

## L2 SPANISH ACQUISITION: GALLICISMS IN ROMANIAN LEARNERS' INTERLANGUAGE

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### ABSTRACT

*THE COMPLEX PROCESS OF ACQUIRING SECOND / FOREIGN LANGUAGES LEADS TO THE CREATION OF A TRANSITIONAL SYSTEM, CALLED INTERLANGUAGE, THAT INCLUDES A WIDE VARIETY OF ELEMENTS AND RULES BELONGING TO THE LEARNER'S MOTHER TONGUE OR OTHER LANGUAGES. IN THIS ARTICLE, WE ANALYSE THE ROMANIAN LEARNERS' INTERLANGUAGE FROM THE ANGLE OF FRENCH-SPANISH INTERFERENCE, IN ORDER TO UNDERSTAND THE PHENOMENON AND, CONSEQUENTLY, IMPROVE THE TEACHING-LEARNING PROCESS BY PROVIDING EFFICIENT INPUT AND FEEDBACK. INTERESTINGLY, APART FROM THE INTERFERENCE OF SPANISH (L2) AND ROMANIAN (STUDENTS' L1), IN THE CORPUS THAT WE INVESTIGATED WE COULD TRACE A GREAT DEAL OF GALLICISMS (FRENCH ORIGIN ELEMENTS) AT ALL LEVELS: PRONUNCIATION, SPELLING, VOCABULARY, MORPHOLOGY AND SYNTAX. THUS, WE CAN CLAIM THAT FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION CAN BE INFLUENCED NOT ONLY BY THE LEARNER'S L1, BUT ALSO BY OTHER FOREIGN LANGUAGES MASTERED BY THE STUDENT. THE INTERLANGUAGE IS THE RESULT OF THE COGNITIVE PROCESS OF OVERGENERALISATION, FALSE ANALOGY AND TRANSFER. BY UNDERSTANDING THESE FEATURES OF INTERLANGUAGE, FROM A THEORETICAL POINT OF VIEW, TEACHERS AND EVALUATORS CAN CORRECT THE DEVIANT USE OF LANGUAGE THROUGH PRACTICE, ACTIVITIES, DETAILED AND CONTRASTIVE EXPLANATIONS, INPUT AND CORRECTIVE FEEDBACK.*

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**KEY WORDS:** INTERFERENCE, INTERLANGUAGE, FRENCH, GALLICISMS, SPANISH (L2), ROMANIAN LEARNERS

### 1. INTRODUCTION

During the process of acquiring second or foreign languages, interference and transfer are two inevitable and frequent phenomena, noticeable especially in its first stages. Along with the cognitive process of overgeneralisation, they lead to a transitional system of rules, called interlanguage, which includes a variety of foreign elements that enable the learner to communicate. Our paper deals with the acquisition of Spanish by Romanian learners from the angle of cross-linguistic transfer and French-Spanish interferences, in order to describe and understand Romanian students' interlanguage. Thus, identifying and explaining the deviant use of language (errors) and

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overgeneralised rules enable us to understand the process of teaching-learning and to provide more efficient input and feedback.

Romanian students who learn Spanish as a foreign language tend to commit different types of errors as a result of the interference with Romanian, which is students' mother tongue or with other foreign languages, such as French or English. Interestingly, Romanian students' interlanguage contains a great deal of French elements (also called Gallicisms) at all levels: vocabulary, morphology, syntax, spelling and pronunciation. By highlighting these Gallicisms, teachers and evaluators can understand the phenomenon and take some measures in order to avoid these particular errors.

The paper is structured as follows. In section 2, we present some opinions on interference and foreign language learning, then, in the following section, we analyse the typology of Gallicisms and errors as a result of French interference and, finally, provide some teaching solutions.

## 2. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS ON THE LINGUISTIC INTERFERENCE AND INTERLANGUAGE

The complexity of the language acquisition process is given by a wide range of psychological, social and biological factors, among which we can refer age, cognitive processes, such as memory and intelligence<sup>1</sup>, individual abilities, social skills. Moreover, the native language acquisition and the second or foreign language(s) acquisition are similar processes, that share many common particularities, but they also imply different linguistic and extralinguistic factors.

