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Spanish Linguistic Interference in the Development of English Language Learning among A2-Level University Students

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed Spanish linguistic interference in English language learning among 81 A2-level students at Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi during the 2026-A academic period, specifically from the GM, VM, HT, IT, JT, and MT class sections. The objective was to identify and classify recurrent learner errors at the syntactic, semantic, morphological, and phonological levels. A qualitative descriptive design based on error analysis was applied through practical grammar, vocabulary, oral production, writing, and reading exercises. At the phonological level, readings from the EVOLVE 2 textbook and pronunciation activities were used to detect the most common pronunciation errors. The information was organized in an expert-validated error analysis matrix that included the type of interference, incorrect learner production, expected English form, possible cause of Spanish transfer, and explanation of each error. The corpus comprised 81 selected error samples: 14 syntactic, 15 semantic, 25 morphological, and 27 phonological errors. The most frequent errors were related to literal translation, omission or misuse of grammatical markers, false cognates, incorrect adjective order, subject-verb agreement, and transfer of Spanish pronunciation patterns into English. The findings showed that Spanish influenced not only learners' pronunciation but also grammatical structure and meaning construction. The study concludes that systematic error analysis is useful for identifying the linguistic needs of A2 learners and guiding contrastive, communicative, and pronunciation-focused teaching practices.

***Keywords*:** English, foreign language, bilingualism, language behaviour

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La interferencia lingüística del español en el desarrollo del aprendizaje del inglés en estudiantes universitarios de nivel A2

RESUMEN

La presente investigación analizó la interferencia lingüística del español en el aprendizaje del inglés en 81 estudiantes de nivel A2 de la Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi durante el período académico 2026-A, pertenecientes a los paralelos GM, VM, HT, IT, JT y MT. El objetivo fue identificar y clasificar errores recurrentes en los niveles sintáctico, semántico, morfológico y fonológico. Se aplicó un diseño cualitativo descriptivo, basado en el análisis de errores, mediante ejercicios prácticos de gramática, vocabulario, producción oral, escritura y lectura. En el nivel fonológico se utilizaron lecturas del texto EVOLVE 2 y actividades de pronunciación para detectar los errores más comunes. La información se organizó en una matriz de análisis validada por un experto, en la cual se registró el tipo de interferencia, la producción incorrecta, la forma esperada en inglés, la posible causa de transferencia y la explicación del error. El corpus estuvo conformado por 81 muestras: 14 sintácticas, 15 semánticas, 25 morfológicas y 27 fonológicas. Los resultados evidenciaron interferencias relacionadas con traducción literal, omisión o uso incorrecto de marcadores gramaticales, falsos cognados, orden de adjetivos, concordancia sujeto-verbo y transferencia de patrones de pronunciación del español. Se concluye que el análisis sistemático de errores permite identificar necesidades de estudiantes A2 y orientar prácticas pedagógicas contrastivas, comunicativas y centradas en la pronunciación.

Palabras clave: inglés, lengua extranjera, bilingüismo, comportamiento lingüístico

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INTRODUCTION

When an English learner says, “I have ten years old,” the error is not random. It reflects a direct transfer from Spanish, where age is commonly expressed with the verb tener. Similarly, pronunciations such as “eschool” for school or a Spanish-like /gw/ sound in water reveal the influence of Spanish phonological patterns on English pronunciation. Therefore, learning English as a foreign language involves not only the acquisition of vocabulary and grammar, but also the restructuring of linguistic patterns already established in the learner’s first language.

For Spanish-speaking learners, the first language may function as a cognitive resource during communication. Positive transfer can support learning when both languages share similar forms or meanings; however, negative transfer may cause interference when English and Spanish differ in word order, verb agreement, morphology, lexical meaning, pronunciation, and sound-spelling correspondence. Language transfer has been recognized as a key factor in second language development because learners frequently rely on previous linguistic knowledge when processing a new language (Houssos, 2020).

