

**BENEMÉRITA UNIVERSIDAD AUTÓNOMA DE PUEBLA
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'Interlanguage transfer': A study through stimulated
recall about Spanish-speaking students who transfer
elements from English in order to learn German

**A thesis submitted to the School of Languages for the Degree of
LICENCIATURA EN LENGUAS MODERNAS**

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‘Interlanguage transfer’: A study through stimulated recall about Spanish-speaking students who transfer elements from English in order to learn German

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Abstract

This thesis reports a qualitative study of interlanguage transfer. This study was carried out at a public university in a faculty of modern languages in the city of Puebla. The main purpose of my research was to study the phenomenon of transfer from one foreign language to another, in order to investigate if the previous knowledge of the participants' L2 let the learning of another subsequent language depending on their closeness. The research data were collected through participants' written productions and stimulated recall interviews that were applied to 7 students who belonged to early German levels: beginners or A1.

The research found that the genetic relatedness and language closeness maintains features in common among languages which are highly associable and transferable. Thus providing students an advantage for learning when they apply that previous knowledge as a learning strategy, too.

Findings also revealed that there were negative outcomes because of the nature of L2 (e.g., English) and L3 (e.g., German).

Finally it was interesting to find that almost all the participants involved indicated that they could make associations between their L2 (e.g., English) and the third language they aimed to learn (e.g., German); but also English was part of their German learning because they were similar in some way. What concerns the negative outcomes those were product of the language mixing and calquing syntactical patterns, those structures which do not work satisfactorily will have to be changed, as they advance to further levels and increase their L3 knowledge, in order to avoid errors in the future.

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DEDICATIONS

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.0 Chapter Introduction

German is a difficult language to learn because of its complexity, even more difficult for the Spanish-speaking students than the ones who have some knowledge about English. Some students use English as a strategy for learning German. Phenomenon such as language transfer might be influencing this which is concerned to language acquisition studies; but also the belonging of a certain language family might be another factor because of the similar elements that exist between these two Germanic languages. Those elements in common let the positive transfer occurs while some others elements might cause problems or confusions at the time of learning, which is known as negative transfer.

1.1 Study Justification

This study was carried out because it is important to know how students employ strategies in order to learn a foreign language. As researcher, I am quite interested in knowing how language transfer occurs in students whose mother tongue is not being helpful for their learning. It is almost impossible for those students to make a connection between their mother tongue and the target language, in this case German; so they use an alternative language as a strategy for learning. This is worth being investigated for the nature of the phenomenon. As it is already known language transfer occurs by making a connection between the mother tongue and the target language. However in this particular case it is not happening in that way, the transfer is being made from one foreign language to another. This study attempts to explore how helpful or disruptive this connection might be.

1.2 Study Significance

This study attempts to explore the phenomenon of language transfer and how it works in students whose mother tongue (e.g., Spanish) does not help them for learning a foreign language (e.g., German). As a consequence they are forced to use a third language (e.g., English) as an intermediary for achieving the target language they aim to learn. This study could be useful for other students who are experiencing the language transfer phenomenon in a similar way; as a result, they would understand their meta-cognitive processes and be able to use learning strategies more efficiently in the target language.

1.3 Research Context

This study fits into the context of second language acquisition studies. The study was mainly focused on the language transfer which at the same time is a subcategory of Cross - linguistic influence (CLI). Language transfer is also divided into positive transfer and negative transfer which means that the transference of some linguistic elements (e.g., word order, verbs, vocabulary, cognates, morphemes, and so on) of the individual's native language might help or complicate the learning of the target language. In order to encourage positive transfer and to avoid the negative one, similarities must exist between these two languages. In that case the language families also play an important role while transferring, for instance, English and German belong to the Germanic languages. Particularly this study attempts to explore the kind of transfer that occurs from one foreign language to another.

1.4 Background of the researcher

At the time of writing the thesis and almost at the end of my social service I started working as a helper of a German teacher in a language faculty. This teacher was in charge

of a speaking-workshop of three people. However as the students were beginners, they did not produce a lot of spoken language. They only produced isolated words and they were able to identify cognates. The most interesting part is that those cognates did not have any similarity with the Spanish language; they had it with the English language instead. Since the moment I observed that, I wished to identify what kind of elements of English language they were using and which they were producing positive transfer and and/or negative transfer at the time of learning German.

1.5 Research Location

The research was made at a prestigious language faculty in a German speaking-workshop. Spanish-speaking students belonging to that workshop who had knowledge about English were the subjects of this study. At the time of carrying out this research project, they were beginning German learners who had just started to learn that language as part of their curricula and professional formation.

1.6 Study Aims

This study had several aims. The first one was to have a short students' writing in German in order to analyze and to detect positive and/or negative transfer. Another aim was to do a stimulated recall method with each student, and finally to find reasons for which they were using English.

1.7 Research questions

This study had two research questions which guided the data collection and analysis:

RQ1 – What elements from English are students using to help themselves write in German?

RQ2 – Which elements are causing problems?

1.8 Chapter summary and overview of the thesis document

This whole chapter served as an introduction to the thesis study. The justification and the significance of the study were described as well as the information about the participants and the location. Information about me, as researcher, was also provided. The overall topic of the thesis was to identify how transfer works and to detect elements of the English language that can be helpful or disruptive for learning German. The next chapter presents the theoretical framework and the literature review which will provide background information needed to comprehend this study.

Chapter II: Literature review

2.0 Introduction

As presented in the previous chapter, this study is about language transfer which lets the transference of linguistic elements from one language to another in order to learn a determined target language (TL). The central topic of this research is to identify the transference that occurs from one second language to a third language e.g., from English to German. One of the aims of this thesis was to identify similarities between these two Germanic languages and what kind of elements encourage positive and/or negative transfer in students whose native language (e.g., Spanish) is not useful for achieving the their target language (e.g., German). Thus, determining how beneficial or disruptive this kind of transfer is, this study was supported in related research and in a number of studies that have been one in the same context: Language acquisition which is a relatively new area of study. This chapter presents the theoretical framework – those studies, research and literature review associated with the thesis topic.

2.1 Language family

The term ‘language family’ can be defined as all the branches or languages that belong to the same group; these branches resemble a family tree which tries to represent the relation among languages that descend from a common ancestor, called *proto-language*. That is to say that, languages come from the same origin; therefore they share linguistic features between them.

According to Barber, the process of change in a language often leads to divergent development (1993, p. 53). Throughout this process changes and the formation of new

languages occur. Only an examination of these languages shows that many of them belong to some group of related languages, and some of these are very large, constituting what we call linguistic families (Barber, 1990 p. 53).

The ‘family tree theory’ was developed by the German linguist August Schleicher. This theory states that there are genetic relationships among languages, and the similarities and differences among them are regular when they are related (Fennel, 2001 p.18). If we follow the metaphor used by August Schleicher of the ‘language family tree’, then it is possible to trace back every single language to a common ancestor (Fennel, 2001 p. 18).

According to Fennell (2001 p .19) “there are natural indications that some languages seem closer one another to than others. As she explained, German speakers can usually learn Swedish rather than Russian. This is because German and Swedish are closely related languages – they are both members of the same language family. Therefore they have many linguistic features in common – whereas Russian is a member of the Slavonic family”. As Fennell said: “Languages within the same language group resemble each other” (Fennell, 2001 p. 19). As the following table shows:

Table 2.1 Genetic relatedness among Germanic and Romance languages

Source: Adapted from Fennell, B. (2001)

| | Germanic languages | | | Romance languages | | |
|----------------|---------------------------|---------|--------|--------------------------|----------|--|
| English | German | Swedish | French | Italian | Spanish | |
| winter | Winter | Vinter | hiver | inverno | invierno | |
| foot | Fuß | fot | pied | piede | pie | |
| two | zwei | två | deux | due | dos | |
| me | mich | mig | moi | me | me | |

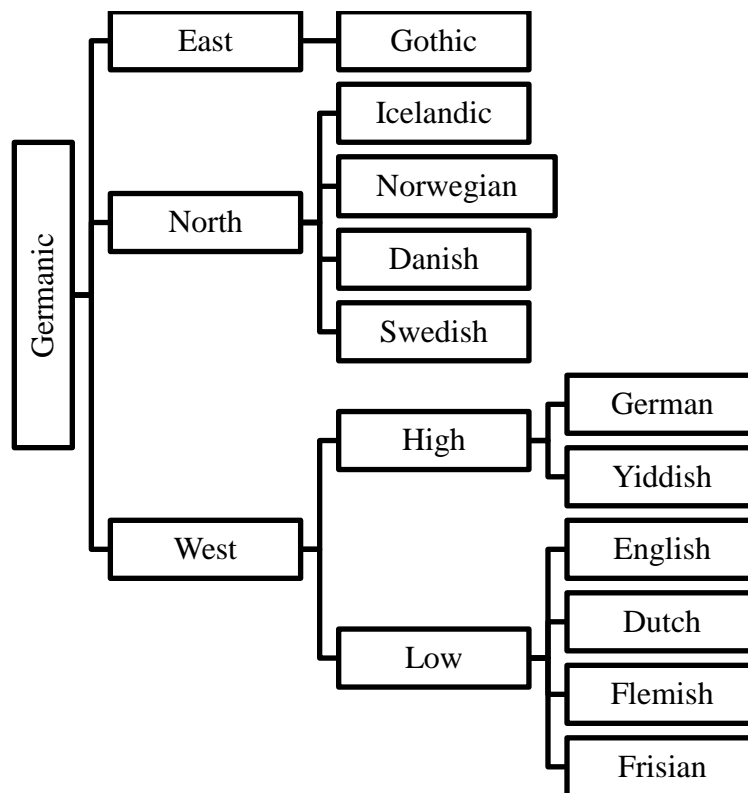
This study attempts to find a close relationship between English and German which belong to the same branch or language family e.g., *the Germanic languages* which will be presented in the following section.

