Learners' Choices in the Use of the Perfect Aspect: Grammatical Error or Different Perspectivization?

Elecciones de los alumnos en el uso del aspecto perfecto: ¿error gramatical o perspectiva diferente?

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this work is to examine the extent to which learners -whose L1 is the *Rioplatense* variety of Spanish- learning English as an L2 at B1 level of language proficiency (CEFR) are able to use the perfect aspect appropriately to convey its expected prototypical meanings. Specifically, it focuses on analyzing learners' use of the perfect aspect in English from the perspective of crosslinguistic influence and on determining if the differences found constitute impeding mistakes or imply a distinct perspectivization leading to other linguistic realizations when construing an event. Results demonstrate that conceptual and linguistic transfer from L1 is observed in students' L2 productions. Despite crosslinguistic influence, a limited number of samples can be considered incorrect: although students do not choose the present perfect, communication is achieved. From these results, additional research lines such as the implications of CLI for teaching, learning and assessment arise.

Keywords: Cognitive linguistics; crosslinguistic influence; aspect; tense; present perfect.

RESUMEN

El objetivo de este trabajo es analizar el nivel de precisión con el que los estudiantes de inglés como lengua extranjera de nivel B1 (MCER), cuya lengua materna es el español rioplatense, transmiten los significados prototípicos del presente perfecto en L2. Específicamente, se busca analizar el uso del aspecto perfecto en inglés desde la perspectiva de la influencia interlingüística y determinar si las diferencias observadas constituyen errores que impiden la comunicación o implican una perspectiva distinta que conduce a la elección de diferentes realizaciones lingüísticas al construir un evento. Los resultados demuestran que existe transferencia conceptual y lingüística desde L1 a L2. A pesar de esto, pocas muestras se consideran incorrectas: la comunicación se logra aun cuando no se elige el presente perfecto. Otras líneas de investigación, como las implicancias de la influencia interlingüística para el aprendizaje, la enseñanza y la evaluación, surgen a partir de estos resultados.

Palabras clave: Lingüística cognitive; influencia interlingüística; aspecto; tiempo; presente perfecto.

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Introduction

The main purpose of this study is to analyze how B1-level students, according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR), use the perfect aspect[3] to linguistically realize the different perspectives from which a situation can be construed.[4] These different perspectives might stem from both language users' knowledge and use of English as a foreign language and their knowledge and use of Spanish as their first language. When crosslinguistic influence or transfer[5] from L1 to L2 leads students to choose a different verbal tense and/or aspect, the analysis of whether students' choices result in a mistake[6] or not is carried out.

The analysis is based on the assumption that "grammar is meaningful" (Langacker, 2008: 3): grammatical elements carry their own meanings and, through grammar, language users are able to construct and symbolize meanings expressed by more complex phrases, clauses and sentences. Linguistic meaning, i.e. the conceptualization associated with language constructs from the perspective of cognitive semantics, makes the significance of grammar evident. Noteworthy conclusions can be drawn from this approach to language analysis: several factors, apart from the event being portrayed, might have an influence on what an expression means (Langacker, 2008: 3-4). As Langacker further explains:

> On the one hand, it presupposes an elaborate conceptual substrate, including such matters as background knowledge and apprehension of the physical, social, and linguistic context. On the other hand, an expression imposes a particular construal, reflecting just one of the countless ways of conceiving and portraying the situation in question. (4)

Taking into account the basic principles Langacker has proposed for construing an event, the main objective of this work is to examine the extent to which students -whose L1 is the *Rioplatense* variety of Spanish- learning English as an L2 at B1 level of language proficiency according to the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR) are able to use the perfect aspect appropriately to convey the expected prototypical meanings associated to it. Specifically, two essential points have been included in the analysis: 1. whether the differences between the expected use of the perfect aspect in English and other linguistic forms preferred by language users might be due to crosslinguistic influence; 2. if the differences found constitute impeding mistakes which interfere with communication or imply a distinct perspectivization that leads to other possible linguistic realizations when construing an event.

Theoretical Framework

Since this analysis is carried out from the perspective of Cognitive Linguistics and the crosslinguistic influence theory, it is essential to expand on both theoretical approaches as a starting point.

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[3]Grammatical aspect, the category expressed through verb inflection which applies to a situation to concentrate on distinct stages within its development, has been selected as the main focus of this analysis. Further explanations are provided in the theoretical framework section.

[4]Construal is our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways. In cognitive linguistics, the term indicates an array of conceptual factors [such as prominence] shown to be relevant for lexical and semantic description. [...] An expression's meaning depends on both the conceptual content invoked and how that content is construed. (Langacker, 2019: 140)

[5] The influence of a person's knowledge of one language on that person's knowledge or use of another language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 1).

[6]According to Brown (2007), a mistake is defined as "a performance error that is either a random guess or a "slip", in that it is a failure to utilize a known system correctly" (257). Mistakes are present in everybody's performance both in L1 and L2 (Brown, 2007: 257). In the specific context of learning a foreign language, errors are described as "direct manifestations of a system within which a learner is operating at the time" (Brown, 2007: 258). They show how competent L2 learners are. It must be acknowledged that not always is it possible to distinguish an error from a mistake (Brown, 2007: 258), and the process to determine this distinction is believed to be highly subjective (Brown, 2007: 259). Since this differentiation is not the focus of attention of this analysis, the two terms are used interchangeably.
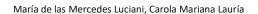
Basic Principles of Cognitive Linguistics

In Evans, Bergen & Zinken's words (2006): "[c]ognitive linguistics is a modern school of linguistic thought and practice. It is concerned with investigating the relationship between human language, the mind and socio-physical experience" (1). It has embraced a shared set of guiding principles and fundamental beliefs (Evans, Bergen & Zinken, 2). This cognitive approach-is defined by two core principles. The initial one, known as the Generalization Commitment (Lakoff, 1990, as cited in Evans, Bergen & Zinken), involves a commitment to identifying overarching principles which can be applied to all aspects of human language (3). The Generalization Commitment signifies a dedication to thoroughly exploring how different aspects of linguistic knowledge arise from a shared set of human cognitive abilities, instead of assuming that they are generated in separate and isolated modules of the mind (Evans, Bergen & Zinken, 4). The second principle, known as the Cognitive Commitment (Lakoff, 1990, as cited in Evans, Bergen & Zinken), involves a dedication to describing the general principles of language in alignment with our understanding of the mind and brain from other fields of study (Evans, Bergen & Zinken, 5-6).