Error analysis is also relevant in this context because it allows teachers to distinguish random mistakes from systematic learner errors. Zhu (2019) argues that error analysis contributes to second language acquisition by identifying areas that require pedagogical intervention. Previous studies have also shown that mother-tongue interference remains a recurrent source of grammatical, lexical, and phonological errors in EFL learners (Asad, 2025; Daquilema Chorlango & Arias Arroyo, 2024; Macías Loor et al., 2025). In pronunciation, Widiantari et al. (2021) found that first-language interference affects the production of English sounds, while Rahayu and Basri (2021) emphasize that mother-tongue influence can affect vocabulary, grammar, and oral production.

At the A2 level, learners are expected to communicate in familiar contexts, describe people and routines, ask and answer simple questions, and understand short oral and written texts. Nevertheless, this stage is characterized by transitional language forms. Students may know isolated words and basic structures, but they may still translate directly from Spanish, interpret English words through Spanish meanings, omit grammatical markers that are not salient in Spanish, or pronounce English words according to Spanish spelling rules.

In this context, the present study focused on A2-level students from the Foreign Language Center at Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi (UPEC) during the 2026-A academic period. Specifically, the analysis considered 81 students from the GM, VM, HT, IT, JT, and MT class sections. The study examined four linguistic levels: syntactic, semantic, morphological, and phonological interference. Given the qualitative descriptive nature of the study, no hypothesis was formulated; instead, the research was guided by a central research question. The central research question was: What types of Spanish linguistic interference are observed in the English learning process of A2-level students at UPEC during the 2026-A academic period? Accordingly, the objective was to identify and classify recurrent errors related to Spanish interference and to propose pedagogical implications for A2 English instruction.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design based on error analysis was applied. This design was appropriate because the purpose was not to measure the statistical effect of an experimental intervention, but to recognize, classify, and interpret recurrent learner errors associated with Spanish linguistic interference in English production. Therefore, the study should be understood as a diagnostic and pedagogical analysis rather than as an experimental treatment.

The study was conducted at the Foreign Language Center of Universidad Politécnica Estatal

del Carchi during the 2026-A academic period. The participants were 124 A2-level students enrolled in English classes from the GM, VM and HT class sections. Classroom work was supported by the EVOLVE 2 textbook, which is organized into twelve units and develops communication skills, grammar, vocabulary, listening, speaking, reading, and writing. During the academic period, the instructional process advanced up to Unit 11.

The unit of analysis was not the individual student, but the error sample identified in classroom productions. Practical exercises were applied to elicit learner productions in grammar, vocabulary, oral production, written sentences, short dialogues, and reading aloud. At the phonological level, readings from the EVOLVE 2 textbook were used together with pronunciation activities to detect the most frequent pronunciation errors, including sound substitution, vowel confusion, /s/ cluster insertion, and word-by-word pronunciation.

The corpus was obtained from guided reading activities, controlled oral production, grammar exercises, written sentences, vocabulary tasks, short dialogues, and pronunciation practice. The 81 error samples were selected according to recurrence, clarity, and direct relationship with Spanish-English transfer. Because the study had a diagnostic and pedagogical purpose, the selected samples corresponded to errors that clearly showed possible Spanish linguistic interference.

The main instrument was an error analysis matrix composed of five elements: type of interference, learner's incorrect production, expected English form, possible cause of Spanish transfer, and error explanation. The matrix was organized into four linguistic categories: syntactic, semantic, morphological, and phonological interference. The instrument was validated through expert judgment by an English language teaching and applied linguistics expert, who reviewed the relevance, clarity, coherence, and correspondence of the categories and examples before the final analysis was conducted.

Syntactic errors included subject-verb agreement, adjective order, and possessive structures. Semantic errors included false cognates, literal translation, incorrect word choice, and semantic categorization. Morphological errors included plural formation, omission of third-person singular -s, auxiliary use, comparative forms, and pronoun or possessive confusion. Phonological errors included replacement or omission of /h/, substitution of “th” sounds, vowel and diphthong confusion, literal word-by-word pronunciation, and the addition of an initial vowel before /s/ clusters.