2.1.1 Germanic languages

As explained in the previous section, languages descend from a common ancestor known as proto-language. In the particular case of Germanic languages that ancestor receives the name of *Proto-Germanic (PG)*. The branch which English belongs to includes German, Dutch, Frisian, Danish, Swedish and Norwegian (Barber, 1990, p. 81). The following scheme represents the members belonging to the ‘family tree’ of the Germanic languages:

Figure 2.1

Source: Adapted from Fennell, B. (2001)



The most spoken languages belonging to this family are English and German which along the centuries have evolved differently. However both have maintained some features in common.

2.1.2 Similarities between English and German

Although in these days a great difference exists between English and German, they maintain certain features in common as they descend from the same language family. One of the greatest differences between them is that English is an analytic language while German is a synthetic language. That means that throughout its evolution English has lost most of its inflections while German has kept most of them.

Among the similarities that have prevailed between English and German is the history, cognates which lead to vocabulary and word order in some phrases. Some quick, easy examples are *house/Haus, man/Mann, here/hier, and good/gut*. Of course, several similar examples like this exist. For instance, the German word for "dog" is "*Hund*." That looks pretty different, but if you know that "hound" is another English word for "dog," then you can see the similarity. In the same way, "chair" is "*Stuhl*" in German; it looks very different, but it is pronounced quite similar to "stool," a synonym for "chair." (In Sitzman ABC, 2011).

Through these comparisons it is possible to appreciate the close relation between English and German rather than Spanish, the following excerpt gives support to this idea:

Another area where we notice both similarities and differences is grammar. In some ways, German grammar is much more complicated than English grammar. (...) if you know that a verb is irregular in English, it is almost always irregular in German,

too. For example, the English verb "to swim" is conjugated *swim - swam - swum*; in German, it is *schwimmen - schwamm - geschwommen*. It is not *exactly* the same, but if you compare it to a Romance language like Spanish (*nadar - nadé - nadado*), then you can see English is quite a bit closer to German than Spanish. (In Sitzman ABC, 2011).

If we look at the following table, we observe that the similarities between the same language family members are evident. Through this table now it is possible to represent what has been explained so far. In the table, it can be observed the closeness of English and German, which are Germanic languages in a comparative way towards Spanish which is a Romance language:

Table 2.2 *Genetic relatedness of Germanic and Romance languages*

| Germanic languages | | Romance languages | |
|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| English | German | Spanish | Italian |
| man | Mann | hombre | uomo |
| good | gut | bueno | buono |
| here | hier | aquí | qui |
| hound | Hund | can | cane |

Fennell (2001, p. 20) explained the content of the above table as follows: “Though similarity in the actual shape or form of the words forms of such comparison, closer scrutiny reveals that the similarity is the fact based on systematic and regular sound correspondences between semantically related words, which we refer to as cognates”. Another aspect in common between English and German is the comparative form as it is constructed in the same way; that is to say by adding the ending *-er* to the adjectives. Also the word order of some phrases is similar such as ‘it is cold’, in German, ‘*es ist kalt*’. Or even in the equivalence and meaning of some words such as ‘homesick’, as it is known

there is no an equivalent word in Spanish for it; but in German there exists one with the exact meaning '*heimweh*'. The similarities that have prevailed between English and German are just a few and merely concern to some linguistic elements.

The features described above and these linguistic elements are perfectly transferable from English to German and vice versa as they descend from the same language family. Both have features in common which let learners make an association between them. In the same way, a Spanish - native speaker could transfer elements of his L1 to any Romance language as they are pretty similar as shown in Table 2.1. In the following section we will review an analysis which function is to compare and to detect features in common among languages like the ones revised in this section.

2.2 Contrastive Analysis:

Contrastive analysis was developed by Lado (1957). It is the study of comparing a pair of languages to identify their structural differences and similarities. Contrastive Analysis was used extensively in the field of Second Language Acquisition (SLA) as a method of explaining why some features of a target language were more difficult to acquire than others. Therefore, the difficulty in learning certain structures in a second language depend on the difference between the learners' first language and the target language they are trying to learn. The following lines describe how this method arose and its purpose:

Contrastive analysis was rooted in the practical need to teach a second language in the most efficient way possible (Ellis, 1990). As Lado (1957; cited in Ellis, 1990 p. 23), one of its main founders made clear, 'the teacher who has made a comparison of the foreign languages with the native language (also known as first language or

mother tongue) of the students will know better what real problems are and can provide for teaching them.

In order to identify areas of difficulty, Contrastive analysis was developed. This was founded on the belief that it was possible to predict what problems the learner of a particular L2 would face. To this end, descriptions of two languages were obtained and an interlingual comparison was carried out. This resulted in a list of features of the L2 which, being different from those of the L1 were presumed to constitute problem areas (Ellis, 1990 p. 7).

The type of analysis through comparison or contrast has two main aspects which characterizes it: a psychological and a linguistic aspect. The linguistic aspect has to do with the comparison of linguistic elements in common between the L1 and the L2. In order to establish a point of comparison between them, it was carried out among languages of the same language family. However some problems arose from this particular characteristic:

How can an effective comparison be executed if languages do not have any categories in common? This problem was ignored, however contrastive studies were carried out in the United States (e.g., Stockwell & Bowen 1965; Stockwell, Bowen & Martin 1965). These studies compared languages from languages belonging to the same language family (e.g. English and Spanish), so the problem of identifying a set of categories which were common to both languages was not acute. However, for practical purposes the problem of establishing the linguistic basis for comparison could be overlooked, the theoretical problem remained” (Ellis, 1990 p.25).

As the pervious text shows, problems existed at the time of comparing quite different languages because a point of comparison did not exist. As Ellis (1990) stated,

ideally CA needs to be based on universal categories. For this purpose Chomsky (1965, in Ellis 1990 p. 25) proposed a model, based on his theory of grammar that served as the theoretical basis for CA. The procedure followed was:

1. Description (i.e., a formal description of the two languages is made)
2. Selection (i.e., certain items are selected for comparison)
3. Comparison (i.e., the identification of areas of difference and similarity)
4. Prediction (i.e., identifying which areas are likely to predict problems)

(Ellis, 1990 p. 26)

Contrastive analysis attempted to predict problems in the language learning – teaching process by making comparisons among languages for finding features in common and differences. It was prudent to take it into account because CA attempted to look for points of comparison between languages which are similar to the information that was provided previously at the time of looking for features in common between English and German. As researcher I tried to emphasize the idea of what relatedness among languages belongs to the same language family and the similar and/or different features among them plays an important role when trying to learn a foreign language (FL). This fits into the area of *second language acquisition*; a field of study which explores the phenomena that take place in language learning such as cognitive processes like language transfer among others. According to Odlin (1989 p. 2) such cross –linguistic comparisons, made in CA, constitute the basis for the study of transfer. In the following section the area of study second language acquisition will be reviewed as well as its relevance in the present study.

2.3 Second Language Acquisition

Second-language acquisition (SLA), also known as second-language learning or L2 acquisition, has as aim of study the cognitive processes by which people learn any other language in addition to their first language (L1). That means that this research area not only focuses on second language learning, as its name points out. In other words, it includes the learning of subsequent languages. According to Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 7), SLA is the study of how second languages are learned; that is the learning of a language beyond the native language (NL). L2 can refer to any language learned after the L1, regardless of whether it is second, third, fourth or fifth language.

On the other hand, Rod Ellis in his book *Understanding of Second Language Acquisition* attempts to clarify what language acquisition concerns to, as a larger field of study. He defines SLA a general term that embraces both untutored acquisition and tutored acquisition (1985, p. 5). Ellis also states that SLA aims to identify aspects in learning that are relatively stable and hence generalizable. The term 'second language acquisition' is used to refer to these general aspects (1985, p. 4). Byrnes (1998, p.62) states that *Studies in Second Language Acquisition* are devoted to problems and issues in second language acquisition and foreign language learning; he defines broadly to include problems of language contact – interference, transfer, and pidginization. This study was mainly focused on the phenomenon of language transfer, particularly the one that occurs from one L2 to a L3, and its role in the language learning. Therefore areas and concepts related to language transfer will be reviewed in the rest of this chapter.

