



Cross-Linguistic Interference from Spanish to French in Learners' Writing Productions

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Abstract

This study examines linguistic interference from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students enrolled in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena. The research aimed to identify and categorize the most common instances of cross-linguistic influence present in learners' written responses. A mixed-methods design with a qualitative emphasis was adopted. Data were collected through a structured written production test consisting of guided writing tasks, sentence translation, sentence ordering, and interpretation activities. The analysis focused on identifying and classifying instances of interference according to four linguistic domains: morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics. The findings revealed that morphological interference was the most frequent category, particularly in orthography, grammatical gender, and lexical borrowing. Syntactic and semantic interferences were also recurrent, while pragmatic interference appeared less frequently. The results suggest that the typological proximity between Spanish and French facilitates learning while simultaneously generating transfer-related difficulties. The study highlights the importance of explicitly addressing differences between language during instruction in order to create linguistic awareness and to reduce negative transfer and improve learners' written production.

1. Introduction

Learning a foreign language is a complex cognitive and linguistic process influenced by the learner's native language (NL). Elements of the NL often shape how learners understand and produce the target language (TL), and research consistently shows that the first language plays a key role in developing additional language competence (Perkins & Zhang, 2024). This phenomenon, known as language transfer or cross-linguistic influence, can both facilitate learning and generate persistent errors when mother-tongue structures are incorrectly applied, resulting in linguistic interference.

For Spanish-speaking learners of French, this influence is particularly relevant due to the typological proximity of the two Romance languages. While such similarities may aid comprehension and vocabulary recognition, they can also create confusion. As Bailey, Lockary, and Higby (2024) note, “in some cases cross-linguistic influence facilitates lexical access while in others it is a hindrance,” showing how shared features may simultaneously support learning and produce interference.

In the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena, fifth-semester students are expected to reach an intermediate-advanced level in English and French according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. However, despite their training, aspects of the native language may still influence their written French. Understanding these

effects is important for improving instruction, supporting learner accuracy, and enhancing writing development.

There is limited evidence on the specific patterns of Spanish interference in the written French production in similar contexts, therefore This study therefore examines linguistic interference in students' writing to understand how Spanish influences the acquisition of French. It addresses the question: What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students at the University of Cartagena? The objective is to identify and categorize these interferences.

By doing so, this research contributes both theoretically and practically. Theoretically, it provides evidence on cross-linguistic influence between typologically close Romance languages in adult learners, an underexplored area. Practically, it helps teachers identify common learner difficulties and design more effective feedback and interventions to improve written production and linguistic awareness. Taking this into consideration, this study seeks to answer the following research question

(1) How does linguistic interference from Spanish to French present itself in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?

(2) What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Existing Models and Framework

Existing knowledge and skills frequently constitute the foundation upon which new competencies are learned, a phenomenon commonly referred to as transfer (Kuo & Anderson, 2010). where the knowledge of how meaning is structured and conveyed through sentences in a first language influences the development of subsequent linguistic systems. How learners comprehend and produce meaning in their initial language do not remain isolated; instead, these linguistic procedures actively shape the cognitive pathways involved in foreign language learning (Perkins & Zhang, 2024).

Neuroimaging research, particularly through functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI), demonstrates that first language (L1) neural networks are physically carried over to the second language (L2), fundamentally shaping how the brain processes new linguistic data (Perkins et al, 2024). One landmark study found that Chinese-English bilinguals recruit a neural system associated with spatial information representation and working memory even when performing phonological tasks in English (Tan et al., 2003)

Bailey et al. (2024) identify two outcomes of bilingual language co-activation: facilitation and interference. Facilitation refers to the more efficient processing that occurs when the languages involved share conceptual or semantic links, allowing activation in one language to facilitate access to related representations in the other. By contrast, Interference refers to those instances of deviation from the norms of either language that affect the oral or written productions of bilinguals as a result of their differences and competing representations. Together, facilitation and interference represent complementary outcomes of bilingual lexical activation.

2.1.1 Models of Explaining NL to TL Transfer

The earliest accounts of cross-linguistic influence emerged in the late 1950s (Gai et al., 2023), particularly through Lado's (1957) Contrastive Analysis (CA), which compares languages to identify similarities and differences. Two main versions are distinguished: strong and weak CA (Perkins & Zhang, 2024). For this study the most relevant one is the weak, or a posteriori version, via which Through error analysis, researchers identify recurring difficulties and then examine whether differences between L1 and L2 explain them, relying on empirical data rather than prediction (Ramón Torrijos, 2009).

