helps to realize how learners compensate the lack of vocabulary, structure, among other aspects in order to keep communicating fluently. In the same way Crystal (1987) makes another important description about how language learners use L1 words when saying “...to compensate de deficiency by code switching which provides this deficiency”.

The studies mentioned have explained the most important factors taken into account in the present study about language interference as well as how a language learner react in front of language deficiency. Likewise, it is important to mention that some positions are taken as a brand new area to be analyzed as in syntax translation when language interference happens. These details are studied as language adaptations because there are words that are simply not part of a language dictionary. This lack of words in some languages respond to an evolutionary process which occurs in some cases due to cultural, social, and environmental exposure, among others. This position is supported by Geeraerts, D. P4 who mentioned that “new experiences and changes in our environment require that we adapt our semantic categories to transformations of the



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circumstances, and that we leave room for nuances and slightly deviant cases”. Another important study made by Leavitt (2015:58) cited by Lounsbury said “Language is meaningful, but that meaning involved, and their classification, differ from one society to another, or that language is used in relating to the natural and social environment”. In this case, Leavitt gives great importance to the environment and its elements which has a lot to do when learning a language; changes in a language occur according to the place where it is developed.

In reference to the internal development process when learning a language Evans (2014:26) remarks “This sceptor kind of intelligence facilitates a range of cooperative behaviors of which language is an example par excellence” This contribution, in relation to the present study shows that the human being reacts according to a determined context when learning another language.

Based on these factors, this research focuses on syntax language interferences caused by Kichwa and Spanish on English writings. Some of these interferences are set as positive and others as negative ones according to the three languages. The results of this study were very useful to potentiate the positive interferences and emphasize on negative ones to avoid error fossilization.

Keeping in mind details like context, culture and cognitive process, two research questions to guide this study were set:

- 1) Which are the most common syntax interferences that occur from Kichwa and Spanish on English when writing?
- 2) Which syntax interferences can be classified as positive and negative?

Having as one of the main research objectives to answer these questions, a quantitative and qualitative analysis of 90 students’ English writings was applied. The process focused on the analysis and comparison of basic structures of the three languages. The results of this comparative analysis determined the type of language interferences as well as its corresponding classification as positive or negative interferences.

2. METHODS

This study was carried out on 30 students from The Technical University of Ambato studying an elementary A2 English level at the Language Center. All of them managed Spanish and Kichwa languages and were chosen from 1226 students from 37 classes. Most of them came from indigenous communities and a few of them learned Kichwa and Spanish from their families and from the active interaction among the communities in the center of the country.



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This group of students wrote three paragraphs in three different moments during the semester March-August, 2017. As a first exercise, they were asked to write a paragraph between 40-50 words about the description of objects and places. On a second time, they had to write another paragraph between 50 -60 words about daily routines, and for a last time a paragraph of 60-70 words about customs and traditions. A systematic process like this was necessary since the students were gradually learning new structures throughout the semester; so the level of difficulty had to match the length of the writings. The process applied started with the structure analysis in simple sentences written in English in their paragraph writings. The incoherencies in structure were marked. Then, those marked items were compared to Spanish and Kichwa structure in order to identify interferences. The next step was to classify those interferences into categories as well as positive and negative interferences based on similarities and differences in word order in the three languages. The percentage of interferences were identified in the three different paragraphs of the 30 students. Besides, it was counted the total number of words in relation to the number of interferences found on each paragraph to get a percentage of it.

RESULTS

Along this study specific interferences that were identified:

1.- The use of false friends⁴ from Spanish to English like in the following example:

Kichwa: Ñuka rimani apanakushka kunawan

Spanish: Yo converso con mis amigos.

Conjugated verb

English: I talk with my friends.

Students' output: I conversation with my friends.

False friend derived from Spanish

2.- As it was mentioned before Kichwa is a language which has not evolved, so Kichwa speakers generally borrow words from Spanish and use them into Kichwa. This is called a "loanword⁵". For the case of the English language the learners identify the similarity

⁴ Wikipedia: When people assume wrongly that similar sounding-words have the same meaning.

⁵ Wikipedia: It is a word or phrase whose meaning or idiom is adopted from another language by translation into existing words or word-forming roots of the recipient language.



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that the word has in Spanish and writes the English version without considering its correct form in English. This is shown in the following example.

Kichwa:	Kay Kan <u><i>inseguro</i></u> ⁶ runapak.
	Loanword
Spanish:	Esto es <u>inseguro</u> para las personas.
English:	It is <u>unsafe</u> for people.
Students' output:	It is <u>insecurity</u> for the people.
	Loanword

3.- The use of plurals has shown a big influence from Spanish into English and in a few cases from Kichwa into English. Learners get confused when using the letter “S” to form the plural in Spanish or KUNA to form the plural in Kichwa at the end of words in English as follows:

Kichwa:	wawak <u>una</u>
	Plural
Spanish:	niño <u>s</u>
	Plural
English:	<u>children</u>
	Plural

Interference from Spanish into English:

- Childres - instead of “children”
Spanish plural
- Jean - instead of “jeans”
Standard Spanish pronunciation

Interference from Kichwa into English:

- Childkuna - instead of “children”
Kichwa plural
- Jeankuna - instead of “jeans”
Kichwa plural

4.- The use of adjectives has shown a positive influence from Kichwa into English. Both languages place the adjective before the noun. However, in Spanish the standard position places adjectives after the noun. This can be seen in the following examples.

⁶ Loanword: This word does not exist in Kichwa as a direct translation.