2.3.1 Cross-linguistic influence

In the present study the recognition of a concept like cross-linguistic influence plays an important role because it refers to interaction between or among languages. “Cross-linguistic influence (CLI) is a generic term for different ways in which different language systems in the mind interact and affect either the linguistic performance or the linguistic development (or both) of the individual concerned” (Sharwood, 1983, p. 192). Such kind of influence and interaction among languages receive the name of cross-linguistic influence and it occurs when languages come in contact. Doughty and Long (2003) state that there are several phrases for referring to cross-linguistic influence, among them are language transfer, linguistic interference, the role of mother tongue, native language influence and language mixing. The term of cross-linguistic influence is usually employed in cases where the TL is not an L2 but rather the L3 – and in some cases even L4 or L5 (Doughty & Long, 2003, p. 437). This definition fits perfectly to the thesis topic particularly in looking for influences from one L2 over the L3 learning. Terence Odlin (1989) affirms that the significance of cross-linguistic influences has long been a controversial topic. On the one hand, Sharwood Smith and Kellerman (1986 p. 1; Ellis 1994, p. 301) have argued that a superordinate term that is theory – neutral is needed and suggest cross-linguistic influence. They comment: “...the term ‘cross-linguistic influence’...is theory neutral, allowing one to subsume under one heading such phenomena as ‘transfer’, ‘interference’, ‘avoidance’”. Kellerman (1987 p. 3; Ellis 1994 p. 301) suggested that the term be restricted to ‘those processes that lead to the incorporation of elements from one language into another’. Through Kellerman’s statement it can be observed that the term *cross-linguistics* is intimately linked to language transfer. According to Murphy, a researcher who carried out a similar study to the thesis topic at the Columbia University, “such instances of transfer can

take the form of the substitution of an intended L3 word by an L2 word” (Murphy, n.d.). According to him cross-linguistic influence promotes the use of L2 items into an L3 utterance by making in some way a kind of hybrid among languages that intervene.

2.3.2 Language transfer

Language transfer (also known as L1 interference) concerns cross-linguistic influence which was briefly described in the section above. As its name itself indicates, it refers to the direct transference of words, concepts, or structures from one language to another in order to understand or produce expressions in the target language (Oxford, 1990, p. 47). One of the most asserted definitions about it is the one given by Odlin (1989, p. 27) who defines transfer as: “The influence resulting from similarities and differences between the target language and any other language that has been previously (and perhaps imperfectly) acquired”. As one of the central issues in SLA some discussions have arisen about its nature, as Ellis commented:

Transfer has continued to be a problematic area in L2 acquisition research not least because its associations with behaviorist learning theory. There can be little doubt, however, that learner’s L1 does play a significant part in L2 learning and, in particular perhaps, FL language (Marton, 1981). One of the major problems in determining exactly what this role is in the transfer that occurs in conscious translation from transfer that results from subconscious processes. Corder (1978a) talks of the former as a communication strategy and the latter as a learning strategy. The ‘transfer debate’ continues in full flow today (cf. Gass and Selinker, 1983; Kellerman and Sharwood-Smith, 1986). Discussion now takes place within the framework of cognitive or linguistic rather than behaviorist learning theories. The

term cross-linguistic influence is often preferred to that of transfer (Ellis, 1990, p. 29).

On one side, Corder (1978; Ellis 1990, p. 37) “outlines one way in which L1 interference can be recast as a learner ‘strategy’. He suggested that the learner’s L1 may facilitate the developmental process of learning a L2 by helping him to progress more rapidly along the ‘universal route when the L1 is similar to the L2 (Ellis, 1990). Krashen made a similar proposal, too. He suggested that learners can use the L1 to initiate utterances when they do not have gained enough knowledge of the target language for this purpose. From these two suggestions, it is essential to mention that Corder and Krashen viewed L1 as a resource that learners use in order to overcome their limitations; but also the strategies used by them are their input existing knowledge (Ellis, 1990, p. 37). In order to support the idea of transfer as a strategy, it is necessary to review the following information. Cohen defines language learning strategies as: “Those processes which are consciously selected by learners and which may result in action taken to enhance the learning or use of a L2 or FL, through the storage, retention, recall, and application of information about that language” (Gass & Selinker, 2008 p. 439).

Oxford(1990, p. 9) classified transfer as a learner’s cognitive strategy. Some of those strategies, such as analyzing, and particular memory strategies, like the keyword technique, are highly useful for understanding and recalling new information – important functions in the process of becoming competent in using the new language.

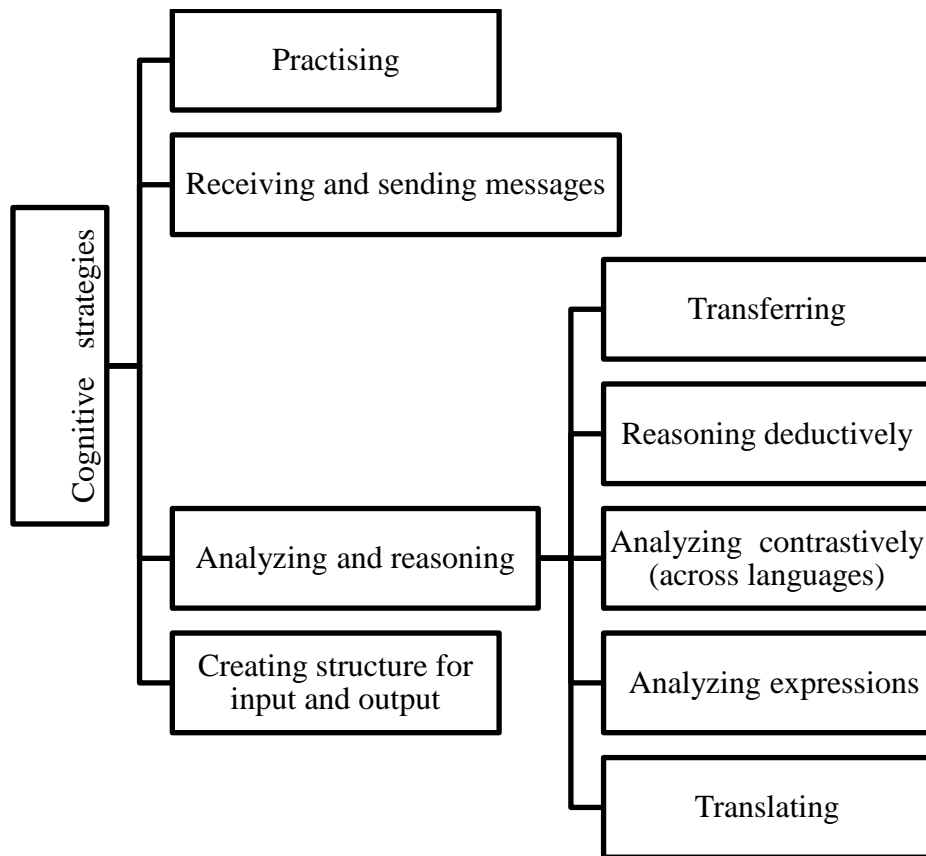


Figure 2 2. Source: Adapted from Oxford, R. (1990)

As Oxford also explained, these kinds of learners’ cognitive processes are extremely valuable as the learners, especially adults, generate their own knowledge about the new language they aim to learn. In other words, they construct a model in their minds based on analysis and comparisons, create general rules, and revise those rules when new information is available (1990, p. 44). However some students make mistakes inevitably because of that generalization of rules or because of transferring expressions from one language to another, typically from the L1 to the new language. As Oxford (1990, p. 45) explained “such mistakes characterize the interlanguage, which she defined as a hybrid form of language that lies somewhere between the native language and the target language”.

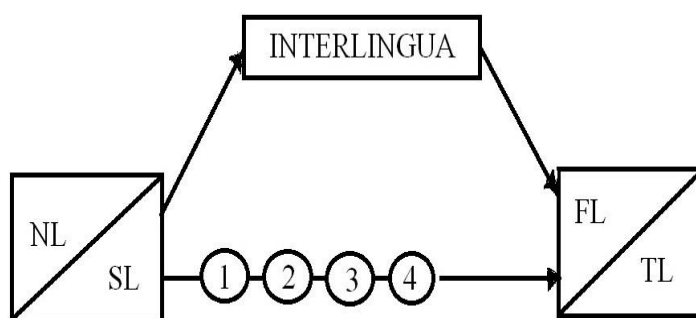
The interlanguage development reflects the operation of cognitive learning strategies. As Ellis attempts to clarify in the following lines:

The process by which interlanguages are constructed has been explained in various ways. One type of explanation identifies a number of cognitive learning processes such as L1 transfer, overgeneralization and implication (Cancino et al., 1974). According to this view, L2 learning, like L1 learning involves the learner discovering how the general principles that constitute any learner's innate knowledge of language are realized in the target language (cf. Cook, 1985)" (Ellis, 1990, p. 52).

A basic definition about it provided by Gass and Selinker (2008, p. 14) establishes that learners create a language system, known as interlanguage (IL). The following scheme shows that the learners create and develop 'approximate systems' while attempting to learn a FL:

Figure 2.3: The field of interlanguage studies

Source: Adapted from James, C. (1980)



Although researchers have attempted to give their own interpretations and definitions about IL, the term was coined by Selinker in 1972 which will be explained

further on. Interlanguage has been used to refer with different but related meanings; one of which fits better to the present study, refers to the combination that exists between a particular mother tongue and a target language (i.e., French mother tongue/ English target language vs. German mother tongue/English target language). According to its creator himself there are five principal processes operated in IL:

- 1) Language transfer
- 2) Overgeneralization of the target language rules
- 3) Transfer of training
- 4) Strategies of L2 learning
- 5) Strategies of communication

(Selinker, 1972; Ellis 1990 p. 48)

After reviewing this information, we can see that transfer or L1 interference is one of the several processes responsible for interlanguage (Ellis, 1990, p. 48); indeed, it is the initial and main process of IL.