The Typological Primacy Model (TPM), developed by Rothman (2010), explains cross-linguistic influence (CLI) during the initial stages of language acquisition, particularly when another previously learned second or foreign language enter the picture. It proposes that learners transfer one previously acquired language system as a whole, rather than individual linguistic features, to serve as the initial template for the target language. The selection of this source language is based on its structural or typological similarity to the target language (Rothman, 2010, 2013, 2015).

According to Rothman (2010), this selection process is guided by learners' psychotypology, a concept originally proposed by Kellerman (1977, 1978, 1983), which refers to learners' subjective perception of the linguistic distance between the languages in their repertoire. Rather than relying solely on objective linguistic similarity, learners transfer from the language they perceive to be most closely related to the target language. Conversely, when languages are perceived as distant or language-specific, learners may avoid transfer even if the languages are objectively similar. This holistic transfer is motivated by cognitive economy: instead of constructing a new grammatical system from scratch, the mind recycles the language perceived as most similar, thereby reducing cognitive effort and facilitating early acquisition, even if this results in the transfer of incorrect linguistic values (Rothman, 2010, 2013, 2015).

2.1.2 Characteristics of Transfer

Transfer can be intentional or unintentional (Fuster, 2024). Unintentional transfer often arises from morphological similarity and does not necessarily enhance target-language (TL) performance (Fuster & Neuser, 2020). In contrast, intentional transfer involves using the mother tongue as a guide, producing forms adapted to TL morphology. For instance, uttering *estresado* in Spanish conversation based on the English stressed can yield correct outcomes depending on metalinguistic awareness. When adaptation fails, such forms are considered “inventions” (Bouvy, 2000). Fuster (2024) also notes that transfer is more frequent between closely related languages, especially Romance languages.

Words with similar form or meaning are activated across languages, forming shared lexical networks alongside language-specific subsets. This supports Fuster's (2024) view that languages are neither fully separate nor fully integrated, while Fuster and Neuser (2021) show that co-activation during TL use increases transfer. Research on cognate processing further demonstrates that exposure to one language facilitates access to another, making cognates easier to acquire regardless of age (Bosch & Ramon-Casas, 2014; Gampe et al., 2021; Elias & Degani, 2022; Ghazi-Saidi & Ansaldi, 2017; Lotto & de Groot, 1998; Raboyeau et al., 2010).

Words that are similar in form or meaning are activated across languages, forming shared networks, alongside language-specific subsets. This supports Fuster's (2024) view that languages are neither fully separate nor undifferentiated systems. Fuster and Neuser (2021) further show strong co-activation during TL use, increasing transfer. Evidence from cognate processing also supports this, showing that exposure to one language facilitates access to another and that cognates are easier to acquire regardless of age (Bosch & Ramon-Casas, 2014; Gampe et al., 2021; Elias & Degani, 2022; Ghazi-Saidi & Ansaldi, 2017; Lotto & de Groot, 1998; Raboyeau et al., 2010).

Interference tends to decrease as proficiency increases, partly due to metalinguistic knowledge (MK), the ability to reflect on linguistic forms (Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Falk et al., 2015). Sharwood Smith (2007) relates MK to metalinguistic awareness, a view shared by Angelovska (2018) and Bialystok (2001), and consistent with Krashen's (1982) distinction between acquired and learned knowledge. Greater MK and proficiency reduce interference across linguistic domains, with lexical transfer declining from 5.3% in beginners to 0.25% in advanced learners (Lindqvist, 2009; Foryś-Nogala et al., 2023).

2.2 Recent Findings

Research into language transfer has expanded steadily since the 1950s, with growing attention to multilingual acquisition contexts. Early work focused mainly on Spanish and English, later extending to Mandarin (Gai et al., 2023; Wang et al., 2024; Yu & Li, 2025).

Current studies distinguish between facilitative transfer and interference in target language development.

Positive transfer is central in the work of Casarin (2015), and Yu & Li (2025), who show that typological proximity and prior knowledge act as learning resources. Casarin illustrates how French speakers use Spanish when learning Italian, while Mu demonstrates that interlinguistic transparency reduces processing demands. Similarly, pragmatic research shows that previously learned languages often facilitate rather than hinder acquisition, with positive transfer frequently outweighing negative transfer (Yu & Li, 2025).