In the light of Cognitive Linguistics, several conceptual elements that are important for lexical and semantic representations are grouped under the term *construal*, which is–fundamental for the development of the theoretical framework and the analysis in this work. Langacker (2019) has defined construal as "our ability to conceive and portray the same situation in alternate ways" [...] [The meaning of an expression arises from] "both the conceptual *content* invoked and how that content is construed" […] [Thus,] "every conception and every linguistic expression construes the content invoked in a certain manner" (140). Another relevant concept related to the means through which languages portray an event is the one known as *windowing of attention* (Talmy). This term refers to the cognitive processes which take place when language users decide which part of an event is to be foregrounded or backgrounded (Talmy), and it is also essential for the analysis of the language samples collected.

Basic Principles of Crosslinguitic Influence

Within the framework of this theory, the study of language and cognition -particularly in the field of second language learning- has shed some light on a phenomenon which has attracted the attention of both experts and nonspecialists since the evolution of language: Crosslinguistic Influence (CLI) "or the influence of a person's knowledge of one language on that person's knowledge or use of another language" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 1). This phenomenon has also been termed transfer, which used to be viewed as a negative characteristic resulting from "sloppiness, narrow-mindedness, and lack of mental clarity and sound thinking" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 2). Nevertheless, by the middle of the 20th century, research has legitimated "transfer as an unavoidable feature of language learning and use", which should be explored "as a linguistic, psycholinguistic, and sociolinguistic phenomenon" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 2008: 2-3). Since then, this phenomenon has been referred to as crosslinguistic influence and transfer "interchangeably as theory-neutral cover terms" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 3). Another synonym widely used in the literature is interference (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 3). It is worth mentioning that the three terms (influence, transfer and interference) refer to the same phenomenon and none of them implies a negative connotation. Therefore, any of these terms will be used interchangeably.

With the aim of examining CLI in more depth, Jarvis & Pavlenko have provided a characterization of transfer across ten dimensions (20). Among those, the cognitive level dimension is presented, and it addresses the differentiation between linguistic and conceptual transfer: "the distinction between types of transfer that are

examined primarily in relation to linguistic forms and structures versus types of transfer that are analyzed in relation to the mental concepts that underlie those forms and structures" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 61).

More specifically, linguistic transfer allows us to explain the impact of individuals' knowledge of one language on their understanding, perception, and production of forms and structures in another language (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 61). Conceptual transfer is concerned with the resemblances and variations in conceptual categories that correspond to the lexical and grammatical categories of both the source and target languages (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 112). Then, time, space and motion are the three concepts which influence how events in our surrounding environment are perceived (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 139).

A salient crosslinguistic difference that has been observed in this area is related to the way time is categorized in connection with "grammaticized [tense, or tense and aspect] and lexicalized concepts [temporal adverbs and particles, spatiotemporal metaphors]" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 139-140) in different languages. For example, there are languages such as English that have a tendency to associate the length of time with a linear distance (and thus speakers refer to a long time); however, there are other languages such as Spanish which tend to perceive and conceptualize time as a measurable quantity (therefore, speakers resort to adverbial phrases like *mucho tiempo*) (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 140).

> These differences have implications for nonverbal cognition, whereby speakers of different languages differ significantly on time estimation tasks (Casasanto et al., 2004). Conceptual transfer in this area may manifest itself in speakers' systematic reliance on the temporal concepts of the source language when using the recipient language and thus, for instance, talking about *largo tiempo* (= literally: long time), instead of *mucho tiempo*, in L2 Spanish.[7] (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 140)

Another interesting crosslinguistic difference includes languages like English and Spanish, where temporality is expressed through grammatical features (namely tense or tense and aspect), as well as languages like Mandarin and Indonesian, which rely solely on lexical and discursive methods to convey temporality without grammatical markings (Comrie, 1985, as cited in Jarvis & Pavlenko, 140).

> Conceptual transfer in this area may thus be evident in difficulties experienced by speakers of tenseless languages in making systematically temporal distinctions obligatory in the target language, and, consequently, in the lack of or in inappropriate tense marking (although tense marking errors may also be affected by other factors). (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 140)

There is a third crosslinguistic distinction related to tense systems: the connections created between time, events, contexts and language users' purposes may differ from one language to another. As an example, in Russian, speakers are required to indicate in both the past and future tenses if the described event is completed or ongoing. Although these differences resemble those expressed in English through the contrast between Simple Past and Past Continuous or Present Perfect Simple and Continuous, "the English tense and aspectual system cannot fully guide the learner of Russian" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 40).

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[7] Despite the most usual linguistic representations of the conceptualization of time described for each language by the authors cited, it needs to be acknowledged that both temporal expressions can be found among Spanish language users. Nevertheless, according to *Corpus del Español del Siglo XXI, largo tiempo* is remarkably less frequent than *mucho tiempo*: the former shows an absolute frequency of 1,877and a normalized frequency of 4,77 per million while the latter's absolute frequency is of 21,164 and its normalized frequency is 53,82 per million. As regards, topic distribution, *largo tiempo* is more frequent in narratives, whereas *mucho tiempo* has a more homogeneous distribution among the different thematic areas.

A study conducted by Hinkel in 1992 (as cited in Jarvis & Pavlenko,) required English native speakers and speakers of many other languages as their mother tongue (among which there were Spanish native speakers) to analyze four sentences representing each of the English tenses by choosing the correct options from a multiple-choice questionnaire. This provided various options to describe the time and nature of the action in the sentences. The outcomes revealed that non-native speakers' performance was similar to the performance of speakers of English as their first language only when statements were expressed in the Present Continuous. Regarding the other tenses (e.g. simple past, present perfect, simple present), their understanding varied greatly from that of native English speakers, despite the fact that some of the languages included in the study (e.g. Spanish) do have morphosyntactic resources to encode tense. "These results suggest that present progressive maps onto a clearly delineated concept, while the other tenses may not have clear conceptual counterparts in some languages" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 141). These authors go on to conclude that language learners sometimes come across obstacles related to acquiring the structural characteristics of the English system of tense and aspect; while some other times, they encounter obstacles due to conceptual differences. From Jarvis & Pavlenko's conclusions, it is essential to emphasize that "English present perfect, for instance, presents particular conceptual challenges for ESL learners" (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999: 125, as cited in Jarvis & Pavlenko, 141). This statement about the challenges posed by the Present Perfect for learners of English as a foreign language is of special significance for this work as it accounts for the difficulties observed in students' use of such verbal tense and aspect.