In this section we have reviewed a general definition of transfer. It can be defined as the direct transference from one language to another. So far it has been mentioned the sort of transfer which occurs from the L1 or NL to the L2, known as substratum transfer; however the idea of transferring linguistic features from one L2 to a L3 must not be dismissed. The term assigned to it is interlanguage transfer. The reasons for focusing in this less conventional type of transference were provided in Section 2.1 of this same study. At this point, the study will be focused on that kind of transfer which the thesis topic is closer.

As mentioned previously, SLA also incorporates many types of acquisition, including a third, fourth or fifth subsequent language to the L1 (Section 2.3). “By definition, interlanguage transfer is the influence of one L2 (using the broad sense of this

term) over another” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p.152). In words of Gass & Selinker (2008, p. 152) in order to more completely understand the language transfer, it is necessary to go beyond the NL or L1 and the TL. According to them there is a number of variables that can impact the extent to which one of the languages involved (the L2 and the L1) will influence the acquisition of L3. Among these are the age at which L3 learning begins, the context of acquisition, individual characteristics, and language distances among the three or more languages (2008 p. 21). Cenoz (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 154) discussed a number of factors that might influence cross-linguistic influence in general (e.g., age, context of use, proficiency)”.

Within the area of multiple language acquisition studies SLA language similarity and its effects have been extensively investigated. A number of researchers like De Angelis, 1999; Dewale, 1998; Ringbom, 1987; Selinker and Baumgartner Cohen, 1995; Stedje, 1977; Vildomec, 1963; Williams and Hammarberg, 1998 (as cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008) have explored the particular phenomenon of interlanguage transfer. On one side, Vildomec (cited in Gass & Selinker 2008, p. 154) observed that L3 production tends to come from the second language and not from the native language. “This may occur even when the two languages are not phonetically similar” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 154). These researchers explored the influence of a L2 over the L3. They discussed the use of function words from a second language rather than the native language in third language production (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 154). The results of their studies showed that the similarity between or among languages made an activation of the learner’s previous knowledge, but also they show how the transference for one L2 to an L3 happens.

For exemplifying what was proposed and found by some of those researchers, this study presents fragments of their whole investigations. For example, De Angelis (1999;

Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 152) examined the production of Italian by a French-Canadian L1 speaker with three foreign languages: Spanish, English and Italian. She found that interlanguage transfer occurred from Spanish to Italian because of the strong similarity patterns in phonology which served as an activation as was explained previously; the L2 knowledge formed the basis of associating and generating a new one in the L3. Another study carried out by Stedje attempted to examine the interlanguage transfer in Finnish learners of German as L3 with Swedish as L2 (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008 p. 154). In this case Stedje found that the predominant transference was from the Swedish (L2) to German (L3) as it was explained in Section 2.1 of the present study. On the other hand, Williams and Hammarberg (cited in Gass and Selinker, 2008 p. 154) carried out a study but this time with an English native speaker who has German as L2 and Swedish as L3. “The authors proposed that the German second language was activated in parallel to the third language” (Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 154). Although they did not find a direct similarity, some German features such as lexical or structural features were transferred to Swedish. The transference from L1 (e.g., English) could also happen to L2 (e.g., Swedish) because of a common characteristic that these three share: they belong to the Germanic languages (Section 2.1.1). However there must be more closeness between German and Swedish for the researchers to obtain those results.

From these types of studies, Klein (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008, p. 153) asked whether the knowledge of more than one language facilitates the acquisition of additional languages. “She tested matched groups of monolinguals (English as an L2) and multilinguals learning English as a third or fourth language” (Gass & Selinker, 2008). Of course, what she found is that there is clear evidence which shows that multilinguals are

better learners than monolinguals. Her study had support from a similar study carried out by Ramsay (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008).

To conclude this section, I will say that language transfer is under the influence of several factors: *cross-linguistics, interlanguage, learners' cognitive processes, learning strategies*, and the *relation that exists* between or among languages; that is to say that it has to do with certain similarities and/or differences they share. As Ellis (1985, p. 7) explained, in the case of similarities among them, it functions positively while in the case of differences it functions negatively. That means that language transfer has its beneficial and/or disruptive outcomes in the language learning. Those phenomena are known as *positive transfer*, and *negative transfer*.

2.3.3 Positive transfer

In the previous section positive transfer was briefly described. It is caused by the similarities and close relatedness between the L1 or L2 and the TL. Positive transfer also receives the name of 'facilitation' because those existing similarities help the learner to make associations and in consequence to get positive outcomes while learning a foreign language. Corder describes the transfer as a facilitation strategy (cited in Gass & Selinker, 2008 p. 153).

Ellis made clear the facilitative effect of the L1 is evident in other aspects of L2 acquisition:

In many cases this is obvious, as when two languages share a large number of cognates (i.e., English and French), thus giving the learners a head start in vocabulary. Chinese learners of L2 Japanese have an enormous advantage over

English learners because of the similarity of the Chinese and Japanese writing systems” (1994, p. 304).

What is said above is clear evidence of how positive transfer takes place. But also it shows that the starting point for transferring elements from language to another are the cognates; words that have a common origin or etymology therefore they have similar or identical meaning. Then cognates form the basis of vocabulary, as explained above, because they are easy to remember and resemble existing knowledge. But not only Ellis attempted to explore this kind of phenomenon. Odlin (1989 p. 1) gives a similar explanation about it by suggesting that the close relatedness of some languages facilitates their learning, he stated:

Many believe that the study of one language (e.g., Latin) will make easier the study of one closely related language (e.g., French). Similarly, people often believe that some languages are “easy” in comparison with others. For example, many English speaking university students see European languages such as French as less difficult than Oriental languages such as Chinese. Since the similarities between English and French seem to be relatively great, French is often considered “easy”.

The phenomenon described by Odlin states that this language facilitation is the result of the cross-linguistic influences as well as the language transfer. According to Doughty and Long (2003, p. 438-439) the facilitating influences come from the cross-linguistic similarities. Almost at the beginning of this chapter similar examples to this extract were mentioned when giving background information about the Germanic languages (Section 2.1). Researchers such as Doughty and Long (2003, p. 439-441) presented a similar example about positive transfer. Their study shows that similarities

which let the ‘facilitation’ happen depend on the language families. Originally the study mentioned was carried out by a researcher named Ringbom who argued that positive transfer affected notably the L2 learning. Ringbom (cited in Doughty & Long, 2003, 438-441) made a cross-linguistic comparison of Swedish and Finnish native speakers who aimed to learn English. In their explanation they give the following information as Swedish are Indo-European and Germanic languages Swedish speakers showed a greater success and progress over the Finnish speakers. This was encouraged by the similarity of the prepositional system but also by the large amount of cognate vocabulary – those aspects give a tremendous advantage in learning English – as Doughty and Long explained. On the other hand, Finnish speakers had problems because the Finnish language belongs to the non-Indo European languages; that is why “countless hours must be spent in remembering English words having little or no similarity to those of their NL” (Doughty & Long, 2003 p. 441). In these three examples about how positive transfer occurs, it is possible to observe that the belonging to specific language families plays quite a relevant role while learning a foreign language. This is because the similarities that prevail among languages let the learners generate new knowledge from the existing one. However not all researchers see transfer as beneficial. According to Ellis (1994 p. 304) some researchers have ignored the L1’s positive contribution and have only focused on the transfer’s negative aspects such as learners errors.

2.3.4 Negative transfer

When we talk about negative transfer, doubtless we are referring to learners’ errors. The interest of some researchers for focusing on them resemble the contrastive analysis (Section 2.2) which aimed to detect and predict difficult learning areas rather than looking for learning facilitators. One of those researchers is Weinreich who assumed that negative

transfer is more interesting than positive transfer (Doughty & Long, 2003 p. 438). He put special emphasis on the interference effects because he considered the language transfer as an impediment for correctly learning the structures belonging to the TL.

In the section 2.3.1 it was mentioned that transfer also receives the name of interference. However as explained by Odlin “the term interference implies (...) negative transfer”. Also Doughty and Long (2003) commented that transfer should not be equated to interference. From this information we can say that according to those researchers ‘interference’ has a negative connotation related to errors and in consequence with negative transfer. As explained in Section 2.3.2 positive transfer is the result of similarities between or among languages while negative transfer is the result of differences. Odlin (1989) establishes that the cross-linguistic influences result in errors, overproduction, underproduction, miscomprehension, and other effects that constitute a divergence from norms in the target language.

1) Underproduction consists of producing a very few or no examples of a target language structure.

2) Overproduction. According to Odlin, it is sometimes simply a consequence of underproduction referring to the excessive use of a structure.

3) Production errors. In speech and writing there are three types of errors especially likely to arise from similarities and differences in the NL and the TL: (1) substitutions and (2) calques:

-Substitutions involve use of NL forms in the TL.

-Calques are errors that reflect very closely a NL structure.

According to Odlin “substitutions and calques are frequently the types of errors to which writers of bilingualism refer when they discuss transfer errors, and these types might

suggest that transfer always involves an obvious correspondence between the NL and the TL” (1989, p. 36 -37). Theorists such as Krashen (1993; Odlin 1989 p. 38) proposed that transfer is a falling back on the “L1 rule”.

2.4 Conclusion

This chapter served as the theoretical framework for supporting the thesis topic. The information that served as the basis for carrying out this study was provided. The first largest area to be focused on was language evolution in order to establish a close relationship between English and German, as they belong to the same language family. Thus, stating that those languages have features in common which make the transference of certain elements possible that might help English students to learn German.