Apart from the aspects mentioned above, in the process of acquiring foreign languages, we should take into account another important fact. Students have already learnt one or more languages previously, namely their mother tongue and other foreign language(s). In our case, Romanian university students, whose first language is Romanian, learn Spanish (L2) after acquiring other foreign languages, too, such as English, French, German, Italian, etc., in different social and linguistic contexts<sup>2</sup>. Thus, Spanish becomes their new target-language and the whole process will be influenced by their previous linguistic experience and knowledge<sup>3</sup>.

This is the context where interlanguage appears. The concept of 'interlanguage' is defined as a transitional system of rules and evolving linguistic patterns in learner language when the he / she tries to use the target-language in order to communicate. It can be explained in terms of specific cognitive and sociolinguistic processes that shape it, such as overgeneralisation, and can include elements or rules specific to the native language<sup>4</sup>. Interestingly, in the analysis of interlanguage there can be identified some rules that are not traceable to the learner's L1 or not resembling to the input they have been provided with by teachers or books. This would be the case of transfer<sup>5</sup> and interference with other second languages, mastered by the learner previously.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Howard Gardener's Theory of Multiple Intelligences.

<sup>2</sup> Răzvan Bran (Utah, USA: *Cross-linguistic interferences in the acquisition of foreign languages by Romanian adults in Procedia of interdisciplinarity. DSCEI 2014, International Conference (Oradea), Selected Papers - Section: Humanities*, 108-117.

<sup>3</sup> André-Marie Manga (*La noción de interlengua y el fenómeno del error en la enseñanza/aprendizaje del español como lengua extranjera*), <https://www.um.es/tonosdigital/znum21/secciones/estudios-18-nocion.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> For a more detailed presentation of the influence of L1, see Swan, M., "The influence of the mother tongue on the second language vocabulary acquisition and use", in *Vocabulary: Description, Acquisition and Pedagogy*, CUP 1997, 156-180.

<sup>5</sup> Kurt Kohn (1986) "The Analysis of Transfer" in: Kellerman, E., and Sharwood Smith, M. (eds.) 1986: *Crosslinguistic Influence in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon Press.

Sometimes, students' oral or written productions contain errors or incorrect use of language as a consequence of overgeneralisation, lack of input, extralinguistic causes (stress, lack of attention etc.). Errors or mistakes are inevitable, as they are a "transient product of the learner's developing interlanguage"<sup>6</sup> and of the cognitive process of overgeneralisation, that leads to a wide range of deviances or analogies<sup>7</sup>. When speaking, learners are focused on the message and meaning, not on form and grammar, and that is why they activate or generalise some rules unconsciously.

### **3. CORPUS**

The present analysis is based on both our teaching experience and a corpus of written and oral productions. The corpus of our research is formed by more than 130 written papers and oral exams and activities, produced by first year students, who learn Spanish as a foreign language at the Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures (University of Bucharest). Besides Spanish, they also study other languages, such as French, English, Chinese, German, Romanian etc. We also mention that students, whose productions have been analysed, are beginners, with no previous knowledge of Spanish.

In their final exams, after three months of studying Spanish, we could identify a great deal of interferences with other languages (mainly Romanian, English and French) in the following main areas: orthography-pronunciation, vocabulary and morphosyntax. Our paper focuses on the French origin elements, so in the following part we shall discuss only the case of Gallicism, although all these interferences (Spanish L2 and Romanian L1 or English L2) mirrored in the interlanguage are interesting, too.

### **4. SPANISH - FRENCH INTERFERENCE IN INTERLANGUAGE: ANALYSIS OF GALLICISMS, TYPOLOGY AND POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS**

This section represents the practical part of our paper, where we classify the Gallicisms found in corpus according to the linguistic level they belong to. Moreover, we shall try to offer some possible explanations of these interferences in the light of the theoretical remarks presented in section 2.