In conclusion: "adequate language-mediated conceptual representations of [TIME] minimally involve knowledge of (a) obligatory and optional temporal distinctions made in the language in question; (b) language-specific spatiotemporal metaphors that involve [TIME]; and (c) language-specific representations of particular temporal concepts" (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 141-142). Conceptual transfer in this domain might lead to the inability of second language users to express temporality in alignment with the specific temporal system of the recipient language. Additionally, as a result of this conceptual interference, they may rely on the concepts of time from their mother tongue. It should be noticed that these mistakes might be caused by other factors and therefore cannot be considered concrete evidence of conceptual transfer. However, they can be regarded as one of the various ways in which it manifests (Jarvis & Pavlenko, 142).

Following Jarvis and Pavlenko, it has been mentioned that both English and Spanish are languages in which temporality is expressed by tense or by combining tense and aspect (140). Therefore, it is crucial to delve into the definitions of these concepts.

Definitions of Tense and Aspect. The Perfect Aspect in English and in Spanish

As the notions of tense and aspect intertwine, although the main focus of this study is aspect, it is necessary to start by providing a definition of the former: it "relates the time of the situation referred to to some other time, usually to the moment of speaking" (Comrie, 1976: 1-2). In most –but not in all– languages, three verbal tenses are distinguished: past, present and future. When the present tense is used, the situation referred to "is located temporally as simultaneous with the moment of speaking"; when a situation is described in the past tense, it is "located prior to the moment of speaking"; and, when the future tense is used, the situation is "located subsequent to the moment of speaking" (Comrie, 1-2).

Regarding the notion of aspect, Comrie defines it as "different ways of viewing the internal temporal constituency of a situation" (3). To highlight the difference with the category of tense, it is enough to consider that time is perceived by the speaker as an infinite series of intervals or as an infinite series of events in the development of

the verbal process, while aspect is the speaker's viewpoint on the development of the process. Therefore, "time refers to forms whose content is moment, and aspect refers to forms whose content is the speaker's viewpoint" (Ch. Rallides, as cited in Tobón de Castro & Rodríguez Rondón, 1974: 38). This understanding of aspect has not been questioned and several authors in their own studies define this concept similarly:

> Aspect is the grammatical form used by a speaker in taking a particular view of a situation. The origin of the term aspect nicely captures this idea: the word aspect derives from Latin aspectus 'view', which shows that earlier grammarians have already noted that aspect pertains to ways of viewing. (Radden & Dirven, 2007: 176)

> Aspect involves the internal temporal structure of a situation (e.g., whether or not it includes transitions) rather than its placement on the timeline relative to speech time. (Michaelis, 2020: 3)

As claimed by Zamorano Mansilla (2006), most authors begin their dissertation on the topic of aspect by emphasizing the confusion that has traditionally surrounded this linguistic concept. This confusion generally consists of the fact that the word aspect has been (and still is today) used to refer to two completely different, although related, facts. On the one hand, aspect is the category that describes the different ways in which situations described by a predicate unfold. Comrie (1976) defines it as "the semantic aspectual properties of various classes of lexical items" (41), and De Miguel defines it as "the aspectual information contained in the lexical units that constitute predicates" (De Miguel, 1999: 2982, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla). In other words, aspect explains that some situations are punctual, such as reaching the summit, while others extend over time, such as writing a thesis. Some situations reach a moment in which they are completed and end, such as going to the station, while others can persist indefinitely without ever reaching an end, such as exercising. This type of aspect is referred to by various names, including "lexical aspect" (De Miguel,, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla,), "syntagmatic aspect" (Alarcos Llorach, 1982, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "mode" or "mode of action" (García Fernández, 1998; Roca Pons, 1958; Veyrat, 1993, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "objective aspect" (Lázaro Carreter, 1968; Mounin, 1968; Coseriu, 1980, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "inherent meaning" (Comrie, 1976, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "situation aspect" (Smith, 1991, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "actionality" (Bertinetto and Delfitto, 2000, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), or "aktionsart" (Agrell, 1908; Dik, 1989; Rojo, 1990, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla). It is necessary to remind readers of the fact that the description of lexical aspect is beyond the scope of this work.

On the other hand, aspect can be the grammatical category expressed through verb inflection that applies to a situation to focus on different stages of its development. Smith (as cited in Zamorano Mansilla) defines this by asserting that: "aspectual viewpoints function like the lens of a camera, making objects visible to the receiver" (Smith, 1991: 91, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla). Thus, a situation like writing a letter can be shown in the middle of its development using an imperfective tense (*escribía una carta*) or as a complete action that has reached its end using a perfective tense (*escribió una carta*). This type of aspect has also been given many names, including "inflectional aspect" (De Miguel, 1999; Alarcos Llorach, 1982, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "viewpoint aspect" (Smith, 1991, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), "subjective aspect" (Lázaro Carreter, 1968; Mounin, 1968; Coseriu, 1980, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla), or simply "aspect" (Comrie, 1976); (García Fernández, 1998; Roca Pons, 1958; Veyrat, 1993, as cited in Zamorano Mansilla). This is the type of aspect selected as the object of study for the present work.

For a more detailed description, and in order to illustrate the aspectual distinctions, Comrie (1976) provides these examples in English and Spanish (3):

John was reading when I entered.
Juan leía cuando entré. [8]

The first verb of each sentence in the pair of examples portrays the background of the situation while the second verb presents the situation itself. Thus, the verbs *entered/entré* refer to the complete event, as a whole, without dividing the situation into the individual stages that constitute the entry. In Comrie's words (1976): "verbal forms with this meaning will be said to have perfective meaning, and where the language in question has special verbal forms to indicate this, we shall say that it has perfective aspect" (3). The verbs which describe the background of the event refer explicitly to its "internal temporal constituency", without identifying its beginning or end. Then, we understand that the entry took place while the person was reading: he was reading before and he continued reading after the event of the entry. These verbs are said to have imperfective aspect.