The second largest area of this study was SLA, which as explained previously has to do with the acquisition and/or learning of subsequent languages in addition to the L1. Research in this area was consulted in order to explore closely the influence of interlanguage and cross-linguistics over the language learning, the phenomenon of transfer, its positive and negative outcomes, and how it works.

For concluding this chapter, I will say that after reviewing all this information and from all these premises it is possible to say that language transfer can also happen from a second to a third language as a learning strategy for constructing the learner’s initial knowledge. Of course, they must share similar linguistic features like in the case of English and German. In particular as there is no way to make a connection between learners’ L1 (e.g., Spanish) and the TL (e.g., German); students appeal to their L2 (e.g., English) which is similar and closer to the L3 they aim to learn in order to form the basis of their primary knowledge in German language.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

3.0 Chapter introduction

In the previous chapters the reasons for carrying out this study and the theoretical framework were presented. Particularly this chapter presents and provides background information of the participants and the instruments which were used for collecting and analyzing the data. This study is about the transference of linguistic elements from the participants' L2 (e.g., English) to an L3 (e.g., German). The intention of the study was to find out which elements of English language were useful or causing interference in the learning of German with the students in the study. Both languages belong to the same branch in the 'language family tree': the Germanic languages. This is one reason for which they both have features in common which make the association happen between them and facilitates the learning. In order to find those helpful and/or unhelpful elements of transfer a methodology known as 'stimulated recall' was used. According to Gass and Mackey (2000) stimulated recall can be used for helping the participants recall thoughts about a task performed. It focuses on the cognitive and/or mental processes while assimilating and recalling information through stimuli. As explained by Mackey and Gass those processes refer to search and storage mechanism; all of those are relevant for the SLA studies as they let researchers explore and investigate the steps learners go through as they retrieve lexical and morphosyntactic information. Of course, "differences and similarities between first and second language processes are obviously of interest" (2000 p. 23). The goal of SLA research is to determine: (1) the knowledge that learners have of the second language (2) the source of that knowledge. A major source of information about L2 knowledge is production data; that is, utterances produced by learners (Mackey & Gass 2000, p. 1). Researchers apply this type of methodology for finding out how second languages are

learned and taught. Those are the reasons why this methodology was ideal for reaching the aims of this research project.

The following sections provide detailed information about the participants and the instruments used during the research process.

3.1 Study participants

For the purposes of the thesis topic the participants involved in this study had to possess certain characteristics. First of all, I must mention that the subjects were Spanish-speaking students who were beginning German learners whose mother tongue constantly complicated their target language learning. However they possessed knowledge about English language as their L2. That knowledge started to form the basis of their German knowledge.

As those learners belonged to a German workshop in which only three or four people could attend, I decided to take that sample to analyze their productions. Everything was planned in convenience of the study aims; so far the methodology and the participants were mentioned. The following section presents the instruments which served for handling, collecting and analyzing data.

3.2 Study instruments

The study instruments were planned and designed according to the methodology used. The use of text was one of those in order to analyze and identify cognates in the English and German language. The advantage of using this type of instrument is that texts produce reliable evidence about a sample (Silverman, 2000 p. 128). At the same time the use of texts could not give the expected results because of the length of vocabulary

therefore the writing had to be under control by giving the participants a specific topic to talk about and specifying the number of words.

Another instrument was the 'stimulated recall interview' which was carried out after the written productions. the learners' responses were important for answering the research questions and to discover how the input received through stimuli was being processed. The advantage is that the 'stimulated recall methodology' lets the researcher discover the participants' language strategies and how they were generating their L3 amount of knowledge.

3.3 Data handling procedures

Mackey and Gass (2000, p. 57) recommend developing a detailed protocol because it helps the researcher to anticipate problems while also acting as a checklist for the many variables and factors the researcher needs to consider and balance while carrying out the procedure. These types of procedures were divided into two categories the 'text analysis' and the 'stimulated recall interviews'. The text analysis was linked to the selection of a specific topic that have similar words in German and in English and to the extension of the writing. The students would have to write at least fifty words which was adequate to their level. Thus, providing the morpho-syntactic elements in common between the two Germanic languages to be studied. On the other hand, the interview was made in order to detect the reasons why learners were transferring elements from one language to another and for verifying how the stimuli they responded to stimuli.

3.3.1 Data collection procedures

As explained in the previous sections the students were asked to write a short text in German for identifying similarities between English and German. Thus detecting what kind of elements promotes the positive and negative transfer. The type of stimulated recall used in this research receives the name of ‘consecutive recall’. The composing process happened as follows:

First, a text was handed in to serve as a model. Immediately after finishing revisions of the texts produced by the learners the participants were interviewed about the language choices they made during the composing process, using the initial and final products as stimuli, as proposed by Mackey and Gass (2000, p. 51).

3.3.2 Data Analysis procedures

Gass and Mackey set out that “there are several steps that need to be considered when analysis of stimulated recall data is carried out” (2000 p. 63). They proposed that these steps include transcriptions, coding, and description of data. They also mention that the information provided by the stimulated recall methodology might be qualitative, quantitative or a combination of both. It had to be taken into account that the coding categories were highly related to the research questions and hypotheses of the specific second language study as Mackey and Gass recommended (p. 99). Procedures including tabulating, counting, quantifying, and drawing inferences about relations among different kinds of utterances are often carried out in an attempt to reduce the subjectivity of qualitative coding. The revisions of L2 writings and stimulated recall interviews usually involve quantifying categories.

3.4 Chapter Conclusion

For concluding, this chapter served to explain the methodology used in the handling, collection and analysis of data. It presented the procedure that was followed to obtain the required information for answering the research questions. It also presented the subjects of the study by giving background information about them and why they were chosen for this study. Now in the next chapter the results of this analysis will be presented

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS

4.1 Chapter introduction

The previous chapter explained the methodology and the procedures followed to collect and analyze the data. Now to continue with the research project, this chapter will reveal the results obtained during the research process; that is to say the information gathered through the methodology applied and the instruments used for collecting and analyzing data. The results were the ones expected at the beginning of the research. Thus, as researcher, I can say that the interlanguage transfer, the transference from one foreign language to another, is possible to happen and to be used as a strategy for learning or as a facilitator between two related languages. This relation between English and German represents an advantage for students at the time of learning especially some vocabulary expressions. However it also causes confusion as English has been simplified along its evolution, thus losing most of the inflections while German has kept them. Then the grammar cannot be the same. In order to identify elements in common between these two, the participants were asked to write a composition in which positive and negative outcomes were observable resulting of the interlanguage transfer. In the sections below the results are described in detail.

4.2 Research questions

The research questions which guided the research project were the ones that follow.

RQ1 – What elements from English are students using to help themselves write in German?

RQ2 – Which elements are causing problems?

4.3 Results

At the beginning of the research I planned to work with a small group of three or five people, all of them belonging to a German workshop. However because of the circumstances that could not be possible as the schedule of it was inaccessible. In consequence I was forced to look for participants who had characteristics I needed for carrying out the research. Although the plan underwent some changes and I could not work as expected in that workshop through an observation made for monitoring the students L3 learning the following information was obtained. The teacher is the key for understanding why the students transfer linguistic elements from English to German. He constantly encourages that kind of transfer which is referred as 'transfer in training', and it is part of the dynamics of each session. For starting each lesson the teacher shows the students a text in German, then they read the text and later he asks them to look for cognates which in most of cases have close relations with English rather than Spanish, their mother tongue. Those cognates help students to interpret the texts. After that, the sense and the content of it seem to be clearer for all of the students.

In general terms although in most cases the learners are not totally aware of the 'family tree language' as the lessons were in progress the students themselves realized that is a great similarity between English and German and started to make associations between them. Now that these aspects were explained I can say that this is the starting point for the rest of the research.

First of all, I have to mention that not all the results had positive repercussions on the students' learning. Some of them caused problems and confusion. But all of those phenomena will be explained in detail below.

As explained in Chapter 3, the methodology employed for gathering and analyzing data was ‘stimulated recall’ that applied in SLA studies attempts to determine the knowledge that learners possess about an L2 or other additional languages, and the source of that knowledge.

After making the necessary modifications the stimulated recall sessions were planned originally for five German students. However in the sessions 7 students participated. Those two extra participants were volunteers. The dynamics of the stimulated recall session consisted of watching three videos in which vocabulary and some phrases similar in English and in German were shown. This vocabulary had to do with ‘the weather’ (*Das Wetter* in German). Those videos attempted to work as stimuli for refreshing their minds and previous knowledge which seemed to have worked in the expected way.

After watching the videos, students had to write a letter in which they took into account certain aspects for composing the text. The type of text to be written was a letter because as I knew their teacher asked them to write lots of them. for that reason I thought that a letter with at least fifty words would be the most suitable for their level. The fact of setting a determined quantity of words was decided to make students organize a text and not only writing lines or isolated sentences. The topic of the letter ‘the weather’ was chosen because of the quantity of similarities between both languages; in the writing they could include vocabulary related to months and seasons of the year, adjectives and some expressions for describing the weather.

During the ‘composing process’ learners were indicated to write the letter as they usually did without setting a limit of time. And of course they were informed that they were not going to be evaluated or graded for that task. The writing process lasted at least 20 minutes in which they were monitored. Some of them were doubting while writing and

thought a lot while others showed a major facility at the time of composing while some others tried to look for notes in their notebook.