#### **4.1. ORTHOGRAPHY AND PRONUNCIATION**

Orthography is the first level where students of Spanish encounter some problems as a consequence of transfer. They misspell some words, according to French orthography (e.g. \**livro* instead of *libro*) or they mark an unnecessary accent on some words. Both Spanish and French mark the graphic accent according precise, but different rules of accentuation. Let's analyse only a few misspelled words found in the corpus:

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<sup>6</sup> *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, 164, [http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework\\_en.pdf](http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/source/framework_en.pdf).

<sup>7</sup> "Errors are due to an 'interlanguage', a simplified or distorted representation of the target competence. When the learner makes errors, his performance truly accords with his competence, which has developed characteristics different from those of L2 norms. Mistakes, on the other hand, occur in performance when a user/learner (as might be the case with a native speaker) does not bring his competences properly into action". (*The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages*, 155).

Spanish	French	Interlanguage
tele	télé	*télé / *téle / *telé
a	à	vendrá *à mi fiesta *à tiempo he visto *à Miguel

Table 1 - Spelling errors in interlanguage

From the examples above, we can notice that students of Spanish mark the graphic accent on *tele* ‘television’ as in French although in Spanish it does not have an accent. Another example is the preposition *a* ‘to’ expressing direction or time that is frequently misspelled (cf. French: *Je vais à l’université* vs. Spanish: *Voy a la universidad*), or as a mark of the [+human] Direct Object.

When speaking, students pronounce some words as in French. For instance, some final letters are not pronounced, as in French. This is the case of final *-s* and *-e*, as in *has escrito* [ha eskrito], *es* [e]. Another frequent phenomenon is nasalisation of final vowels followed by /n/: *-ín, -ón, -ión*: *canción* [kansiõ], *corazón* [korasõ] etc., although Spanish nasal vowels do not have phonological value. Nevertheless, these pronunciation errors become less frequent in a short amount of time, due to the oral input students are provided with.

#### 4.2. LEXICON

Another area where we have identified a great deal of interferences is the lexicon. Due to the fact that Spanish, French and Romanian belong to the same family of Romance languages, similarities are very frequent, especially in the area of vocabulary. Students are aware of these formal similarities of different lexical items, due to their previous studies and everyday life experience (music, films etc.). In this context of linguistic resemblance, beginner students of Spanish who do not know a particular lexical item tend to ‘borrow’ them from other languages they can speak. They either use the same words, without any formal changes, or they slightly adapt the words to the Spanish morphosyntactic, phonetic or orthographic system.

Nevertheless, we should mention that the basic vocabulary does not have a similar form or the lexical items are different regarding to their form (spelling, pronunciation, etc.) and this can lead to transfer, misinterpretations, calques or utterance of false friends. The following contrastive table presents only a few examples of words that differ in Spanish, French and Romanian, in spite of belonging to the same linguistic family:

Spanish	French	Romanian
<i>padre</i>	<i>père</i>	<i>tată</i>
<i>agua</i>	<i>eau</i>	<i>apă</i>
<i>mañana</i>	<i>matin</i>	<i>mâine</i>
<i>mirar</i>	<i>regarder</i>	<i>a se uita (a privi)</i>

Table 2 - A short comparison of basic vocabulary

The part of lexicon that is more likely to be similar in various languages is the common international vocabulary, including specialized terms and loan words (of French, Latin, Greek origin). Usually, they have the same root or similar pronunciation and spelling (cf. Sp. *internacional*, En. / Fr. *international*, Ro. *internațional*; Sp. / Ro. / En. *hotel*, Fr. *hôtel*; Sp. / En. *hospital*, Fr. *hôpital* Ro. *spital* etc.).

Taken into consideration the two categories of vocabulary that may be similar in different languages, students tend to make analogies in the case of other words, too. Let us take a few examples of lexical calques used by first year students. Many verbs belonging to common vocabulary, such as *parler* for *hablar*, *regarder* for *mirar*, *finir* for *acabar / terminar*, *devenir* for *llegar a ser*, *convertirse en*, *ofrir* for *regular*. They also use the adverb *oui* instead of *sí* or the conjunction *mais* [me] instead of *pero*, especially when speaking. Another lexical Gallicism is *matin* used for *mañana*, e.g. *en ese matin* (*esa mañana*).