> The perfective looks at the situation from outside, without necessarily distinguishing any of the internal structure of the situation, whereas the imperfective looks at the situation from inside, and as such is crucially concerned with the internal structure of the situation, since it can both look backwards towards the start of the situation, and look forwards to the end of the situation, and indeed is equally appropriate if the situation is one that lasts through all time, without any beginning and without any end. (Comrie, 1976: 4)

In addition, Langacker (2008) affirms that "the perfective/imperfective contrast is anything but a rigid lexical specification" (148). Therefore, verbs can be classified as either perfective or imperfective initially, but later they can be used in any of the two ways because of the flexibility of this categorization. He adds that:

> [t]he choice between a perfective and an imperfective construal is not necessarily determined by anything inherent in the scene described. It often depends on general or contextual knowledge, or it may simply be a matter of how the speaker decides to portray the situation. (Langacker, 2008: 151)

Based on the bibliography consulted, it must be stated that perfect and perfective are not synonyms and there is no consensus among linguists regarding whether to consider the perfect as an aspect or not. Comrie states that it should receive some attention when studying aspect, even though it is quite different from other aspects discussed, and he describes it as the aspect which "indicates the continuing present relevance of a past situation" (52).

As it is mentioned in *Nueva gramática de la lengua española* (2009), alongside the imperfective and perfective aspects, some authors distinguish what is known as the perfect aspect, which others consider a variety of the perfective. The perfect aspect refers to a certain state of affairs that results from a previous process. Thus, "*El director ya se ha marchado*" (or "*ya se marchó*" in certain areas) implies "The director is already gone", indicating that the director not being here anymore is the resulting state of the previous action of leaving (431).

Some of the languages which have and express the perfect aspect allow us to distinguish several types of perfect illustrated in Comrie's work. Since this work concentrates mainly on the analysis of the use of the perfect aspect

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[8] The examples provided are the ones Comrie (1976) has used to illustrate the perfective/imperfective distinction. However, the imperfective form *leía* could also be expressed in Spanish by stating *Juan estaba leyendo cuando entré*. The periphrasis *estar* + gerund describes a situation which has started but not been concluded, emphasizing the progressive aspect. A verb form such as *leía* can denote the initial moment of the action whereas the periphrasis *estaba leyendo* denotes an action that has already begun. This is the reason why *estar* + gerund is habitually used in combination with adverbs like *ya/todavía*. This periphrasis is the most frequent temporal expression in spoken Spanish to refer to actions in process. Therefore, it sounds more natural to express *estaba leyendo* to describe an activity circumscribed to a specific moment, while *leía* is more likely to be understood as a habitual action in the past (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 547-548). This comparison of the meanings conveyed in a communicative situation by the different forms available in a given language is another example of "form-meaning mappings" (Langacker, 1987, as cited in Ellis & Cadierno, 2009: 126).

in written productions by Spanish speakers learning English as a foreign language, it is essential to characterize the types of perfect found in the two languages in focus.

In English, as described by Comrie, there are four principal meanings conveyed by this aspect: the perfect of result (a reference to a present state as the result of a situation in the past), the experiential perfect (an indication that a situation has taken place before the present time), the perfect of persistent situation (a description of a situation which began in the past and is still going on in the present), and the perfect of recent past (an indication of the present relevance of a situation in the past due to temporal closeness).

Since Spanish is spoken in several regions around the world, and it adopts particular characteristics in each of them, while describing the main interpretations of *pretérito perfecto compuesto*, it is also relevant to analyze the geographical distribution of its uses.

The form "*he cantado*" (*pretérito perfecto compuesto*) is known as an *antepresente* (according to Bello's terminology, cited in *Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 438), and it expresses the situation denoted as an anterior event with respect to a reference point located in the present. Thus, interpreted as this, "*he cantado*" is used to refer to certain past situations, whether punctual or durative. These situations take place within an interval that starts at an unspecified point in the past and extends until the moment of the utterance, including it (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 438). Apart from this, *pretérito perfecto compuesto* can also allow for a second interpretation, known as the perfective or aorist interpretation, as in "*Ha muerto hace dos meses*" (a typical usage in Bolivian Spanish, but also present in other varieties), where "*ha muerto*" acquires the meaning of "*murió*". The *antepresente* interpretation of "*he cantado*" is found in the central and southern regions of European Spanish, coastal Peruvian Spanish, Andean Bolivian and Colombian Spanish, the northwest of Argentina (from Tucumán to the border with Bolivia), the central region of this country (especially in the northwest of Córdoba), and with greater restrictions, also in Cuba and other areas of the Antilles. In Mexico, many Central American countries, and several Caribbean countries including Venezuela, the *pretérito perfecto simple* (*canté*) is used to refer to completed actions in the past, as in "*Hoy estuvo más tranquilo* (Excélsior 21/1/1997)*"*, while the *pretérito perfecto compuesto* is reserved for actions or situations that continue or remain open in the present, such as "*Siempre he vivido aquí*"; "*María no ha llegado*" (meaning "it is expected that she will arrive"). In Chile, in much of Argentina (with the exceptions mentioned above), and in Spain, in the northwest and the Canary Islands, "*canté*" replaces "*he cantado*" in this usage, and sometimes in other interpretations, too (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 2009: 438). This final explanation is evidence to support the preference for *pretérito perfecto simple* over *pretérito perfecto compuesto* among speakers of the *Rioplatense* variety of the language.

In addition, *perfecto de experiencia* or *perfecto experiencial* is used to express that a certain event has taken place one or more times within a period, which may not be indicated or can be expressed using some resources equivalent to lately, in these times, these days, among others. The formulas "*a lo largo de* + quantitative temporal noun group", "*en lo que va de* + singular temporal nouns", "*en {más ~ menos} de* + quantitative temporal noun group", or "{*desde ~ hasta*} + adverb or temporal noun group" can be used. Some examples are: *He hablado con él tres veces {en el último mes ~ en lo que va de semana ~ desde enero}* (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 439).

Moreover, *perfecto compuesto continuo* (with progressive aspect) refers to a past situation, generally expressed through atelic predicates, that extends until the present and remains open: for example, "*Conozco todas sus tretas. Las han empleado durante un siglo contra nosotros*" (Fuentes, *Naranjo*). The adverbs *todavía/aún* allow

for the interpretation of continuous aspect with negated predicates, as in: "*¿Todavía no hemos empezado y ya aparecieron los enemigos*?*" (Martínez, *Evita*). The *perfecto continuo* is also formed with telic predicates in negative contexts, like "*Maite no ha llegado (todavía)*". It shares many temporal modifiers with the experiential perfect that can delimit the time frame, for example: "*Ahí lo pusieron [...], y ahí ha estado desde entonces*" (García Márquez, *Cien años*) (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 439-440).