At the lexical level, transfer is particularly prominent, as up to 92% of transfer-related errors are lexical (Bouvy, 2000; Shatz et al., 2023). Burton (2013) identifies a hierarchy in which nouns are most frequently transferred, followed by conjunctions and auxiliaries. These findings align with Mu's (2025) observation that lexical transparency facilitates vocabulary learning by reducing processing costs.

In contrast, negative transfer emerges when superficial similarities conceal structural differences. Dedková (2023) reports persistent difficulty with grammatical gender, with Spanish speakers achieving only 52% accuracy in French, often misled by the French ending -e. Ponce Lazcano (2024) similarly finds that Spanish learners frequently transfer native structures into French writing, while Ramírez and Ríos (2023) show that discourse markers and conjunctions are also widely transferred to maintain fluency.

Huang (2024) found that for students whose mother tongue is Chinese, English as a prior foreign language exerted a more profound influence on the learning of French than their primary language. Similarly, Li (2024) observed that negative grammatical transfer was significantly more frequent from English than from Chinese.

Comparable findings are reported by Sassane (2025) and Eibensteiner (2024), using the Typological Primacy Model (TPM). Sassane shows that Algerian learners transfer more from French than Arabic when learning English due to lexical and syntactic similarity, while Eibensteiner finds that Spanish learners rely more on French than English for similar reasons. Together, these studies suggest that perceived typological proximity and form-meaning similarity are stronger predictors of transfer direction than acquisition order (Eibensteiner, 2024; Fuster, 2024).

2.3 Linguistic Domains' Specific Susceptibility to Transfer

The third major area of research concerns the linguistic domains most vulnerable to cross-linguistic influence. Although transfer can occur at all levels, lexical transfer remains the most frequently documented form of CLI (Bouvy, 2000; Burton, 2013; Shatz et al., 2023), as learners often rely on familiar vocabulary in communicative situations.

However, lexical similarity can also lead to interference. Studies on Spanish–French multilingualism show that lexical overlap frequently results in false cognates, incorrect substitutions, and overestimation of equivalence (De Angelis, 2005; Dedková, 2023; Ponce Lazcano, 2024). Thus, lexical proximity acts both as a facilitator and a source of error. Syntactic structures are also highly vulnerable. Morales González (2018) found that syntactic interference from Spanish to French exceeded morphological and semantic interference, with literal translation from Spanish being the most common form. This supports the idea that structural similarity can both facilitate learning and increase negative transfer (Dedková, 2023; Ponce Lazcano, 2024).

In syntax and morphology, grammatical gender, agreement, and word order are especially vulnerable. Dedková (2023) reports persistent difficulty with grammatical gender in Spanish-speaking learners of French, who rely on misleading formal similarities. Similar issues appear in Mandarin–English contexts, where surface similarities conceal deeper differences (Han et al., 2025). By contrast, Li (2024) argues that clearer structural differences can improve performance by increasing attentional focus and reducing transfer.

At the semantics–pragmatics interface, Mazzaggio and Stateva (2024) find that bilinguals transfer pragmatic patterns across languages, while Yu and Li (2025) show that multilinguals

draw on multiple systems in communication. This suggests pragmatic transfer may persist even after semantic mastery.

Overall, the literature shows that transfer is uneven across domains. Lexical transfer is most frequent, while syntax, morphology, pragmatics, and phonology vary in susceptibility depending on typological similarity, proficiency, and cognitive load. Transfer is therefore best understood as a multidimensional process across linguistic subsystems.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Type and Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods design with a qualitative emphasis, aiming to examine linguistic interference from Spanish to French in students' written production. Mixed methods integrate qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a more complete understanding of the phenomenon (Cueva Luza et al., 2023). In this study, the qualitative component identifies and interprets interference patterns, while the quantitative component classifies and counts their frequency, allowing a systematic analysis of Spanish influence on French writing.

3.2 Research Approach

A case study approach is used to explore linguistic interference within a specific educational context. This approach enables in-depth analysis of multiple individual cases to identify broader patterns of language transfer (Greenhalgh, 2025). As Stake notes, case studies involve examining several cases to better understand a phenomenon (Crowe et al., 2011). Here, the focus is not on a single learner but on a group of students whose written productions serve as cases for analyzing Spanish–French interference.

3.3 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Foreign Languages Program at the Universidad de Cartagena, an eight-semester program focused on developing communicative competence in English and French. Students regularly produce written French as part of their training, making this a suitable context for examining cross-linguistic interference. Participants completed a written test designed for this study within a one-hour time limit.