### 4.3. MORPHOSYNTAX

In the field of morphology and syntax, we could identify some cases of interference, as well. For instance, in interlanguage the Spanish verbal flexion interferes with French, *tú \*es, él \*est, ellos \*sont* (Sp. *tú eres, él es, ellos son*). One explanation is that, before acquiring the Spanish flexion, students are more familiar to the conjugation of French verbs, so they tend to use it to communicate.

Nominal elements are also subject of transfer: articles, pronouns and possessives. In interlanguage, some students use the following French articles: masculine, singular *le* and *les* for both masculine and feminine, plural. In the corpus, we found a great deal of interferences of French - Spanish pronominal systems (possessives, subject and clitic pronouns, interrogative and relative pronouns):

- possessive: *vendrá a \*mon aniversario (mi aniversario), aniversario de \*ma abuela (mi abuela), \*nos padre (nuestro padre), \*vos madre (vuestra madre)*;
- personal pronouns: *\*vous podréis, (vosotros / vosotras podréis)*;
- relative pronouns: *\*qui viene (que viene)*.

Another interesting situation is the use of the *de / de la* with the same function of the French partitive article. In the following example, *podemos hacer de ski*, we identify two different interferences. First of all, the word *ski* is misspelled (*esquí*), but, interestingly, the student used *de*, as a calque of the French *faire du ski*, where *du* is a partitive article. The same French article can be found in *escucho de la musique* or *de música*.

As Spanish is a pro-drop language, the use of phonetic subject is not compulsory. Interestingly, although this is a syntactic feature shared with Romanian, in both oral and written production we have noticed that learners tend to use unnecessary subject pronouns. Take the following example: *Yo me llamo Cristina*. instead of *Me llamo Cristina*, without the pronoun *yo*. In Spanish, we use the subject pronouns only when you want to insist on the subject or to make a contrast. In interlanguage, this deviant use of pronouns could be the result of the interference with languages that require a phonetic subject, such as French or English (both studied by Romanian students during high school). On the other hand, the use of pro subject (specific to French) prevailed to the pro-drop subject (specific to Spanish and Romanian).

### 4.4. THE RELATION BETWEEN L2 FRENCH AND L2 SPANISH: INTERFERENCE AND INTERLANGUAGE

The following figure presents the process of acquiring Spanish (L2) from the angle of interlanguage and Gallicisms. We tried to describe the relation established between French L2 and Spanish L2 reflected in Romanian students' interlanguage through the use of Gallicisms. We should emphasize that these French elements are not the only interferences which can be found in Romanian students' interlanguage. Beside them, one can identify a great deal of Romanian and English elements (morphosyntax, vocabulary, loan translations / calques etc.). First year students

learning Spanish (L2), whose oral and written productions have been analysed, have no previous knowledge of Spanish. During high school they studied other foreign languages, especially English and French, and this could be the reason why their interlanguage contains a great deal of Anglicisms and Gallicisms.