As soon as they finished writing, they were interviewed about their experiences during the composing process. Their comments were quite interesting and most of the times they seemed to support the topic of the present research project. Some of the students mentioned that English helps them and it works as a facilitator between their L2 and their L3 because English and German are similar. And that those languages have many words in common which receive the name of cognates. They identified those words in the videos shown at the beginning of the session. Some of them commented that these words are easy to remember because English words resemble German words: For instance:

Table 4.1 *English – German cognates*

| English | German |
|----------------|---------------|
| winter | Winter |
| windy | Windig |
| November | November |

Or even they are just different in only one letter, for example:

Table 4.2 *Examples of words with similar spelling*

| English | German |
|----------------|---------------|
| Summer | Sommer |
| January | Januar |
| December | Dezember |

A participant commented that he was thinking in English while writing because they are languages that share almost the same history so they intimately related. So he was aware of the ‘genetic relatedness’ that exists between these two languages. Even he showed some of the words he used and pointed out its relatedness. Those are some of the reasons

for which he transfers elements from English as a facilitator; but also he produced errors as German grammar is more complex than English grammar.

Even there were two extra participants who told that they do not have enough or any knowledge of English. However they could make the connection between English and German through the stimuli done at the beginning of the session and could recall the vocabulary presented and use them in the text. Also there was a participant who mentioned that she never made a connection between English and German as they are totally different languages and they are not related in any way. Because of that, her composition had to be analyzed differently because she made many errors at the time of writing. Doubtless they were not result of the interlanguage transfer. It is possible that her errors were produced because of a lack of knowledge of German syntax or even because of the transference from Spanish to German; in that case the mother tongue or L1 might be causing interference. To justify this I will say that the structures used had no relation with the German language nor with English as that participant denied any kind of relation. Maybe these comments were the result of her absence at the beginning of the session while the other participants were exposed to the stimuli which she was not. Anyway her responses provided worthy information for this thesis project as she made more errors than the ones who declared that English was helping them in some way.

To sum up, most of participants declared that their previous knowledge about English let them generate new expressions in German as it helped them to learn vocabulary and some expressions. Most of them remarked that those languages are alike, but that also there were some other elements which made them confused, such as grammar which is quite different.

Now, from this point and the study will only focus on describing the positive and negative outcomes of the ‘interlanguage transfer’.

As mentioned in Chapter 2, Chomsky set parameters for contrasting language grammar in order to predict possible errors in learning, especially when a language is being taught, known as the *contrastive analysis hypothesis*. However that is not the case of this study as I am not trying to predict errors but studying the effects of interlanguage transfer. That is the reason why that approach was not used for analyzing data obtained. The results were interpreted in terms of spelling and syntax. Through the analysis of the productions it was possible to observe likenesses between these two Germanic languages: German and English to identify which elements were transferred directly and brought good outcomes. The writings showed that learners effectively looked for cognates at the time of writing. At first sight cognates are easy to find throughout the texts. Mainly they refer to vocabulary related to ‘the weather’ as it was the topic of their productions. Some of them were the ones shown in the following table:

Table 4.3 *Examples of cognates most often used in the participants’ productions*

| English | German |
|----------------|---------------|
| summer | Sommer |
| winter | Winter |
| cold | kalt |
| sonny | sonnig |
| windy | windig |
| wind | Wind |
| Sun | Sonne |

The months of the year also were very used throughout the texts as they keep a great similarity or even the spelling is the same as shown in the table:

Table 4.4 *Cognates: Months of the year*

| English | German |
|------------------|---------------|
| January | Januar |
| February | Februar |
| March | März |
| April | April |
| May | Mai |
| June | Juni |
| July | Juli |
| August | August |
| September | September |
| October | Oktober |
| November | November |
| December | Dezember |

Even, some expressions like the ones contained in the following table were frequently found; these expressions can be directly transferred from English to German as they share the same word order:

Table 4.5 *Short expressions with the same word order in English as well as in German*

| English | German |
|----------------|---------------|
| It is sunny | Es ist sonnig |
| It is windy | Es ist windig |
| It is cold | Es ist kalt |
| It is hot | Es ist heiss |

But what about other words which are not necessarily related to the selected topic in the written productions? Of course there are many words which share a morphological root, like in the case of some verbs, such as:

Table 4.6 *Similar verbs between English and German*

| English | German |
|---------|--|
| learn | Lernen |
| swim | Schwimmen |
| hope | Hoffen |
| come | Kommen |
| drink | trinken (in its imperative form sounds more alike to the English verb: 'trink') |

In the particular case of the verbs 'hope' and '*hoffen*', we can say that these words are equivalent as they have exactly the same meaning and connotation. This property is called lexical semantics. English and German words are also similar in terms of semantics as can be appreciated in following examples:

Table 4.7 *Semantic equivalence between German and English words*

| English | German |
|---------|----------|
| hope | hoffen |
| wait | warten |
| expect | erwarten |

In Spanish there is the same word for referring to these three concepts assuming that they have almost the same meaning. That is another point to take into account as the German words have more or less the same connotation as the English ones. Therefore these elements are highly transferable and helpful, too. The participants could clearly distinguish that connotation in their productions with the verb '*hoffen*' and '*warten*' as shown:

'*Ich hoffe, dass dir gut geht*' —————> **I hope** you are fine
'*Ich warte deine Antwort*' —————> **I wait** for your answer

Another verb with the same kind of equivalence is the verb '*sein*' or the verb 'to be' which is highly transferable especially conjugated in the third person of the singular: '*ist*' –

‘is’. While in the Spanish language a distinction is made and two different verbs are used for addressing those verbs, in English and in German it is not.

This is also the case of the modal verb ‘*können*’ which resembles the English modal verb ‘can’ especially when conjugated in the first and third person of the singular ‘*kann*’. These two modal verbs ‘*können*’ and ‘can’ have exactly the same meaning, use and function. Another similar modal verb is the verb ‘*müssen*’ which resembles to the modal ‘must’ particularly when conjugated in the second person of the singular ‘*musst*’. In fact there is not much difference between the English and the German modal verbs as they have almost the same function.

But that is not all, there are other words in those texts which have close relatedness and are semantically equivalent, too. For example, the use of prepositions of place such as ‘in’ which is quite similar in German and in English. But although both have the same meaning, in some cases in German language the preposition ‘in’ is accompanied by a declension in accusative and/or dative, something that does not occur in English. In the case of the participants’ compositions it was employed to express that they were in a determined city or place which did work satisfactorily. See the examples below:

Table 4.8 *The use of the preposition ‘in’ as a locative preposition in German and in*

English

| German | English |
|---|-------------------------------|
| ‘ <i>Ich bin in Puebla</i> ’ | I am in Puebla |
| ‘ <i>Ich wohne in Puebla</i> ’ | I live in Puebla |
| ‘ <i>Hier in Mexiko</i> ’ | Here in Mexico |
| ‘ <i>In meinem Land</i> ’ | In my country |
| ----- | |
| ‘ <i>Warst du schon mal in Puebla?</i> ’ | Have you ever been to Puebla? |

In the examples of Table 4.8 above it is evident that the word order is also concordant except in the last one. The German preposition ‘*in*’ can also be used as a preposition of time but that entails exceptions. In the following examples that preposition is adequately used and does not require any declension, also the word order is concordant:

‘*Mein Geburtstag ist in Januar*’ —————> My birthday is in January

The compound words facilitate the learning of L3 students. German language makes extreme use of these, but also English tends to join words called lexemes in order to create others. Some examples found in the participants’ compositions are:

Table 4.9 *Compound words similar in German and in English*

| English | German |
|------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Birth + day = Birthday | Geburt + s + tag = Geburtstag |
| Rain + bow = Rainbow | Regen + Bogen = Regenbogen |

Certainly, knowing how these words are compounded, they can give advantage for learning a language which lexicon contains lots of words just like the ones above.

And finally, we will revise words which are written or pronounced similarly. That is the case of the conjunction ‘*und*’, the adjective and also adverb ‘*gut*’, the cognate ‘*Bier*’, and the adverb of place ‘*hier*’. These words were found in the compositions written by the participants. They were analyzed in terms of spelling. See below:

Table 4.10 *Words with similar spelling and pronunciation*

| English | German |
|----------------|---------------|
| and | und |
| good | gut |
| Beer | Bier |
| here | hier |

For concluding this section, these are some of the English elements found in the written productions which helped the participants write in German. To summarize I will say that cognates are highly useful for acquiring vocabulary and making associations between similar languages. Some words in English as well as in German may be identical or even just being different in one letter. There is a number of those between them which are highly distinguishable. Also some short expressions or phrases have the same word order in both languages which make them transferrable. The morphological roots also help learners make connections with similar words although they had been inflected like in the case of verbs. Semantics also play an important role in this matter as many words in English and German are semantically equivalent. The use of determined words is almost the same like in the case of modal verbs, something similar happens with the prepositions of place. Even, words which sound similar and are written similarly are also distinguishable and transferable. But not only that, the compound words help even more if the language which is attempted to learn combines lexemes in order to create new words. These are the elements which lead to the positive transfer from English to German; some linguistic items which have prevailed throughout centuries of evolution maintaining the 'genetic relatedness' of the Germanic languages.