3.4 Labels Chosen

Terminology in multilingualism research can be at times inconsistent. The term second language acquisition (SLA) has been used both for the first language learned after the mother tongue and for any additional non-native language, often obscuring distinctions between L2 and L3/Ln acquisition (Tordini, 2020). Likewise, labels such as L1, L2, and L3 imply a linear order of acquisition that does not always reflect multilingual realities, so to avoid these issues, this study refers to participants' languages as the native language (NT) and target languages (TL), namely French and Spanish, and other previously learned languages will be referred to as such or specified.

The categorization of linguistic interference found in this study classifies errors according to the linguistic domain affected in written production, therefore excluding phonology alongside a separate category for direct lexical interferences, therefore, the analysis employs five following main categories: semantic, morphological, lexical, syntactic, and pragmatic interference, each one with its own subcategories

3.5 Participants

Twenty-one fifth-semester students participated voluntarily. At this stage, they have an intermediate French proficiency (B1–B2 CEFR) and comparable proficiency in English, as both languages are taught simultaneously. Participants were selected through convenience sampling because they met the study's inclusion criteria and were readily accessible. As all were actively engaged in French coursework and regularly produced written texts, their writing provided a suitable corpus for identifying and analyzing Spanish interference in French. Participants were informed of the study's purpose before data collection, and the analysis of their written productions enabled the identification of recurring interference patterns.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to the ethical principles of academic research. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants signed an informed consent form explaining the study's purpose, objectives, their rights, and the intended use of the data. Personal information was excluded, as the research was conducted solely for academic purposes. The analysis focused on students' written productions rather than the individuals, and all data were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. No identifying information was reported, and the study complied with ethical standards for informed consent, anonymity, confidentiality, and the responsible use of research data.

3.7 Data Collection Instrument

The present study employed a structured written production test as its primary data collection instrument. Designed to identify Spanish interference in the written production of learners of French as a foreign language, the test comprised open-ended and semi-controlled tasks that elicited authentic language use and potential instances of cross-linguistic influence.

The instrument was administered to fifth-semester French students at the University of Cartagena and included: (1) a guided writing task; (2) a grammatical gender assignment activity; (3) a pragmatic writing task assessing register appropriateness; (4) a sentence translation task; and (5) a translation task focusing on progressive tenses. These activities targeted morphological, syntactic, semantic, and pragmatic interference. Participants were given one hour to complete the test, and all instructions were provided in Spanish to ensure clarity.

The choice of instrument was supported by research highlighting written production as a complex skill involving multiple linguistic components (Vásquez et al., 2016). Similar instruments have been used by Morales González (2018), Ramírez and Ríos (2023), Li (2024), Fuster (2024), and Fikri (2023) to identify and classify linguistic interference. To ensure validity, the instrument was reviewed by three experts in Applied Linguistics and Foreign Language Education: Professor Liseth Villar, Professor Miryam Cabrales, and Professor Nadia Morales. Their feedback led to minor revisions in wording and task design. A pilot test with sixth-semester students not included in the study confirmed the instrument's clarity, suitability, and functionality before its final administration.

3.8 Data Analysis Procedure

The data were analyzed using a mixed-methods approach. Qualitative analysis identified and interpreted patterns of linguistic interference in students' written productions, while quantitative analysis examined their frequency and distribution across linguistic domains. Student texts and responses were organized in a data analysis matrix, where errors were identified and classified as linguistic interference when a clear correlation with Spanish was established.

Each instance was categorized according to the primary linguistic domain affected (morphology, syntactics, syntax, semantics, or pragmatics), with additional subcategories developed inductively from recurring patterns. Interferences were then analyzed according to their frequency, recurrence across participants, and distribution within each category, supporting both qualitative interpretation and quantitative analysis.

4. Results

By examining students' answers, the analysis of the students' written productions in French show interferences that suggest the influence of Spanish as their mother tongue. These patterns were grouped into categories, which represent the most frequent types of linguistic interference observed in the participants' production.