The procedure included four stages. First, classroom productions were reviewed to identify errors related to Spanish transfer. Second, each error was classified according to its linguistic level and specific type of interference. Third, the incorrect production was compared with the expected English form. Finally, the possible cause of the error was interpreted by considering Spanish structures, meanings, and pronunciation patterns that might have influenced the English production. The classroom productions were used only for academic and pedagogical purposes, and students’ identities were anonymized throughout the analysis.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Summary of the main types of Spanish linguistic interference identified in the study

Linguistic level	Main type of interference	Representative incorrect production	Correct form / expected production	Interpretation
Syntactic	Subject-verb agreement	They is my friends. / My dog am shy. / I are a student.	They are my friends. / My dog is shy. / I am a student.	Students showed difficulty selecting the correct form of the verb to be according to the subject. This reflects interference from Spanish verb patterns and incomplete control of English agreement rules.
Syntactic	Word order	My is house big. / Brown a is dog it. / White is car the.	My house is big. / It is a brown dog. / The car is white.	Learners transferred Spanish word order into English. These errors show difficulty organizing English sentences according to the more

				fixed subject + verb + complement structure.
Syntactic	Possessive structure	Friends my are they. / Black my is car. / Parents they my are.	They are my friends. / My car is black. / They are my parents.	Students placed possessive adjectives following Spanish-like patterns instead of English structure, where possessive adjectives usually come before the noun.
Phonological	Replacement or omission of /h/	Hello pronounced as jello. / Homework pronounced as omework.	/həˈloʊ/ / /ˈhoʊmwɜːrk/	Learners replaced or omitted the English /h/ sound because the letter h is silent in Spanish and may be confused with stronger Spanish-like sounds.
Phonological	Replacement of “th” sounds	Then pronounced as ten. / Teeth pronounced as tet. / The pronounced as te.	/ðen/ / /tiːθ/ / /ðə/	Students replaced the English interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ with /t/, which is a common phonological transfer among Latin American Spanish-speaking learners.
Phonological	Addition of initial vowel before /s/ clusters	School pronounced as eschool. / Student pronounced as estudent. / Special pronounced as especial.	/skuːl/ / /ˈstuːdənt/ / /ˈspeʃəl/	Learners added an initial vowel before /s/ + consonant clusters because this sound pattern is uncommon at the beginning of words in Spanish.
Morphological	Incorrect plural formation	I have two doges. / She has three cates. / I see two boxs.	I have two dogs. / She has three cats. / I see two boxes.	Students overgeneralized plural rules or applied incorrect endings. These errors show partial acquisition of English noun morphology.
Morphological	Omission of third-person singular -s	She play soccer every day. / My father work on the farm. / The dog drink milk.	She plays soccer every day. / My father works on the farm. / The dog drinks milk.	Learners omitted the third-person singular marker in the present simple. This suggests interference from Spanish verbal patterns and difficulty noticing small English grammatical markers.
Morphological	Incorrect auxiliary use in questions	Do she like apples? / Does they play soccer? / Does	Does she like apples? / Do they play	Students confused the use of do and does and

		Maria works on the farm?	soccer? / Does Maria work on the farm?	sometimes maintained the third-person -s after the auxiliary. This reflects difficulty with English question formation.
Semantic	False cognates	Library means librería. / Parents means parientes. / Exit means éxito.	Library means biblioteca. / Parents means padres. / Exit means salida.	Students relied on visual similarity between English and Spanish words. This caused incorrect meaning interpretation and vocabulary confusion.
Semantic	Literal translation	I have ten years old. / I have hunger. / I have cold.	I am ten years old. / I am hungry. / I am cold.	Learners transferred Spanish structures directly into English, especially expressions that use tener in Spanish but require to be in English.
Semantic	Incorrect semantic categorization	Apple – banana – orange – chair. / Teacher – doctor – farmer – job. / Red – blue – green – pencil.	Chair does not belong to fruits. / Job is a category, not an occupation example. / Pencil does not belong to colors.	Students had difficulty differentiating category labels from category members. This indicates problems organizing vocabulary into semantic fields.

Note. Prepared by the authors based on the validated error analysis matrix applied to A2-level students from the GM, VM, HT, IT, JT, and MT class sections.