This interpretation of the perfect aspect which remains open varies depending on the geographical area. *"Así ha sido hasta ahora"* (Rulfo, *Pedro Páramo*) can be understood as *"sigue siendo así"* (open interpretation, as continuative perfect or continuative *antepresente*) and as *"ya ha dejado de ser así"* (non-continuative *antepresente* interpretation). Both are equally natural in European Spanish (except for the Canary Islands and the northwest of the Iberian Peninsula), the Antilles, the Andine area (especially Bolivia and Peru) and the northwest of Argentina. The continuative *antepresente* interpretation is preferred in other Spanish-speaking countries, especially in Mexico and Central America (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 440).

Furthermore, *perfecto de hechos recientes*, such as "*Lo he visto hace un momento*", is called so because in the geographical varieties that have this usage it allows for reference to actions that are located within a temporal scope which includes the moment of speech. This period can be today, the current week or year, but hardly the week prior to the one in which one is speaking. Some examples are: "*El paquete ha llegado esta mañana*"; "*Este verano he visitado a mi familia*"; "*Hoy Rosi me ha preguntado una cosa curiosa*" (Atxaga, *Obabakoak*). In the absence of a temporal modifier that locates the designated state of affairs, it will be understood that it has occurred within the day that includes the moment of speech, unless the communicative context allows for understanding that it refers to a longer, but still close, interval. The *perfecto de hechos recientes* is used in a large part of European Spanish, coastal Peruvian Spanish, and in some other linguistic areas where it is very likely that sentences like "*He comido con Luis*" (without further context) or "*Me he roto una pierna*" refer to recent events, perhaps immediate ones. In Mexico, as well as in much of Central America and the *Río de la Plata* area, among others, these events are interpreted as experiential facts, that is, events experienced on some occasion. Temporal modifiers that designate events located within a day are understood as referring to the day one is speaking about, such as "*La sesión ha empezado a las ocho*" (meaning 'at eight today'); "*Me ha llamado hace unas horas*" (meaning 'a few hours ago today') (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 440).

When mentioning immediate events for the first time, *perfecto de noticias recientes* is habitually used, followed by other verbs in *pretérito perfecto simple* to describe the situation with more detail. It is typically used in journalese: *Un palestino ha resultado herido grave tras recibir dos puñaladas [...] Agresor y víctima se enzarzaron en una discusión que acabó con el apuñalamiento del palestino* (CREA oral, España) (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 440-441).

Additionally, the use of *perfecto resultativo* implies that the current state results from the action denoted by "*he cantado*". For example: "*El jarrón se ha roto*" (The vase has broken, implying 'The vase is broken'); "*Me han decepcionado ustedes*" (You have disappointed me, implying 'I am disappointed'), or "*¿Viste que los precios han bajado*?*" (Did you see that prices have dropped?, implying 'Prices are low'). Since it refers to a process whose results are observed at the moment of speech, it has also been called the *perfecto evidencial* or *perfecto de hechos constatados* (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española,* 441).

The term "simple" in the denomination of *canté* (*pretérito perfecto simple*) captures morphological information, but it also seizes temporal information because it refers to the opposition between absolute time and relative time. The fact that *canté* is an absolute tense and *he cantado* is a relative tense leads to many of the facts that

affect the usage of these tenses, since the connection that the *pretérito perfecto compuesto* has with the present time determines that only with "*he cantado*" are past situations shown as part of an interval that includes the moment of utterance. In "*canté*," on the other hand, no connection is established between the mentioned action and the present (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 443).
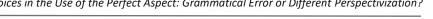
The form "*canté*" allows for uses that can also encompass the characteristics of "*he cantado*" in many American countries. In these linguistic areas, both options shown in these contrasts are possible: "*Mi hijo {sacó ~ ha sacado} sobresaliente en Matemáticas alguna vez*"; "*Es la mejor novela que {publicó ~ ha publicado} hasta ahora*"; "*Se {convirtió ~ ha convertido} en un punto de referencia para nuestros jóvenes*"; "*¡Cómo {creció ~ ha crecido} este muchacho!*". More specifically, Spanish speakers of the *Rioplatense* variety alternatively use any of the two options in "*Marta no {ha llegado ~ llegó} todavía*", while Spanish speakers in all the other areas resort to the first option (*ha llegado)* in most occasions (*Nueva gramática de la lengua española*, 443).

Based on the descriptions of the perfect aspect provided so far, it can be stated that, even though the meanings conveyed by this aspect do not differ significantly, their linguistic realizations do. In English, the types of perfect are easily related to the use of the Present Perfect: She's painted the room (result); I've been to France twice (experience); I've lived in Madrid since 2005 (persistence); I've met the manager earlier this morning (recentness). Despite the fact that all the examples could be expressed in Spanish by resorting to a compound verbal form including the verb *haber (pretérito perfecto compuesto)*, the majority of language users -especially those of the *Rioplatense* variety, as it has been explained in the previous sections- would certainly choose *pretérito perfecto simple* to express a result (*Ella pintó la habitación* instead of *Ella ha pintado la habitación*), to refer to an experience (*Fui a/Estuve en Francia dos veces* instead of *He ido a/estado en Francia dos veces*) or to describe a recent situation (*Me reuní con el gerente más temprano* instead of *Me he reunido con el gerente más temprano esta mañana*). It must be mentioned that the concept of closeness can vary and the perspective of what is considered recent might be different among language users. In addition, the present tense (*presente*) or a periphrasis containing the verbs *llevar/estar* followed by a gerund would be preferred to show the persistence of a situation: *Vivo en Madrid desde el 2005/Llevo (viviendo) … años en Madrid/Estoy viviendo en Madrid desde…* instead of *He vivido en Madrid desde el 2005.*

As stated by Tobón de Castro and Rodríguez Rondón (1974), one of the syntactic means that Spanish has to express aspect is verbal periphrasis. The term periphrasis has been adopted to refer to any non-simple verbal expression in which two elements are combined: one that appears as 'grammaticalized', that is -in addition to taking the morphemes of person, tense, mood, etc.- it functions itself as a 'morpheme', and another that can be a non-conjugated form (infinitive, gerund, or participle) of any verb, for example: "*Deben traer su equipo de viaje"; "Andan diciendo que habrá alza en los precios"; "Llevo escritas sólo diez páginas de mi trabajo"* (42).