Figure 1. Categories

Research Question	Categories
What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?	Morphological interferences

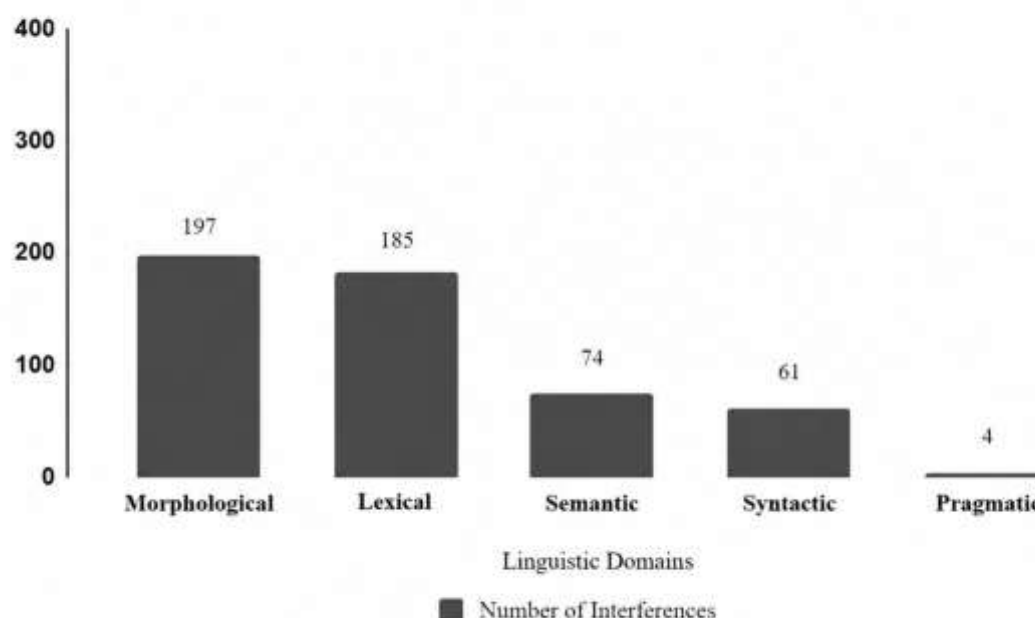
Cross-Linguistic Interference from Spanish to French in Learners' Writing Productions

What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?	Lexical interferences
What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?	Semantic interferences
What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?	Syntactic interferences
What are the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena?	Pragmatic interferences

Table 1. Distribution of Linguistic Interference Found by Linguistic Domain

Linguistic Domains	Morphological	Lexical	Semantic	Syntactic	Pragmatic
Number of Interferences	197	185	74	61	4
Total	519				

Number of Interferences by Linguistic Domain



Within the five linguistic domains chosen for this analysis it can be observed in this graph that an absolutely vast majority of linguistic interference occur in the morphological and lexical domains, particularly in the lexico-ortographic category related to lexeme spelling and the grammatical gender category, although it should be noted that these were specifically targeted by the test, followed by the semantic domain, in which the use of false cognates is very prevalent alongside the use of idiomatic expressions and common phrases originating from Spanish, followed closely by interferences found in the syntactic domain, pertaining to sentence structure, interference in the pragmatic dimension regarding social adequacy, level of formality expected and word choice was found to be particularly rare compared to other linguistic domains.

Table 2. Distribution of Spanish-to-French Linguistic Interference in Students' Written Productions by Percentage and Subcategory (N = 519)

Linguistic Dimension	Category of Interference	Occurrences (n)	Percentage (%)
Morphological	Grammatical Gender	193	37.2%

	Inflection	4	0.7%
Lexical	Lexico-orthographic Transfer	171	32.9%
	Inadequate Borrowing	14	2.7%
Semantic	Denotation (False Cognates)	47	9.0%
	Phraseological and Idiomatic Calques	27	5.2%
Syntactic	Omission of Sentence Elements	23	4.4%
	Inappropriate Use of Prepositions	17	3.2%
	Incorrect Word Order	11	2.1%
	Incorrect Grammatical Structure or Borrowing of Grammatical Structure	10	1.9%
Pragmatic	Inappropriate Register	4	0.7%
Total	All interferences found	519	100.0%

Table 3. Occurrence of Linguistic Interferences by Sub-Category within the Participants (21)