Nevertheless, we cannot say that this connection between English and German is positive all the time. If we consider that English is an analytic language and German a synthetic one, then there must be big differences between them in terms of grammar. From here and on, we will review the elements that caused errors and confusion at the moment of writing. While making the interview, some participants mentioned that they were thinking in English and mixing languages which made them confused. Something that was clear in the texts is the fact of simplifying the German structures and making them similar to

English, which means that they clearly transferred the syntactical structure of their L2 to L3.

For interpreting the data in terms of syntax the book '*Second Language Syntax*' by Hawkins (2001) was consulted as it contained German syntactical patterns which served as a guide for analyzing the utterances produced by participants into a whole text. Hawkins (2001) attempts to explain the developmental phases of syntax learning,.

First of all, syntax is the set of properties which determine the constructions of sentences in a language, explained (Hawkins, 2001). "If a sentence is constructed according to those properties, it is well formed (Hawkins, 2001 p. 2)". If the contrary happens then the sentence is ungrammatical. Once this point is clear, the analysis starts.

German syntax is variable as word order is freer and more flexible than English; although in many cases German word order may be identical especially in main clauses:

Subject + Verb + Object

According to Hawkins (2001 p.125) "in declarative main clauses in German, where the verb is in a simple tense form, word order is similar to English (SVO)". But this syntactical pattern cannot be applied for all the German sentences as there are several possible ways to arrange the words into a sentence in that language and maintain the same sense. Throughout the participants' productions several sentence types predominate with that particular structure (SVO). See the following examples:

1a '*Hier ist das Wetter wirklich schön, es ist heiss und sonnig*'.

Here the weather is beautiful, it is hot and sunny.

b '*Manche Tage es ist windig*'

Some days it is windy

c '*Manchmal es (ist) regnet*'

Sometimes it rains

d *‘Das ist alles heute von mir, ich warte deine Antwort’.*

That’s all from me for today, I wait for your answer.

e *‘Wenn hier Sommer ist, das Wetter ist warm’.*

When here is summer, the weather is warm

The examples (1a – 1e) are taken from the participants’ compositions. All of those are ungrammatical sentences for only one reason. If we observe the main clauses separately they are correct, but the sentences after the comma are considered errors as there is not verb inversion after it which automatically makes them ungrammatical sentences or errors. All those sentences (1a – 1e) followed the SVO structure. The correct syntactical pattern after the comma had to be as follows VSO. Then the correct arrangement must follow a pattern like this: SVO, VSO.

According to Odlin (1989, p. 36 – 37) this error has to do with ‘underproduction’. The underproduction is the avoidance of particular structures that tend to be quite different between or among languages. At doing this, participants avoided writing subordinated sentences, which entail a different word order arrangement, and also the verb inversion. Odlin (1989) stated that this specific type of errors might be a case of ‘overproduction’, too. That refers to the excessive use of a structure. In the case of participants’ productions they made excessive use of simple sentences or main clauses (SVO). Or even, it could be result of ‘production errors’ specifically the result of errors known as ‘calques’. According to Odlin (1989, p. 37) calques are errors that reflect correspondence between languages, therefore, it can be similar to a literal translation exposing the concordance between English and German. Here are some clear examples of calques, also taken from participants’ writings:

2a *Wie du weisst der Frühling hat angefangen.*

As you know the spring has begun.

b *Heute das Wetter ist sehr schön aber im Winter das Wetter ist schlecht.*

Today the weather is beautiful but in winter the weather is bad.

c *Ich lebe mit meine Familie*

I live with my family

d *Ich bin sehr gut*

I am very well

The examples from 2a to 2d show a clear correspondence between English and German, but that does not mean that they are well formed sentences indeed all of them resemble literal translations or calques:

(2a): The sentence is an example of an embedded clause as it starts with ‘*wie*’. There are two verbs in the sentence (V1 – V2). Then the verb tensed must be in clause-final position. That verb serves as auxiliary of the perfect tense. **Wie du weisst der Frühling angefangen hat.*

(2b): In German when a sentence starts with an adverb the subject and the verb are inverted that is called inversion. There is not any inversion where it should be. In German before the coordinating conjunction ‘*aber*’ (‘but’ in English) there must be a comma while in English there must not. **Heute ist das Wetter schön, aber im Winter ist das Wetter schlecht.*

(2c): Prepositions such as ‘*mit*’ must have been inflected in its correspondent grammatical case (dative). German is governed by four grammatical cases (Nominative, Accusative, Dative and Genitive). There is no inflection over the possessive pronoun that follows the preposition ‘*mit*’. **Ich lebe mit meiner Familie.*

(2d): The emissary used the wrong sentence for expressing well-being. **Mir geht's gut.*

It is incorrect to say something as example 2d. First, it resembles a literal translation from English to German, and second it falls into another type of negative transfer error called misinterpretation. That is something to consider otherwise the emissary would be misunderstood and his message would not be well received. Besides this, all participants failed in a particular German syntactical pattern: the verb separation effect which implies the separation of V1 and V2 especially with compound tenses. The transference also followed the SVO word order, but with an error as shown in the following example:

3a *Du musst trägt Kleidung für Sommer.*

You must wear clothing for Summer.

As shown in example (3a) V₁ and V₂ are together. In the case of the modals, German language has a different syntactical structure from English, and even from Spanish. Example (3a) did not undergo the verb separation effect which implies that the V₁ (*musst*) is correctly arranged but V₂ (*trägt*) should be placed in the sentence last position of the sentence, as follows: **Du musst Kleidung für Sommer trägt.*

Besides this, there is an error because V₁ (*musst*) and V₂ (*tragen*) were conjugated. In this sense learners committed errors for they transferred from one language to another and/or calquing syntactical patterns.

One of the most frequent errors is the substitution of words, another type of negative transfer. For example, Ringbom (1986) noted the use of a Swedish word *bort* (away) into an English sentence written by Swedish native speakers:

Now I live home with my parents. But sometimes I must go **bort**

Now I live home with parents. But sometimes I must go **away**

The word had been substituted for another which meaning was the same. As it occurred in the participants' compositions, for example:

4a *Ich schreibe diese Letter*

I write this letter

b *Mein Lieblings Jahreszeit ist Summer.*

My favorite season of the year is summer.

As shown in sentence (4a), the writer did not use the German word for 'letter' (*Brief*) he used an English word instead. The demonstrative pronoun was not inflected in its correspondent grammatical case (accusative). **Ich schreibe diesen Brief.*

In example 4b, the writer substituted again a German word with an English one. There is an error in gender in the possessive pronoun as the word *Jahreszeit* is feminine, then the ending should be *-e*. In English that gender differentiation it is not made. **Meine liebsling Jahreszeit ist Sommer.*

Those are the elements that produce negative transfer errors at the time of being transferred directly from English to German. Most of them have to do with the syntactical structure and the inflectional morphemes which are quite different between English and German. Most of these errors are result of production errors such as calques or substitutions, misinterpretations, underproduction and overproduction.

4.4 Chapter conclusion

As seen, the results showed that there are elements from English that can be transferred to German and bring positive outcomes into the German learners' performance. Those elements are little parts of the language for they help students to learn and make clever associations. There are a number of cognates, words that have kept morphological

properties and words semantically equivalent that English and German share. Even, word order may be identical in some sentences or expressions. The genetic relatedness which descends from the language family tree also plays an important role in this resemblance. As Odlin (1989) stated these similarities arose from historical relationships. Besides this, cognitive processes also took part in this process of second language acquisition as the previous knowledge about an L2 encourages the learning of an L3. These are the reasons why students transfer elements from one Germanic language to another: English to German.

However this interlanguage transference was not beneficial in all instances especially in terms of grammar. German has a more complex structure governed by four grammatical cases and numerous inflections which complicates its learning. The negative outcomes in participants' performance were related to these syntactical characteristics of the German language. The problems and confusions arose from these characteristic, problems such as: underproduction, overproduction, substitution, calques and misinterpretations.

For concluding, the phenomenon studied in this research project does not entirely concern linguistics. It has to do also with history and language evolution, as well as cognitive processes and learning strategies from the constructivist perspective as learners make use of their preexisting knowledge in order to generate new knowledge.

On the other hand, what concerns negative outcomes, those patterns which do not work satisfactorily will have to be changed. According to Hawkins (2001) the acquisition of the syntactical patterns depends on the learning stages, in the case of beginning students it is common to overproduce a particular language structure and avoid complex syntactical

patterns. That might be one of the reasons for which it is easier for them to calque familiar patterns belonging to English or even Spanish language.

In the next chapter the significance of this study will be explained in detail.

CHAPTER 5: CONCLUSIONS CHAPTER

5.0 Chapter overview

In this final chapter, the conclusions and the significance of the study will be presented. This chapter also contains a reflective account about the research project. The chapter also presents the limitations that affected the research process as well as recommendations and a section for further research.

5.1 Findings and results significance

The results of the research showed that the participants' L2 and their L3 are related. There are elements that help them and they work as an advantage or as a strategy for learning. But also there are some other parts of the language which were confusing and make them commit errors. As mentioned in previous chapters, the languages to be analyzed belong to the Germanic branch, these are English and German. This study attempted to explore the phenomenon of transfer and how it works in students whose mother tongue (e.g., Spanish) does not help them for learning a foreign language (e.g., German). As a consequence they are forced to use a third language (e.g., English) as a facilitator for learning the TL they aim to learn.