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Kichwa: Shuk jatun atuk.
Article Adj. Noun

Spanish: Un lobo grande.
Article Noun Adj.

English: A big wolf.
Article Adj. Noun

Kichwa: Shuk uchilla tulunpa
Article Adj. Noun

Spanish: Una rana pequeña.
Article Noun Adj.

English: A small frog.
Article Adj. Noun

5.- The lack of use of subjects in sentences in English showed that there is a big influence from both Kichwa and Spanish. This happened because the subjects are over understood in both languages, however this situation does not occur in English where the subject is necessary. This can be seen in the following samples:

Kichwa: tamiakun
Spanish: Esta lloviendo
English: It is raining.

Subject omission interference:

Kichwa: mikusha (standard way of Kichwa speaking)
Subject.
Spanish: (∅) estoy comiendo (standard way of Spanish speaking)
Subject omitted
English: I am eating (correct form)

Students' output: eating in my house.

In some cases, learners placed the subject at the end of the sentence because in Kichwa, the subject is placed at the end of sentences when they want to emphasize information.



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Kichwa: mikusha (~~ñuka~~)

Subject omitted because it is over understood

Spanish: comiendo yo (interference from Kichwa into Spanish)

Subject.

English: I am eating. (correct form)

Subject.

Students' output: eating I (interference form from Kichwa into English)

Subject

6.- It was realized that spelling was a serious problem. Even though this was not part of the aims in this study, it had to be mentioned for further research in morphology. This responds to the differences in the number of letters in each of the alphabets of the three languages. In the Kichwa alphabet⁷ there are 15 consonants and 3 vowel letters; in Spanish used in Latin America there are 27 consonants and 5 vowels, whilst in English there are 26 consonants and 5 vowels. These variations affect language production as well as the place and the way sounds are produced. This situation influenced directly to word spelling as shown in the following examples:

Kichwa: churana

Spanish: ropa

English: clothes

Students' output: clutis/clotes (change and/or omissions of letters)

Kichwa: randina

Spanish: comprar

English: bought

Students' output: bugt (change and/or omissions of letters)

Kichwa: chikan

Spanish: diferente

English: different

Students' output: diferen (change and/or omissions of letters)

⁷ Grefa, S & Cayapa, N. (2007), The authors explain that in kichwa there are three vowels (a, i, u) and fifteen consonants (ch, j, k, l, ll, m, n, ñ, p, r, s, t, w, y, sh).



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The following section will present the number of interferences per category.



TABLE 1: Kichwa interference into English writing.

CATEGORIES	W1 April, 2017 1414 words	%	W2 May,2017 2018 1743 words	%	W3 June,2017 1989 words	%	TOTAL 5146 words	%
False friends	4		3		1		8	
Loanwords	8		4		4		16	
Plurals	7		3		2		12	
Adjectives (kichwa and Spanish share same positions)	172		123		97		292	
Subject omission (It occurs in kichwa and Spanish)	213		173		147		533	
Total	305		306		251		861	

TABLE 2: Spanish interference into English

CATEGORIES	W1 1414 words	%	W2 1743 words	%	W3 1989 words	%	TOTAL 5146 words	%
False friends	16		14		9		39	
Loanwords	72		53		47		182	
Plurals	18		15		16		49	
Adjectives	172		123		97		392	
Subject omission	213		173		147		533	
Total	491		378		316		1195	

DISCUSSION

In reference to the English written paragraphs, it was found that most of the students reduce the number of interferences when they are exposed to more class hours learning a new language. When comparing results, a mixture of words known as ‘kichwañol’ and “Kichinglish” was identified. This generally occurs when a language lacks of



specific terminology or specific grammar rules in order to convey meaning. This situation forces the speaker to make use of a word existing in Kichwa or Spanish to supplement this absence of vocabulary. Regarding the use of plurals, a very interesting phenomena occurs. In some cases the language learners' writings were interfered by Spanish rules and in some other fewer cases by Kichwa word endings to form plurals. Another important factor that has influenced a lot is the subject omission because in both languages, Kichwa and Spanish, subjects are over understood, so they are not necessary. In this case, when English language learners write sentences in paragraphs, they omit subjects which causes a lot of confusion when trying to communicate an idea in English. There are extreme cases where learners try to communicate ideas in English by using a verb in gerund or just by using the complement of a sentence. This means a sentence with no subject neither a verb. This interference is highly marked.

The last important fact found in this study was the misspelled words. This occurs because English language learners who manage Kichwa and Spanish write in the same way they listen which is totally different when spelling words in English. The number of letters and vowels each alphabet has also influences spelling.

3. CONCLUSIONS

This study focused on identifying the most common language interferences as well as the corresponding classification into six categories. It was found that in all of the cases, the interferences were negative (except for adjectives position), because there were no similarities in syntax that could be applied positively from the two languages into English. All of these factors were analyzed based on the English level A2 students managed until then. Areas like the present simple, plurals, vocabulary and spelling revealed being interfered.

On the other hand one of the most important factors that highly helped to identify interferences were the use of adjectives. It could be seen that the positions of adjectives within sentences denoted a similarity between Kichwa and English language word order. Both languages placed the adjective before the noun. Furthermore, the omission of subjects is a main factor that prevents understanding when communicating ideas. This comparative analysis helped to focus on weaknesses and strengths these three different languages have when communicating ideas. It was found that the cultural



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factor as well as the way people think mean a great deal when expressing ideas in a different language. It helped to identify the roots of problems based on the number of errors and occurrences in English writing.

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