Linguistic Domain	Type of Interference (Subcategory)	Occurrence in Students per Subcategory (Individualized)	Percentage of Occurrence in Students (21) per Subcategory	Percentage of Occurrence in Students per Linguistic Domain
Morphological Domain	Grammatical Gender	E1 to E21 (21)	100%	100%
	Conjugation / Inflection	E2, E4, E7, E8, E11 (5)	23.8%	
Lexical Domain	Inadequate borrowing	E3, E6, E8, E9, E10, E11, E12, E13, E18, E20 (10)	47.6%	100%
	Lexico-orthographic Transfer (spelling)	E1 to E21 (21)	100%	
Syntactic Domain	Sentence organization	E1, E2, E4, E5, E6, E9, E11, E13, E14, E19, E20 (11)	52.4%	100%
	Omission of Sentence Elements	E1, E4, E5, E8, E9, E11, E13, E16, E19, E21 (10)	47.6%	
	Inappropriate use of prepositions	E1, E5, E6, E7, E9, E10, E11, E12, E14, E19 (10)	47.6%	
	Incorrect grammatical structure	E2, E3, E5, E8, E14, E15, E18, E21 (8)	38.1%	
Semantic Domain	Phraseological and Idiomatic Calques	E1, E2, E3, E4, E5, E6, E8, E9, E10, E11, E12, E13, E14, E16, E17, E18, E19 (17)	80.9%	100%
	Denotation (False Cognates)	E1 to E21 (21)	100%	
Pragmatic Domain	Inappropriate Register	E10, E11, E17, E21 (4)	19%	19%

Note: E means student.

4.1 Morphological Interference

The analysis of the written productions revealed that morphological interference was the most frequent category identified among participants. All students demonstrated difficulties with grammatical gender assignment, consistently transferring the gender of equivalent Spanish nouns to French even when the corresponding French nouns had a different grammatical gender, this was the case even when said nouns had the gender indicating -eur termination which is generally used for abstract female gendered nouns.

“un dent” (student 2)

“la nez” (student 3)

“le chaleur” (student 4)

“le douleur” (student 5)

“le couleur” (student 9)

“la sang” (student 14)

regarding inflection and conjugation, 20% of respondents made use of the +ive suffix in place of +if in words like effectif/effective, productif/productive, while +ive does not exist in Spanish, +ivo and +iva do exist as suffixes and are used in the Spanish equivalent of said words (productivo, efectivo), taken into account that respondents making small adjustments to their borrowings to better fit French's characteristics, it's not inadequate to suggest this interference

may originate from the previously mentioned suffixes, no other interference found regarding inflection and conjugation was found. Examples found in the corpus include:

"le presenciel est plus efective" (student 12)

"productive" instead of "productif" (student 17)

4.2 Lexical Interferences

Nearly half of the participants used Spanish words in their written productions, it should be noted that in the majority of cases, students altered the form of the given word to better fit French's words typical characteristics in termination and spelling. Examples identified in the corpus included:

"je me sens très confondu" (students 9, 11, and 18)

"c'est un testimoine important" (student 12)

"il y a beaucoup de trancon dans la ville" (student 8)

"le teletravail a reste une teme controversial ultimement" (student 8)

"je vois recentement un polemique" (student 16)

"de l'avenir de monde laboral" (student 19)

Regarding orthographic transfer, nearly all respondents produced at least one French word following Spanish spelling conventions. The most recurrent errors involved omission of accents, omission of double consonants, and direct transfer of Spanish orthographic patterns into French, these occurred more prominently in cases where there is a similar looking equivalent noun in Spanish. Examples identified in the corpus included:

"ça me plait beaucoup" (student 3)

"le estres affecte les étudiants" (student 5)

"il faut proteger l'environnement" (student 7)

"les resultats sont positifs" (student 14)

"je bois un cafe tous les jours" (student 15)

"le presenciel est plus presenciel" (student 1)

"le contact personel est important" (student 10)

"la raison principal du problème" (student 13)

4.3 Syntactic Interferences

The results also revealed frequent syntactic interference in the students' written productions. Learners often organized French sentences according to Spanish grammatical structures and sentence organization, over half of the respondents demonstrated interference related to word order structure, including attaching pronouns at the end of a verb similarly to how enclisis works in Spanish, not making use of contractions and therefore using non-existent propositions placing the adverb of negation at the end of the sentence, and calcs in the positioning of the adverb of frequency

"referant à le teletravail" (student 9)

"de les differant problematique" (student 17)

"à les aspectos" (student 11)

"aller a la classe" (student 10)

"J'ai peur de qu'elle" (student 4)

"je n'avais entendu rien" (student 20)

"Je ne veux pas manger ici plus" (student 2)

"Ils arrivent tard toujours" (student 3)

Regarding inflection and conjugation, only 20% of participants exhibited interference. For instance using the suffix -ive instead of the French -if in words such as effectif (effective) and productif (productive). Although -ive is not a Spanish suffix, the Spanish equivalents (efectivo and productivo) contain the related suffixes -ivo and -iva, suggesting that these errors resulted from suffix transfer rather than direct borrowing. No other instances of inflectional or conjugational interference were identified. Examples include:

"il est aiment le filme" (student 8)

"il est pleure" (student 7)

“il était en lisant” (students 2 and 6)

“Cette semaine on est en discutant l'importance du teletravail” (student 10)

similarly, almost half of the respondents omitted necessary elements from their sentence in a way seemingly inspired by how these would be formed in Spanish, including omitting the determinant article, prepositions that would not be used in Spanish in similar sentences, mainly “de” and although less common omission of the subject despite French not being a pro-drop language

“existe la possibilité” (student 7)

“a certain heure” (student 11)

“que on appelle teletravail” (student 13)

“je donne mon testimoine de ce qui a passé” (student 12)

“la manière plus efective” (student 4)

“est un peu difficile” (student 17)

“Pendant nous parlons” (student 19)

4.4 Semantic Interferences

Semantic interference was the second most frequent category identified in the analysis. Students frequently interpreted French vocabulary and expressions according to the meanings and semantic structures of Spanish. One of the most recurrent phenomena involved false cognates and semantic approximations, particularly in cases where a single Spanish word corresponded to two or more semantically distinct words in French. For example, learners often failed to distinguish between thème (the thematic focus of a text or discussion) and sujet (the topic or subject being discussed), as both correspond to tema in Spanish. Examples identified in the corpus include:

“La Gioconda à été designe le siècle 20” (student 7)

“personalmment, je pense que le teme est tres important” (student 17)

“Que les humans sont naturalmment tres social don la vie cotidian” (student 17)

“J'ai ne ecuté rien de ce thème” (student 20)

“je me sens très confondu” (students 9, 11, and 18)

the use of idiomatic expression and common phrases originating from Spanish, adapted to try to convey a similar meaning using French words were particularly abundant, these are often times transferred very literally and without any regards to correct word order, therefore also concluding in lexical and syntactic transfer and use of false cognates

“J'ai espéré un couple d'heures” (student 2)

“Un pair d'heures” (student 16)

“vouz ne devez pas avoir contact” (student 9)

“il fait la pluie” (student 5)

“je suis temoigne” (student 2)

“visiter ma grand mere” (student 9)

“sans importer le moment” (student 9)

In addition, several participants produced lexical borrowings or pseudo-French forms influenced by Spanish vocabulary. Examples identified in the corpus included:

“je me sens très confondu” (students 9, 11, and 18)

“c'est un testimoine important” (student 12)

“il y a beaucoup de trancon dans la ville” (student 8)

“le teletravail a reste une teme controversial ultimement” (student 8)

“je vois recentement un polemique” (student 16)

“de l'avenir de monde laboral” (student 19)

4.5 Pragmatic Interferences

almost no interference occurred in the pragmatic aspect of language use, respondents correctly adapted to the level of formality required by the situations presented and used appropriate vocabulary, even if the same level of formality would not have been expected in Spanish or would have presented itself in a different way, for instance in the distinction between

nous (formal) and on (informal) both first person plurals, which doesn't exist in Spanish, despite these differences, the participant adapted successfully to the pragmatic norms of French written communication

5. Discussion

The findings demonstrate that Spanish strongly influences the written production of French among fifth-semester students in the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena.

The predominance of lexical interference and morphology suggests that learners rely on structural and visual similarities between Spanish and French due to their shared Latin origin. As a result, students often apply Spanish spelling conventions, grammatical gender, and lexical structures to French, leading to orthographic transfer, accent omission, and word alteration. This indicates reliance on previously acquired linguistic knowledge. These findings support Wu and Juffs (2022), who argue that the native language strongly shapes morphological acquisition in language learning when languages are similar, and align with Meng (2024) and Perkins and Zhang (2024), who emphasize that prior linguistic systems continue to influence additional language learning.

These patterns also support Andersen's (1983) claims that similarity rather than difference is a primary source of interference. Since the areas most affected, gender assignment and word form, are areas where both languages share many similarities due to being related, this is evident in noun gender assignment, where learners frequently transferred Spanish gender to French nouns, consistent with Dedková's (2023) findings that grammatical gender is particularly problematic for Spanish-speaking learners of French. This is reinforced by the low frequency interferences in more structurally distinct areas such as sentence structure and conjugation and formality. This supports Li (2024), who argues that clearly different features are more easily noticed and learned and aligns with psychotypology (Kellerman, 1977) (Rothman 2010) and markedness-based explanations (Yang & You, 2014), where perceived similarity drives transfer and therefore interference.