Apart from resorting to periphrases, it is possible to express aspect through non-verbal means such as adverbial or prepositional phrases, whether they provide the same focus and interpretation each time the objective situation arises, express units of measurement, determine the length of intervals between repetitions, specify repetitions, locate the event within a series of specific time intervals, or position the event at all times, etc. (Bull, as cited in Tobón de Castro & Rodríguez Rondón, 44).

Undoubtedly, different Spanish speakers in diverse communicative situations could resort to a variety of linguistic realizations for the abovementioned examples, but the translations provided are believed to be the most typical choices language users of the *Rioplatense* variety of Spanish would make. The claim that there could be various other linguistic realizations and that they might be preferred by certain language users to describe a given event

does not necessarily imply a correct/incorrect dichotomy; rather, it is a reminder of the fact that each "expression imposes a particular construal, reflecting just one of the countless ways of conceiving and portraying the situation in question" (Langacker, 2008: 4). The distinctions illustrated by the examples provided can account for the occurrence of crosslinguistic influence (Jarvis and Pavlenko, 2008) in the production of EFL learners.

Methodology and Participants

This is mixed methods research[9], with the purpose of observing and describing students' use of the perfect aspect in written production and analyzing the reasons for their choices. Initially, a group of forty-three EFL learners - aged between 21 and 30- whose mother tongue is Spanish (*Rioplatense* variety) and who receive instruction in English as a foreign language as part of their university study programmes (Certified Public Accountant, Bachelor in Economics and Bachelor in Administration) has participated of this study. They are students from two different groups within the course English for Economics at the School of Economics in *Universidad Nacional del Litoral*.

The expected level of proficiency for assessment of this course is B1 (CEFR) and the material is specifically chosen, adapted and designed with the aim of developing competence in all skills along the course. In order to be able to take this subject, these students had previously passed the two subjects that make up *Ciclo Inicial de Idioma Extranjero* as part of their study programmes: *Idioma Extranjero I* (A2 level, according to CEFR) and *Idioma Extranjero II* (A2+).

As all participants are students of university programmes within the field of Economics, the tasks proposed to collect samples for the intended analysis have been designed in relation to their field of expertise: English for Specific Purposes (more specifically, Business English). Students are therefore already familiar with the vocabulary used in the situations presented and with the type of writing tasks (cloze and email) they have been required to complete.

Before presenting the instructions and tasks, it is worth mentioning that after the first instance of administration and analysis of students' performance during the first academic term -and due to the suspicion that the third item could have induced mistakes- the decision to modify part of the rubric was made. Once the necessary changes were introduced, another group of fifty-four students of similar characteristics (ESP-B1), who were enrolled in two classes taking the same course during the second academic term, was required to complete the task. In addition, with the objective of supporting the results obtained from the analysis of the samples, a learner corpus -built between 2016 and 2020 from written assignments by students who also attended the same Business English course as the participants previously described- was consulted.

Instruments designed to collect data

In order to collect the necessary samples for analysis, first-academic-term participants were asked to complete a writing task specifically designed. It was meant to be completed in the virtual classroom as part of an in-person lesson. It can be labelled as an output-based writing task, in which students were required to write an email based on the instructions provided.

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[9] It is defined as a procedure for collecting, analyzing, and mixing quantitative and qualitative data at
some stage of the research process within a single study in order to understand a research problem more completely (Creswell, 2008) (in Heigham and Croker, 2009)

TASK applied during the first academic term

> Imagine that you are in Italy, working for one of your company's subsidiaries abroad. Write an email to Luke, an English-speaking friend of yours. Tell him about:
>
> - the period of time in Italy (weeks, months?)
> - the moment of your move from the hostel to a flat with Paolo (an Italian coworker)
> - Paolo's studies in Barcelona and his knowledge of Spanish

TASK applied in the second academic term (changes after the initial analysis of the first-term group's performance are highlighted)

> Imagine that you are in Italy, working for one of your company's subsidiaries abroad. Write an email to Luke, an English-speaking friend of yours. Tell him about:
>
> - the period of time in Italy (weeks, months?)
> - the moment of your move from the hostel to this flat with Paolo (an Italian coworker)
> - Paolo's knowledge of Spanish as a *former** student in Barcelona
>
> Glossary: *former: earlier/previous/before*

The change in the third item was supposed to avoid students' confusion regarding the understanding of "studies" as a verb in the third person singular form of the Simple Present instead of as a plural noun. The noun "knowledge" was included in this version, as well as a glossary with the explanation of the meaning of the adjective "former".

Analysis of the results obtained and discussion

To begin with the analysis and discussion section, it is necessary to remind readers of the principal objective of this work: to examine the extent to which students (native speakers of *Rioplatense* Spanish) learning English as an L2 at B1 level of language proficiency (CEFR) are able to use the perfect aspect appropriately to convey the expected prototypical meanings associated to it. More specifically, this analysis is focused on: 1. whether the differences between the expected use of the perfect aspect in English and other linguistic forms preferred by language users might be due to crosslinguistic influence; 2. if the differences found constitute impeding mistakes which interfere with communication or imply a distinct perspectivization that leads to other possible linguistic realizations when construing an event.

In order to fulfill these objectives, the third content point in each task -which intended to elicit the use of the present perfect to convey the meaning of experiential perfect and/or perfect of result- is examined in this section. Before delving into the analysis, it should be explained that the examination of the errors found in students' written productions has been made considering the classification provided by Cambridge in their Writing Assessment subscales for B1 level of proficiency. As mentioned in the band descriptors, errors will be categorized as the ones that "do not impede communication", errors which are "noticeable" but "meaning can still be determined", and the ones that "may impede meaning at times" (*Assessing writing for Cambridge English Qualifications: A guide for teachers*, 2020). Moreover, and due to the constraints of this work, the mistakes which do not have an impact on the linguistic constructions focused on by this study have been dismissed. The principal

aim of this analysis has been to examine the linguistic resources used by the selected participants in order to convey the meanings expected by the task (the use of the Present Perfect as experiential perfect or perfect of result) and inform the reader successfully.