The analysis showed that students' errors were not isolated or random. Instead, they reflected systematic transfer from Spanish to English. Interference was identified at the syntactic, phonological, morphological, and semantic levels. Each level affected a different aspect of English learning: sentence organization, pronunciation, grammatical marking, vocabulary selection, and meaning construction. These findings are consistent with the interlanguage process, in which learners use their first language as a reference while developing the target language.

The findings also support previous research on mother-tongue interference in EFL contexts. Asad (2025) reports that first-language interference can affect English grammar, while Daquilema Chorlango and Arias Arroyo (2024) identify morphosyntactic errors in university

students' written production. Similarly, Macías Loor et al. (2025) found that linguistic interference affects written production in EFL learners, and Widiantari et al. (2021) emphasize that pronunciation is particularly sensitive to first-language influence.

Syntactic interference

At the syntactic level, the most frequent errors were related to subject-verb agreement, word order, adjective placement, and possessive structures. Examples such as "They is my friends," "My dog am shy," and "I are a student" show difficulty selecting the correct form of the verb to be according to the subject. Although Spanish also has subject-verb agreement, English requires specific forms of the verb to be, such as I am, he/she/it is, and you/we/they are.

Word order was another relevant issue. Errors such as "My is house big," "Brown a is dog it," and "White is car the" suggest that learners transferred Spanish sentence order into English. Spanish allows greater flexibility in word order, whereas English sentence structure is more fixed, especially at the A2 level. In English, the usual structure is subject + verb + complement, and adjectives generally appear before nouns.

Possessive structures also presented difficulty. Errors such as "Friends my are they," "Black my is car," and "Parents they my are" indicate that learners had not fully internalized the position and function of possessive adjectives in English. These findings suggest the need for contrastive grammar activities in which students compare Spanish and English sentence patterns through sentence-ordering exercises, guided writing, substitution drills, and oral practice.

Phonological interference

At the phonological level, Spanish pronunciation habits had a strong impact on oral production. The most common errors were the replacement or omission of /h/, substitution of English interdental sounds /θ/ and /ð/, confusion between vowels and diphthongs,

addition of an initial vowel before /s/ clusters, and literal word-by-word pronunciation.

The detection of phonological errors was carried out through practical pronunciation exercises and reading aloud activities based on texts from the EVOLVE 2 textbook. These readings allowed the researchers to observe recurring pronunciation patterns in connected speech and to identify how Spanish sound-spelling correspondence influenced English oral production.

For example, students pronounced hello as “jello” or omitted the initial sound in homework, producing “omework.” These errors may be explained by the fact that the letter h is silent in Spanish, whereas the English /h/ is pronounced. Similarly, students replaced the English “th” sounds with /t/, as in then pronounced as “ten,” teeth as “tet,” and the as “te.” This substitution is common because these interdental sounds are not part of the regular phonological system of many Latin American Spanish speakers.

Another frequent error was the addition of an initial vowel before /s/ + consonant clusters, as in school pronounced as “eschool.” This reflects Spanish phonotactic transfer, since Spanish words beginning with similar clusters usually require an initial vowel, as in escuela or estudiante. Vowel and diphthong confusion was also observed in productions such as my pronounced as “mi,” afternoon pronounced as “afternon,” and blue pronounced as “bluee.” Unlike Spanish, English has a more complex vowel system that includes long and short vowels, diphthongs, vowel reduction, and stress variation.

These findings indicate that pronunciation instruction should include listening discrimination, minimal pair practice, repetition drills, shadowing, and explicit work on English sounds that are difficult for Spanish-speaking learners, such as /h/, /θ/, /ð/, /w/, and English diphthongs.

Morphological interference

At the morphological level, errors were found in plural formation, third-person singular -s,

auxiliary verbs, comparative forms, and pronoun or possessive use. Examples such as “I have two doges,” “She has three cates,” and “I see two boxs” show overgeneralization of plural rules. Other examples, such as “There are five bird” and “My teacher has four class,” show omission of plural markers after numbers.

The omission of third-person singular -s was also frequent. Errors such as “She play soccer every day,” “My father work on the farm,” and “The dog drink milk” show that learners had not fully acquired this grammatical marker. In English, the third-person singular ending is a small but important marker of grammatical accuracy, whereas Spanish expresses person and number through a more extensive verb-conjugation system.