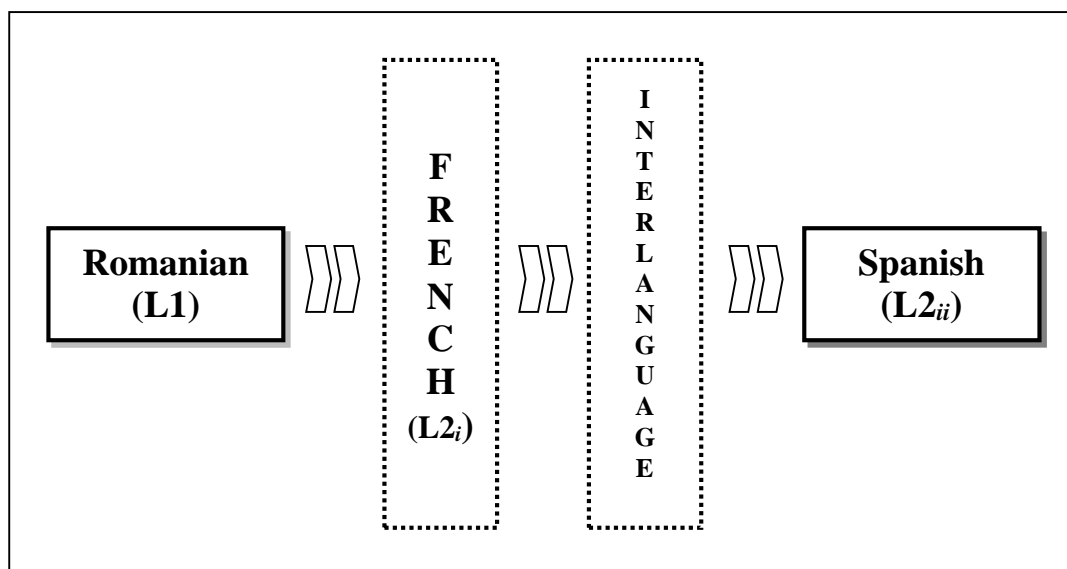


Fig. 1.

As both French and Spanish are L2 for the Romanian students, in Figure 1, we have marked French with L2<sub>i</sub> and Spanish with L2<sub>ii</sub> in order to show that French was acquired before Spanish and for a longer period of time. Thus, students tend to use previously acquired linguistic structures (rules, collocations, word order, lexical items, graphic accents etc.).

## 5. FINAL REMARKS AND TEACHING PROPOSALS

The research in the field of language acquisition and teaching should have practical implications. All conclusions of such investigations must lead to the improvement of the teaching methodology in order to obtain better results. In this section of our paper, we shall discuss the measures to be taken with regard to learners' mistakes and errors from the angle of the teaching process.

When dealing with errors and interlanguage, teachers should take into account two essential aspects. First of all, one essential aspect in teaching and learning foreign languages is separating the development of accuracy from the development of fluency. As we have already mentioned, errors are inevitable, that is why, at least at the beginning, it is more important to develop student's fluency and self-confidence when communicating and, only afterwards, the emphasis should lay on accuracy. If both teachers and students understand and make this distinction, the error will not be considered something bad. Moreover, teachers can work on fluency by using the active listening in class, in speaking activities.

Secondly, as *The Common European Framework of Languages* suggests, "all errors should be noted and corrected at a time when doing so does not interfere with communication"<sup>8</sup>. More precisely, teachers must not interfere in students' conversation or presentation each time they

<sup>8</sup> *The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment*, 155

commit errors, because this would impede communication and would make students lose their confidence. For instance, the corrective feedback, if we want it efficient, must come at the end of the oral production and should present systematically the errors and explain them. In addition, students should be provided with adequate and increasing input in the target-language and corrective feedback from a teacher, native speakers or other more knowledgeable users of the language. Thus, teachers must observe the learner's interlanguage (systematic patterns or rules, frequent errors as a result of interference) in order to correct it.

We can also say that the interlanguage depends on two main factors: the native language and the other second / foreign language(s) mastered by the learner. By monitoring the interlanguage, teachers can insist on these common mistakes in order to explain, correct and make the student aware of them. The input, the exposure to authentic language and feedback play a fundamental role in correcting the deviant use of language. These should lead to the effectiveness of the teaching process in order to maximise the language acquisition. Moreover, teachers themselves should be aware of these possible errors that may occur and predict them. An important aspect is not telling the students what errors could make or present two variants, as this could confuse students. One of the main objectives of research in this field of the language acquisition is to predict the way interlanguage can develop and how to correct these errors more efficiently.

To conclude, we can claim that acquiring foreign languages is a matter of time. The deviant use of language diminishes while fluency, competency and accuracy, along with developing linguistic skills, increase through sufficient input and after a certain period of time passes.

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### Webography

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