The samples obtained to study the third content point **(***Paolo's studies in Barcelona and his knowledge of Spanish)*, which aimed to elicit the use of the experiential perfect (an indication that a situation has taken place before the present), are discussed below. It is worth mentioning that the 3/43 examples which show the use of the Present Perfect Simple also imply that the flatmate's knowledge of Spanish is an outcome of his studies in Barcelona, which is a reference to a present state as the result of a situation in the past and therefore conveys the meaning of the perfect of result.

The three productions which successfully informed the reader by resorting the Present Perfect Simple are:

Example	Meaning
My coworker has studied Spanish in Barcelona.	Experiential perfect and perfect of result
…Paolo, an italian coworker who fortunately speaks fluent Spanish because he has studied in Barcelona for 3 years.	Experiential perfect and perfect of result
He's studied in Barcelona for 5 years so he speaks Spanish	Experiential perfect and perfect of result

Table 1: examples of successful experiential meaning construction

It has also been found that 4/43 participants did not include this piece of information in their emails. Among the rest of the students' productions (36/43), these constructions were used instead of the Present Perfect Simple form:

Construction chosen and number of participants	Example
Past Simple and Present Simple 15/36	*He studied in Barcelona, so he knows spanish too.*
Present Simple 14/36	*Paolo speaks Spanish.*
Past Simple 3/36	*He went to a Barcelona's college and learned Spanish there.*
Past Continuous (in a reported construction) and Present Simple 2/36	*He told me that he was studying in Barcelona, but he has little knowledge of spanish.*
Present Continuous and Present Simple 1/36	*Paolo is studying Spanish in Barcelona but his knowledge is low.*
Simple Future with will 1/36	*Paolo will move to Barcelona to study spanish.*

Table 2: examples of different constructions chosen by participants

Even though they differ from the expected use of the Present Perfect to emphasize the meaning of experience and/or result and although some mistakes evidence the lack of control of the grammatical constructions selected, none of these productions could be judged as syntactically erroneous. However, part of the meaning is changed

and this might pose some difficulty for the reader trying to interpret the message. In fact, the two choices that most students made (Present Simple and Present Simple in combination with Past Simple, which account for 29/43 examples) can be understood as an expression in the second language of their comprehension and verbalization of the situation from the perspective of their mother tongue, whose *Rioplatense* variety prefers the use of *presente* or a combination of *presente* and *pretérito perfecto simple* over *pretérito perfecto compuesto* to communicate the present result of a previous or current experience. Thus, *Sabe/Habla español porque estudió/estudia en Barcelona* or *Estudió/Estudia en Barcelona y por eso/entonces sabe/habla español* are conceptually transferred to English and clearly preferred over *Ha estudiado en Barcelona/Ha aprendido español durante sus estudios en Barcelona*. This does not constitute an impeding mistake; however, the specification of an exact point in time at which his studies in Barcelona took place is expected when the Past Simple is used in the L2 and not all students were able to include this information. Furthermore, as the meanings of experience and/or result are not stressed by the linguistic constructions chosen by the majority of participants, part of these meanings can be said to be lost or, at least, weakened.

The productions in which only the Past Simple was used (3/36) are in the same line with this previous explanation, but there is a difference related to the verb chosen: in these cases, "learn" was used instead of "know/speak". Consequently, the transferred conceptualization can be viewed as the English version of *aprendió español* (referring to an action that took place at a specific moment in the past) instead of *sabe/habla español* (which could be regarded as a present outcome of that previous action/situation). In these cases, the verb meaning might have an impact on the choice.

Furthermore, the vast use of the Present Simple (seen in 29 samples) might have been influenced by the plural noun form *studies* included in the third bullet point of the instruction: students may have overlooked the fact that this word was a noun in a possessive construction (*Paolo's studies*) and considered this as a verb in the third person singular form in the Simple Present because of their identical spelling. This is the reason why some changes were introduced to the instruction for it to be solved by a new group of participants of similar characteristics in the second academic term.

Last but not least, the use of conjunctions such as "so" and "because" has helped students to clarify the connection between the cause and consequence despite the fact that most of them avoided the use of the Present Perfect Simple to express result, i.e. the result becomes clear from the use of the cohesive devices that establish the cause-consequence relationship.

The task with the modified item was solved by fifty-four students of similar characteristics: these participants belonged to the same study programmes and were taking the Business English course during the second semester of 2023. The main focus of attention was on the impact that changing part of the input could have on students' productions regarding the third content point **(Paolo's knowledge of Spanish as a former student in Barcelona)**, since it was believed that the use of *studies* as a noun could have misled participants from the first group to communicate this idea in the Simple Present due to its similarity in form with the third person singular form of the verb in that tense and aspect.

Even after the introduction of the change described in the third bullet point, it was found that participants from the second group did not resort to the expected Present Perfect constructions in order to convey the meanings of the perfect of result or the experiential perfect. None of the students chose this form. Instead, the majority of participants (19/54) resorted to the use of a combination of Present Simple and Simple Past linked by connectors such as *so, because* or *and* in order to illustrate the cause-consequence relationships. Some examples include:

Paolo lived in Barcelona for a few months as a student so his spanish is great.
He learnt spanish when he lived in Barcelona so we can talk in english or Spanish
he speaks a little Spanish because he was an student in Barcelona
He studied in Barcelona and speaks Spanish very well

Table 3: examples that illustrate cause-consequence relationships

In spite of some non-impeding mistakes, these written productions successfully informed the reader about this content point.

13/54 participants made an attempt to communicate the content of this third item by using a construction in the Simple Present. In these cases, readers would be partially informed as these students failed to include a reference to where, when or why their Italian coworker learned the language. In other words, they mentioned that this person is able to speak Spanish but omitted the fact that he had previously studied in a Spanish-speaking country and therefore acquired knowledge of the language there, during that period of time of his life or due to that experience abroad.

Similarly, 9/54 students selected a Past Simple construction to refer to Paolo's studies in Barcelona but they omitted the fact that in the present he has the ability to speak Spanish. This could be inferred but it is not explicitly communicated to the reader; as a consequence, the content point is only partially covered, too.

Finally, there were 13/54 productions which did not include any attempts to express the information in the third content point. This could have been due to students' misunderstanding of the task or due to their lack of linguistic resources to communicate that piece of information.