Auxiliary use in questions also caused difficulty. Productions such as “Do she like apples?”, “Does they play soccer?”, and “Does Maria works on the farm?” show confusion in the use of do and does and in the base form of the main verb after the auxiliary. Comparative forms also presented errors, as in “A horse is big than a dog,” “This road is long than that road,” and “My sister is tall than me.” These errors suggest that learners transferred Spanish comparative logic and omitted the English suffix -er.

Finally, errors such as “His is my brother” and “Their are happy” reveal confusion between subject pronouns and possessive adjectives. These findings support the use of sentence transformation, guided questioning, grammar-focused speaking tasks, and repeated practice with plural forms, auxiliaries, comparatives, and pronoun functions.

Semantic interference

At the semantic level, the analysis identified errors related to false cognates, literal translation, incorrect word choice, and semantic categorization. False cognates were evident when students associated English words with visually similar Spanish words, such as library with librería, parents with parientes, carpet with carpeta, embarrassed with embarazada, and

exit with éxito. These errors show that learners often relied on visual similarity instead of contextual meaning.

Literal translation was also observed in expressions such as “I have ten years old,” which directly transfers the Spanish structure Tengo diez años. In English, age is expressed with the verb to be: “I am ten years old.” Incorrect word choice appeared in examples such as interpreting eat an apple as comprar la manzana, drink water as comer sandía, and play soccer as jugar volleyball. These errors indicate problems in vocabulary recognition and semantic association.

Semantic categorization errors were also found. For example, students grouped chair with fruits or confused a category label such as job with specific occupations such as teacher, doctor, and farmer. These findings suggest that vocabulary instruction should go beyond memorization. Learners need contextualized activities, semantic maps, word association exercises, false-cognate comparisons, and communicative tasks that help them understand word meaning and category relationships.

General interpretation of the findings

The findings show that Spanish interference affected English learning in several interconnected ways. Syntactic interference influenced sentence organization; phonological interference affected pronunciation and oral intelligibility; morphological interference affected grammatical accuracy; and semantic interference affected vocabulary use and meaning construction.

Although the participants were A2 learners, they were still consolidating basic structures and frequently used Spanish as a guide. This reliance on the first language is part of interlanguage development. However, if such errors are not addressed through explicit and contrastive instruction, they may become fossilized and continue to appear at higher proficiency levels.

Therefore, the study supports the need for a contrastive pedagogical approach. Teachers should not only correct errors but also explain why they occur and how Spanish and English differ in each case. For instance, when correcting “I have ten years old,” it is useful to explain that Spanish uses tener for age, whereas English uses to be. When correcting “eschool,” it is important to explain that English permits initial /s/ clusters without an added vowel.

CONCLUSION

Spanish linguistic interference had a significant influence on the English language learning process of A2-level students at Universidad Politécnica Estatal del Carchi during the 2026-A academic period. The analysis showed that errors were systematic and related to the transfer of structures, sounds, word-formation patterns, and meanings from Spanish into English.

At the syntactic level, students had difficulty with subject-verb agreement, word order, adjective placement, and possessive structures. At the phonological level, they experienced difficulties with /h/, “th” sounds, vowel length, diphthongs, /s/ clusters, and connected speech, especially during practical pronunciation exercises and reading aloud tasks from the EVOLVE 2 textbook. At the morphological level, the main errors involved plural formation, third-person singular -s, auxiliary verbs, comparative forms, and pronoun use. At the semantic level, students showed problems with false cognates, literal translation, word choice, and semantic categorization.

These findings confirm that learner errors should not be viewed only as failures, but also as evidence of interlanguage development. Error analysis provides valuable information for teachers because it identifies the areas that require further support. English instruction at the A2 level should therefore include contrastive activities, explicit grammar practice, false-cognate awareness, pronunciation training, vocabulary work in context, and communicative tasks that help learners reduce the negative transfer of Spanish and strengthen their English

language development.

The main contribution of this study is that it provides a contextualized description of Spanish-English interference among A2 learners at UPEC and offers practical guidance for contrastive grammar and pronunciation instruction in the university EFL classroom.

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