The predominance of morphological, lexical and semantic interference contrasts with Morales González (2018), who found syntactic transfer to be most frequent in hispanic FFL learners. This may be due to differences in proficiency, corpus, instruction, or task type.

Semantic interference was also highly prevalent across idioms, false cognates, and phraseology. Learners often assigned Spanish meanings to similar-looking French words, relying on lexical resemblance rather than French-specific constraints. These findings support De Angelis (2005), Dedková (2023), and Ponce Lazcano (2024), who highlight lexical overlap as a source of false cognates and overestimation of equivalence. However, these models do not fully explain phraseological transfer, where entire expressions were translated literally despite not existing in French, suggesting reliance on stored phraseological patterns. Further research is needed in this area.

The findings strongly support Rothman's (2010, 2015) Typological Primacy Model, as Spanish was the dominant source of transfer across all domains. This supports typological proximity as the main determinant of transfer direction. Support to other models that place greater importance in the previously acquired languages (Bardel & Falk, 2007, 2012) receive limited support, as virtually no English interference was found despite participants'. Thus, the findings favor perceived similarity over acquisition order as the main driver of transfer.

6. Conclusion

This study analyzed the most common linguistic interferences from Spanish to French in the written productions of fifth-semester students from the Foreign Languages Program at the University of Cartagena. The findings show that Spanish significantly influences students' French writing, particularly in the morphological, syntactic, and semantic domains.

Morphological interference was the most frequent, specifically regarding noun gender assignment, followed by lexical interference in spelling based on Spanish's forms and

characteristics. Syntactic interference was also recurrent, particularly in contractions, verbal structures, prepositions, and Spanish-influenced sentence organization. Similarly, semantic interference showed that learners often interpreted French words through Spanish meanings, producing false cognates, literal translations, and both single-word and idiomatic calques. h.

The results imply learners often ignore written accentuation in French as accent omission represented a vast number of the interferences found, this seems to be specially true for the accent grave (`) which indicates the need for more thorough in-classroom explanation.

The results confirm the dual role of Spanish–French proximity in acquisition. While similarities facilitate comprehension and vocabulary recognition, they also encourage overreliance resulting in negative transfer. Consequently, students produce meaningfully understandable but non-standard structures. More importantly, interference appears more likely in areas of perceived similarity than difference, supporting the idea that perceived similarity is a key source of cross-linguistic influence and explaining the susceptibility of gender, lexical choice, and orthography.

These findings highlight the need for teachers to address linguistic interference explicitly throughout French instruction. Particular emphasis should be placed on French orthography, including accentuation, noun gender assignment, and the subtle distinctions between French and Spanish that commonly trigger negative transfer.

Because many spelling errors appeared to result from ingrained habits originating from the TL rather than lack of knowledge, instruction should also encourage careful proofreading and the consultation of lexical resources instead of relying on perceived similarities between the two languages.

The persistence of Spanish-influenced patterns at an intermediate stage suggests that previously taught linguistic features should be systematically revisited to prevent fossilization. Reinforcing these elements beyond the beginner level may help learners overcome entrenched habits acquired through continued reliance on Spanish.

Finally, this study contributes to understanding cross-linguistic influence by showing that the native language continues to shape written production even at intermediate levels. examining the intentionality of transfer in the various domains, showcasing how transfer presents itself in adult learners, and how it occurs in related or otherwise similar languages, Future research could extend this work to oral production, learners' perception, different proficiency levels, and additional linguistic dimensions in Spanish-speaking learners of French.

7. Limitations

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, although the test included a 1-hour time limit, this constraint may still have affected performance, as some students may not have had sufficient time to fully reflect on their answers, potentially influencing data accuracy.

A second limitation concerns participants' English proficiency. This variable was not formally assessed or included in the analysis. Although little English-related interference was found, future research should incorporate a fuller linguistic profile to better understand source-language selection and the role of previously learned languages in transfer.

Additionally, no qualitative methods such as interviews, focus groups, or surveys were used to explore learners' perceptions of Spanish influence. As a result, the study could not determine whether transfer processes were conscious or unconscious. Including such methods in future research could provide deeper insight into learners' reasoning and help confirm Spanish as the main source of interference.

Finally, no standardized French proficiency test was administered. Proficiency was assumed based on shared course level, but individual differences were not measured. This limits the ability to account for proficiency effects, despite its known influence on cross-linguistic transfer.

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