This is a phenomenon known as interlanguage transfer. The significance of studying it was to find out if the previous knowledge of a similar language to the TL and the belonging of a specific group of languages serve as a learning strategy when the mother tongue is not being helpful for acquiring and generating new knowledge into a code of communication totally different to the TL.

5.2 Research aims

This study had several aims. The first one was to have a short students' writing in German in order to analyze and to detect positive and/or negative transfer outcomes. Another aim was to do a stimulated recall method with each student, and finally to find reasons for which they were using English as a learning strategy or facilitator.

5.2.1 Accomplishment of the aims

The aims of the research were successively achieved. In the case of the first aim which was the obtaining of participants' written productions in German I had to look for participants who had exactly the same characteristics; that is to say that it had to be a convenience sample. I had to expose participants to a stimulus which were videos and then monitor the composing process of the texts that would be analyzed later. Subsequently for achieving the second aim, I had to do stimulated recall interview with each participant, which means that I asked them about the composing process and what was happening in their minds while writing the text. Their answers gave worthwhile information for carrying out and supporting this study.

During the process of making the stimuli, the writing and the interview I, the researcher, had a short period time for reasons which I will explain further ahead. In spite of those difficulties the aims were achieved and the research questions could be answered. The next part reveals the results after making the data analysis.

5.2.2 Answer to the research questions

Two research questions guided the data collection and analysis.

R.Q. 1 - What elements from English are students using to help themselves write in German?

To answer this question it was necessary to get a written production of the participants in order to detect similarities and differences between the participants L2 and L3. The results showed the following. There is a number of cognates that exist between English and German; those help the learners to acquire vocabulary for those are words which are easy to remember. The word order of some German sentences may be identical to English in some cases it helps them at the time of writing simple sentences. Furthermore there are words which have exactly the same meaning and function in both languages that make them semantically equivalent. The formation of compound words also helps them to write because German tends to join lexemes in order to create new words, something that English language does too. But overall the joining of some of those lexemes, it is very similar in which the words can be substituted for their equivalents. In the particular case of the participants' productions, a pair of those examples were found.

The second research question guided us into another direction which clearly showed all the negative aspects of transferring directly grammatical rules from one language to another:

R.Q2 – Which elements are causing problems?

According to Odlin there are four types of transfer errors: the underproduction, the overproduction, misinterpretations, and production errors from which others are derived

such as (a) substitutions, (b) calques and (c) alterations of structures. In any moment participants fell into one of those. Errors which were product of the interlanguage transfer as when students were interviewed one by one, they mentioned that they were mixing languages or even they found a close relationship between them which made them get confused. Those errors were a kind of direct translation from one language to another.

For concluding this section I will say that the results as presented in Chapter revealed that the kind of transference takes place while learning. Students themselves look for those similarities that exist between one language and another and use them to their benefit. But not all the outcomes were positive because there are quite different structures between English and German which at the time of being transferred directly produced errors and confusions. Those structures do not work satisfactorily; therefore they will have to be changed in order to avoid errors of negative transference.

5.3 Reflective account: Personal reflections about the researching process

In this section I will express in a very personal way. I will show my experiences while carrying out this project and also about the changes that I have undergone while doing research, and the benefits that it has brought to me.

At the very beginning of the course of thesis seminar I thought of writing a thesis as only one more task to do in order to graduate. Of course I did not feel comfortable with that idea because researching and/or writing a formal document like a thesis was never attractive to me, but I had to do it obligatory as it is a requirement for finishing my major, which made think about it as an even harder duty to accomplish. In addition to this I did not have any idea about what to investigate.

Some ideas came to me but all them seemed silly and unworthy to research. I tried many topics which I found interesting but none of them made any contribution to the community of the language faculty in which I studied. Some people recommended choosing a subject which was attractive to me and then I chose a specific topic. But I could not choose easily. It was at the very end of my social service when I finally decided what topic to research about. At that moment I was immersed in a learning environment because I designed material for learning German. During a session of a German workshop and also throughout my German language learning process I realized that when students did not understand something in German they tried to associate it to English, as it was their L2.

In addition, as a student, I observed several times that many language learners left German aside because it was too difficult to learn, and in most of cases they opted for learning Italian or French which are romance languages as well as their mother tongue, Spanish. Therefore it was easier for them to learn rather than learning a synthetic Germanic language such as German. Considering that German and English belong to the same language family, then I thought of the possibility of making associations and transferences between them were logical. In that moment I felt motivated to investigate and learn more about that phenomenon, and I would also have the opportunity of going deeper and writing a document about what was taking place in those learning environments. Since that time I started enjoying researching and writing process of a document of which I would be the author.

This research project has brought me benefits because it has enriched my knowledge and I have experienced something totally new. An aspect that I consider had effects over the research was the fact that I had to plan again my way of working and delay the time for every task. First of all, I could not work with the sample that I had chosen at

the time of planning everything. Thus, I had to choose a sample with the same characteristics which delayed the process even more. At the very end I asked for help from a German teacher who I have a good relationship with so she let me work with her students.

The subjects of the research were people who were kind and willing to help from the moment I asked for their collaboration. However, there was a participant who in my opinion was totally rude and even arrogant and her attitude was not so cooperative. Even I might say that she tried to make a fool of me because I was studying a phenomenon like this which for her was totally senseless. Then I thought of all the information I gathered in Chapter 2, the basis that were supporting my thesis topic and also the approval of the thesis director. I could overcome her negative comments and attitudes because if this study had no basis or has not been carried out before, it would not have any validity or reliability therefore I would not have done it.

At this moment I feel satisfied and proud for having carried out this type of research because I have learned a lot, and I succeeded in the writing of a thesis which at the beginning I did not feel able to do. Of course my guide, the teacher Nancy Keranen, had to do with this because she knew how to guide me in the right way.

5.4 Recommendations

In this section I would like to give some recommendations based on my findings and results. The recommendations done here are addressed to multilingual learners and/or students because the study is just about the relation that exists among languages; especially it is about the relationship among languages learned subsequent to the mother tongue.

Some languages would be harder or easier to learn depending on the previous knowledge that an individual possesses about other multiple foreign languages, which is

called interlanguage transfer. This means the interaction of the language learned or acquired. This type of transference might serve as a learning strategy when two or more foreign languages are closely related. The implementation of this cognitive learning strategy concerns only multilingual learners. Thus, this strategy allows generating new knowledge into a third, fourth or even fifth language from an FL acquired previously.

5.5 Limitations of the research

In this section, I will describe the limitations that affected the whole research. As explained in the introduction chapter I was going to work with German learners belonging to a workshop because that population of students had the expected characteristics for the purposes of the study. In fact, the designing of the thesis topic was based on their characteristics. First, one of the limitations I faced was the workshops' schedule changing; the workshop started at seven o'clock in the evening and lasted 50 minutes which seemed to be too late, even for me. There were only two sessions per week and students stopped attending. As a consequence I could not work with them. In some other occasions only two people attended, but the workshop session only could start with at least three students and no less. Also the teacher as well as the learners could not move on to other topics without the other members. Those reasons were delaying the data collection. For solving that problem, I had to look for students with the same characteristics. Then I had to ask for help from a German teacher. She had no problem with letting me work with her students. However I could not start working with them immediately because the teacher had to do evaluations, and also I had to make a request for counting on the students' cooperation. Unfortunately, I had only time for a stimulated recall session in which I had to do everything quickly because of the limited time. I tried to carry out everything according to

the methodology and its protocol. In spite of that I could obtain the expected results and fortunately I could answer both research questions which guided the research process.

5.6 Suggestions for further research

As researcher and author of the present academic document, I can say that the topic and the phenomenon I investigated is worth further researching. It concerns SLA studies which are important for our field of knowledge because we are immersed into a multilingual learning environment. Most of times it is thought that only the mother tongue facilitates or complicates the learning of a TL, but throughout this study and other similar ones it is possible to know that other subsequent FL to TL may help to learn additional languages depending on their closeness. In this case I attempted to establish a genetic relatedness between two Germanic languages that helped the learners, but that relatedness can be found in other language families as well.

In a very personal way, I will say that I would like to learn more about interlanguage transfer because as a multilingual person I have been able to succeed in the learning of other subsequent foreign languages. But principally I would like to study its effects on the performance of other language learners thus making little contributions to the SLA studies, or even to the language faculty community. In addition, this topic resulted interesting, innovative, and uncommon; that is why I consider that other pre-graduate students may be interested in researching the same for their thesis topic.

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APPENDIX A

Writing

Imagine that you are writing a letter to a friend who lives abroad and you want to tell him/her how the weather is in your country. Take into account the following aspects:

- Remember: the letter must be written in German.
- Write at least 50 words
- Start the letter with a greeting and follow the format of a letter.
- Describe how is the weather in every season (Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter) and how long they last.
- Narrate an experience that you have had into an specific season of the year.
- Write a farewell and an invitation to visit your country.

APPENDIX B

“Stimulated recall interview”

Instructions: Explain how was your experience while writing the letter. Take into account the following questions for helping you to recall the ‘composing process’. Remember: this is not a test.

- What did you have in mind during the ‘composing process’?

- How did you feel while writing?
•

- Was it easy? Why (not)?
•

- What kind of problems did you have?

- Did you find any relation between English and German while writing?
(Show them in the text)
•

- During the session did you make aware of something? What?

- Do you consider that the previous knowledge you possess about English let you generate new one in German?

- Do you consider something of this session can be useful for your learning?