Only 1/54 participants failed to inform the reader on this content point (the third item was omitted). Among the rest (46/54), similar constructions to the ones observed after the implementation of the task for the first time were found:

Constructions used	Number of samples
Present Simple and Present Continuous	10/46
Present Continuous	10/46
Present Continuous and Future with will	6/46
Past Simple and Present Continuous	5/46
Present Simple and Future with be going to	4/46
Present Simple and Future with will	4/46
Present Continuous and Future with be going to	3/46
Past Simple and Future with be going to	2/46
Past Simple	2/46: In these two cases, students mentioned the moment they arrived in Italy but did not inform the reader about the period of time they were expected to stay there.

Table 4: list of different verbal constructions used by participants

Based on the samples collected, it is evident that the change made to the third content point in the writing task did not have a significant impact on students' performance. The linguistic means participants relied on to complete the task is evidence to support the conclusions drawn from the first instance of analysis: even though students -whose first language is the *Rioplatense* variety of Spanish- do not succeed in using the Present Perfect construction the task aims to elicit, they are able to convey the necessary meanings and inform the reader (though some loss of meaning may be observed) by resorting to structures they would more naturally use in their mother tongue to communicate that information and by transferring that to their performance in the foreign language. It is clear that participants' L1 conceptual and linguistic resources are transferred to their performance in L2: the way ideas are thought of and expressed in Spanish interferes with the message which needs to get across in English but, based on this analysis, it can be concluded that it does not have a significantly negative impact on communication.

With the objective of supporting the results obtained from the analysis of the samples from the open writing task, a learner corpus -built between 2016 and 2020 from written assignments by students who also attended the same Business English course as the participants in the previous analysis- was consulted. From the rubrics available in that corpus, and in order to examine students' use of the experiential meaning conveyed by the Present Perfect, the following one was selected:

Your boss has asked you to attend an FA-Electronics' product launch in Los Angeles. Write a memo to your boss telling him about the event you have attended and about the new personal satellite navigation system launched.

You also have to mention: -the product characteristics,

-the price,

-the reasons for offering this product to your customers.

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Some of the samples obtained from students' written productions are listed below:

1	As an you requested, i have	**attended**	the FA-Electronics product lunch in Los Angeles.
2	I am writing to tell you about the last FA-Electronics' product launch organization that i have	**attended.**	
3	I am writing to tell you about the event i have	**attended.**	
4	I have	**attended**	the personal satellite navigation system launch in Los Angeles.
5	I'm writing about the event i've	**attended.**	
6	I am writing to inform you that i have	**attended**	an FA-Electronics' product launch in Los Angeles
7	I am writing you to tell about the event i have	**attended**	in Los Angeles.
8	I am writing to give you some important details about the event i have	**attended**	

Learners' Choices in the Use of the Perfect Aspect: Grammatical Error or Different Perspectivization?

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9	I am writing to you to tell you about the event I have	**attended.**	
10	As you wishes, i	**attended**	an FA-Electronics product launch on November 8th.
11	I am writing to email about the event i	**attended**	in Los Angeles the last week.
12	I'm writing to you to tell you that last weekend i	**attended**	the FA-Electronics product lunch in Los Angeles.
13	I am	**attended**	at event.
14	I am writing to tell you that i am	**attended**	an FA-Electronics' product launched in Los Angeles.
15	I have	**attended**	the FA-Electronic's launch last Saturday.
16	I'm writing to tell you because i will	**attended**	the event the new personal satellite navigation system

Table 5: concordance obtained from Learner Corpus. Instituto de Estudios de los Discursos Académicos y Profesionales de las Ciencias Económicas (INDICE). Facultad de Ciencias Económicas. Universidad Nacional del Litoral

Examples 1-9 show a correct use of the Present Perfect Simple to inform the reader about the experience of having attended the event mentioned. Lifting from the rubric is evident from these examples, which -at this B1 level of proficiency- is not penalised. This has led to the repetition of the same phrases in three cases. However, the rest of the examples demonstrate different accurate linguistic realizations.

Examples 10-12 evidence the use of the Past Simple and adverbial phrases which construe the event as a specific situation in the past. These result in the loss of the experiential meaning which shows the connection between a past event and the present; nevertheless, they succeed in informing the reader. This supports the fact that a distinct construction of an event should be accepted as a different perspectivization provided the reader is successfully informed. This outcome challenges teachers' usual tendency to consider learners' use of the simple past instead of the present perfect as a grammatical error, even when the message successfully comes across.

Examples 13-16 are inaccurate attempts at conveying the required message due to impeding grammatical errors.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, every decision taken as regards grammatical constructions has an effect on meaning and, likewise, the meaning of a message is construed and expressed through grammar. Grammatical forms cannot be taught and learned without a thorough understanding of what they mean: using a simple past or a present perfect construction results in different meanings. More specifically, students' choice of a past simple construction instead of a present perfect form to express the messages proposed by the task analyzed in this work does imply some loss of meaning. For certain, the differences need to be introduced and illustrated as part of meaningful teaching and learning processes, and reflection upon how modifying form signifies a change in meaning is also necessary.

This analysis, based on the comprehension of cross-linguistic influence, has provided evidence to understand that each language gives priority to different characteristics of situations or scenes to be narrated (Berman & Slobin, 1994, in Ellis & Cadierno, 2009: 123) and has its own resources to accomplish communicative goals. This is why learning another language implies acquiring distinct ways of thinking or "learning to rethink for speaking" (Robinson & Ellis, 2008, in Ellis & Cadierno, 123). Then, learners cannot be expected to successfully use L2

grammatical constructions in meaningful communicative situations just because the forms have been introduced to them and practised through several controlled exercises.

After examining participants' written productions, it can be concluded that conceptual and linguistic transfer from L1 can be observed in the choices students make when required to convey the meanings expressed by the perfect aspect in L2. Despite the evident crosslinguistic interference, only a limited number of students' productions can be labelled as incorrect: the majority of examples have demonstrated that, although students resort to linguistic expressions different from the expected form, communication is not impeded. Therefore, they cannot be considered grammatical errors.

For that reason, the main finding of this research is that the assessment of learners' production should include the consideration of the extent to which their choices either lead to mistakes that would impede communication or simply result in a different way of conceptualizing an event and linguistically realizing it. Being able to understand the reasons why students choose certain grammar constructions over others (Past Simple instead of Present Perfect forms, for example) can help EFL teachers develop strategies to make teaching practices more effective and learning processes more meaningful. Based on this analysis, teachers could reflect upon the outcomes expected by the tasks proposed and make any necessary modifications with the aim of optimizing all the resources which are involved in the processes of teaching and learning a foreign language.

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